

Brave Report



A Fairey Swordfish similar to those used by Torrens-Spence

**NI Naval air ace's lead role in
sinking three battleships**

On the night of 11/11/1940, Michael Torrens-Spence DSO DSC DFC (Gr), piloted one of the 21 Swordfish "Stringbag" aircraft from the carrier *Illustrious* which flew off in two waves to mount one of the most daring naval air raids ever attempted.

Two squadrons of Fleet Air Arm (FAA) torpedo-bombers from the aircraft-carrier *HMS Illustrious* – Nos 815 and 819 – and two from *HMS Eagle* – Nos 813 and 824 – attacked the Italian fleet as it lay at anchor in Taranto harbour. A total of 21 Fairey Swordfish aircraft took part in the operation, codenamed Judgement. All the planes flew from *Illustrious* since *Eagle* had been damaged in action off Calabria.

The Swordfish flew off in two waves and achieved complete surprise. Three battleships, *Conte di Cavour*, *Caio Duilio* and *Italia* (previously *Littorio*) were sunk at their moorings. This reduced the battleship strength of the *Regia Marina* (the Italian Royal Navy) by half. *Conte di Cavour* was never to see action again although both *Caio Duilio* and *Italia* were raised and repaired. The survivors were transferred to less exposed bases which also reduced their effectiveness. A heavy cruiser, *Trento*, and some



Captain Michael Torrens-Spence

destroyers were also damaged as was the oil storage depot. Only two FAA aircraft were lost on the mission.

Enemy captain - he is mad or he is the bravest man in the world

Lieutenant Michael Torrens-Spence received the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) for his part in the raid that night. As part of the second wave, Torrens-Spence made his attack when the defences were fully alert. He flew so low through the harbour entrance that his wheels touched the water at one point. His torpedo was one of three to hit Italia.

Michael Torrens-Spence also received the DSO, second only to the Victoria Cross as a gallantry award, for his courage and leadership during the Battle of Cape Matapan on 28/03/1941. In that battle the British Mediterranean Fleet, under Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, defeated the Italian fleet under Admiral Angelo Iachino.

Aircraft of both the RAF and FAA played a major role in the battle, carrying out nine air strikes. One of those strikes, by aircraft from the aircraft-carrier HMS Formidable, saw the Italian battleship Vittorio Veneto damaged by a torpedo. This slowed the ship sufficiently to reduce the threat it posed to Cunningham's command. Torrens-Spence torpedoed the cruiser Pola from

short range. The ship later sank and when rescued by the destroyer HMS Jervis, its captain commented that Torrens-Spence was 'mad or he is the bravest man in the world'.

Michael Torrens-Spence was also awarded the Hellenic Distinguished Flying Cross by the Greek government for his services to that country. This included his involvement at Cape Matapan, the battle having been fought to protect supply lines to Greece.

In his book "War in a Stringbag", Charles Lamb observed that because of his "innate nervousness", Torrens-Spence "always forced himself to press home his attacks to a suicidal degree, and the Italian's assessment was no exaggeration".

The following month, as CO of 815 Squadron, Torrens-Spence found himself in charge of a small force of "Stringbags" operating from an airfield at Paramythia in Albania, attacking Italian shipping to the north. On one occasion he torpedoed and blew up an ammunition ship; on another he attacked and sank what he believed to be a transport but which turned out to be a hospital ship which the Italians had failed to mark

and illuminate. No blame was ever attached to Torrens-Spence, but he was forever saddened by the incident.

One evening the men of 815 were amazed to see what appeared to be a Junkers 88 land on their airfield. Seizing revolvers, they raced to the airstrip and leapt on the aircraft as it taxied to a halt. Torrens-Spence arrived first and, wrenching open the door, ordered the occupants out. One of the three passengers, speaking perfect English, introduced himself: "I'm King Peter of Yugoslavia and that gentleman is my Prime Minister." "And I'm Father Christmas," Torrens-Spence retorted. "Get out!"

But his prisoner indeed turned out to be the young monarch escaping from the invading Germans. Shortly afterwards the Germans found the airfield and attacked it. It was then evacuated.

When writing about 815 Squadron, Charles Lamb observed that "In my opinion 815 was the best squadron of them all, and Tiffy was its finest leader."

Frederick Michael Alexander Torrens-Spence was born on 10/03/1914 at Whiteabbey, Co

Antrim. His father was a professional soldier who spent most of the First World War as a PoW. At the age of 13, after attending Mourne Grange School in Kilkeel, young Michael entered Dartmouth Royal Naval College. He began his career on the battleship Valiant and was present at the Invergordon mutiny, later moving to the battleship Warspite, the cruiser Hawkins in the Indian Ocean and the destroyers Elgin and Wilchelsea.

After further training, he volunteered for flying duties with the Fleet Air Arm, then under the command of the RAF. After flying training at Leuchars on First World War Avro 504s, he was commissioned as a pilot in both the RAF and the Navy. His first postings were on the carriers Furious and, in 1937, Glorious.

When war broke out, Torrens-Spence was playing cricket in Alexandria. Glorious was immediately sent through the Suez Canal to hunt German surface raiders but none was found. He was then sent home from Aden to join the new carrier Illustrious.

Illustrious entered the Mediterranean in September 1940 and was mainly employed on

convoy escorts until the Taranto raid in November. When she was hit by German dive-bombers in early January 1941, Torrens-Spence was one of only three survivors from the wardroom where he had been having lunch.

After his command of No. 815 Squadron, in 1942 he was posted as a test pilot at Boscombe Down and did not return to operational flying until 1945 when he was appointed to the aircraft-carrier HMS Illustrious to command its aircraft. The ship was due to join the British Pacific Fleet but the dropping of the atomic bomb and the end of the war meant she never had to be deployed.

He then went to the Empire Test Pilots' School as CO, a job he did reluctantly as he wanted to get away from flying for a while to get in some sea time. He then served successively in the cruiser Theseus, as Assistant to the 2nd Sea Lord, and as CO of RNAS Eglinton in his native Northern Ireland.

In 1952 he was promoted Captain and sent back to the Admiralty to look after future aircraft requirements. He wrote the staff requirement for the highly successful Buccaneer strike aircraft and steered it through the Admiralty Board.

In 1955 he assumed command of Delight, a Daring class destroyer deploying in home and Mediterranean waters. Afterwards he commanded RNAS Lossiemouth, a training establishment, before taking command in 1959 of the carrier Albion where he spent the next two years, most of it in the Far East.

At 47, Torrens-Spence narrowly missed promotion to Rear Admiral, though he was nominated reserve, and left the Navy. Shortly afterwards, he was invited to become the Commandant of the Ulster Special Constabulary in County Armagh, the so-called "B" Specials.

When the Specials were disbanded in 1970 and replaced by the Ulster Defence Regiment, Torrens-Spence was asked to take command of the County Armagh Battalion (2 UDR), as a lieutenant colonel, to get it up and running. This was not easy as many people had been disheartened by the disbandment of the Specials, but he succeeded in getting enough men and women to volunteer. He retired in 1972.

After the murder by the IRA of the Lord Lieutenant for Co Armagh, Sir Norman Stronge, in January 1981, Torrens-Spence was invited to

become Lord Lieutenant in his place, which he did, albeit with some reluctance, and held the post for seven years.

Torrens-Spence was modest about his achievements. Though he was a passionate unionist, he was never bigoted or closed to new ideas. He was nevertheless saddened by what he saw as continual government appeasement of terrorism.

The Fleet Air Arm's development

On 01/04/1924, the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Air Force was formed, encompassing those RAF units that normally embarked on aircraft carriers and fighting ships. 1924 was a significant year for British naval aviation as only weeks before the founding of the Fleet Air Arm, the Royal Navy had commissioned HMS Hermes, the world's first ship to be designed and built as an aircraft carrier. Over the following months RAF Fleet Air Arm Fairey IID reconnaissance biplanes operated off Hermes, conducting flying trials.

On 24/05/1939 the Fleet Air Arm was returned to Admiralty control under the "Inskip Award" (named after the Minister for Co-

ordination of Defence who was overseeing Britain's re-armament programme) and renamed the Air Branch of the Royal Navy. At the onset of the Second World War, the Fleet Air Arm consisted of 20 squadrons with only 232 aircraft. By the end of the war the worldwide strength of the Fleet Air Arm was 59 aircraft carriers, 3,700 aircraft, 72,000 officers and men, and 56 Naval air stations.

During the war, the FAA operated fighters, torpedo bombers and reconnaissance aircraft.

Following the Dunkirk evacuation and the commencement of the Battle of Britain, the Royal Air Force soon found itself critically short of fighter pilots. In the summer of 1940, the RAF had little more than 800 fighter pilots and as the Battle progressed the RAF shortage worsened. There were simply not enough pilots, not enough ground crew, never enough sleep and too many enemy aircraft. With this desperate situation the RAF was forced to call upon the Admiralty for Fleet Air Arm assistance. As the Battle progressed, many of the unsung heroes of RAF Fighter Command were the Fleet Air Arm crews who served under Fighter Command, either loaned directly to RAF fighter squadrons or as

with 804 and 808 naval units, entire squadrons were loaned to RAF Fighter Command, such as No 804 Squadron, which provided dockyard defence during the Battle of Britain with Sea Gladiators.

In the waters around the British Isles and out into the Atlantic Ocean, operations against enemy shipping and submarines in support of the RN were mounted by RAF Coastal Command with large patrol bombers and flying boats and land-based fighter-bombers. The aircraft carrier had replaced the battleship as the Fleet's capital ship and its aircraft were now strike weapons in their own right. The top scoring fighter ace with 17 victories was Commander Stanley Orr, the Royal Marine ace was Ronald Cuthbert Hay with 13 victories.

Naval aviation tradition alive in NI - Belfast Royal Marine pilot awarded USA meritorious service medal this autumn

In the October 2015 issue of Navy News there is a two page tabloid colour spread on Royal Marine Lt.Col. Philip Kelly from Belfast, who the

previous month had received the USA meritorious service medal for his work with the U.S. Navy combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

His citation praises his “unsurpassed, leadership ability, superb management skills and a complete understanding of tactical operations.

“His dedicated efforts resulted in the flawless execution of figures 4,900 sorties and 13,200 flight hours which concentrated on close air support for coalition ground forces engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq.”

The award was made by Second Sea Lord Vice-Admiral Jonathan Woodcock at a ceremony in Portsmouth Naval base. The citation goes on to say how his leadership and tactical experience were instrumental in the US Carrier Eight Air Wing’s success.

During the past few years the 44-year-old Ulsterman spent time on the USS Ronald Reagan, Harry S Truman and George HW Bush.

He is now the Strike Warfare Commander in the U.K.’s Carrier Strike Group which will be based in

HMS Queen Elizabeth – his seventh aircraft carrier - and the largest warship ever in the Royal Navy.

The former fighter pilot served on HMS Ark Royal, Invincible and illustrious. He has flown F/A 18 Hornets. He joined the Royal Marines 21 years of age and has reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the Naval service. He is one of only two Royal Marine jet pilots.

Commenting on his current position, he said , “I always wanted to be a commando and pilot so I got the difficult one out of the way first. The discipline instilled as a commando allowed me to handle flying training and be effective in combat.”

Philip is a son of the late Canon Wilbert Kelly, formerly Rector of St Aidan’s Belfast. His mother lives in Lisburn where she is a member of the Cathedral Parish.

FEET AIR ARM - WORLD WAR II

ADDY, David Cyril Baines

RN. FAA. B 22/02/1926. D 05/02/1991. Son of JV Addy, Knock Rd., Belfast. Campbell College 2900. RBAI.

ANDERSON, RB

HMS Caroline. RNVR. Lieutenant - Commander. Appointed Assistant Defence Officer for West Solent and Isle of Wight, September 1939. July 1945 appointed First Lieutenant HMS Mayina, Ceylon. Later Officer i/c Fleet Air Arm at Trincomalee.

BABINGTON, Robert

RNAS/ FAA. Sub Lieutenant. Pilot. 1939-45. During the course of the war he had at least two near death experiences. His first wartime posting was flying Fairy Fulmars from the Harland and Wolff-built carrier HMS Formidable. He arrived in Egypt just as his ship was about to take part in the evacuation of Crete. After the Crete evacuation he flew Swordfish torpedo bombers during the invasion of Syria and once spent three days in a dingy, without food or water, after being forced to ditch at sea. Robert was awarded a DSC. The citation reads: "The Distinguished Service Cross has been awarded to Sub Lieutenant Babington for his skill, bravery and sustained resolution in many air attacks against enemy submarines and E-boats in the Mediterranean." He had another brush with death when the carrier HMS Dasher was sunk on 27th March 1943 while sailing in the Clyde with the loss of 379 men. As the ship was sinking, he was forced to jump overboard and swim to safety. A massive explosion took the ship under a short time later. Dublin born. St Columba's College and Trinity College, Dublin. Called to the Northern Ireland Bar 1947. Queen's Counsel 1965. An Ulster Unionist member. He resigned from the '66 Committee of Unionist backbenchers in October 1970. Sat for North Down from the 1969 general election until the

prorogation of the Parliament in 1972. County Court Judge for Fermanagh and Tyrone from 1974.

+BAYNE, Alan Miller Cameron

RN. Petty Officer Airman. FAA, 754 Squadron. Died 17/02/1943. Age 23. FAA 754 Squadron was based at HMS Condor, a Royal Naval Air Station, at Arbroath. Died in an air crash while in service. Son of William James Bayne, and Mrs. Selina Bayne, Tinwald, Canterbury, New Zealand, and formerly of Tamlaghtmore, Moneymore. Buried in Cookstown New Cemetery. First Cookstown PCI - RH. Cookstown WM.

+BOAL, William James

RNVR. FAA. Prob T/ Sub-Lieut (A). DCM. 755 Squadron based at HMS Kestrel, Worthy Down, Winchester. Died 01/07/1941. Age 47. Whilst serving as a pilot instructor there was a collision with another plane. Served in the ranks of 9th Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers as a signaller in World War 1. DCM 01/01/1919, St Quentin, France. Son of Robert and Jane Boal. Robert Boal, also army, served in Gibraltar, Egypt, Malta, South Africa, WW1. Husband to Margaret Boal, Tobermore. Family memorial St Columba's Church of Ireland graveyard, Draperstown.

BROWN, William

RN. FAA. Commissioned 1940. He flew Walrus seaplanes from bases in N Africa and Scotland. Seconded to 836 Naval Air Squadron at Maydown on the Foyle estuary. Its remit was to monitor U-boat activity in the N atlantic. He and his squadron flew Fairey Swordfish biplanes from converted merchant vessels known as MAC Ships (Merchant aircraft carriers) that accompanied vessels across the Atlantic.

Bill developed a passion for mathematics and post-war completed a PhD in mathematics at the University of Michigan and subsequently lectured in the USA and Canada. He returned to Portaferry in 1958 and became involved in the family business.

His passion for sailing resulted in him designing a new 35ft racing yacht 'Ruffian'. He and his brother founded Westerley Yachts and over 200 fibreglass yachts were produced in their two factories in the 1970's and 80's.

Bill returned to teaching mathematics at Sullivan Upper and then the Open University.

He and his wife had a strong involvement with the RNLI Portaferry Station. Bill also served as Hon. Secretary to the Station for 12 years and was awarded the RNLI's Gold Badge in 2005. Born Portaferry 24/04/1921 - Died 08/03/2006. RBAI. University of Michigan

CAPPER, Adam Clarke

FAA. 1939-45. B 14/09/1926. Son of T. H. Capper, 56 Malone Park, Belfast. Campbell College 2903. BA, OU. Civil servant Rtd. Killinchy.

DARLING, Gerald Ralph Auchinleck

RNVR. FAA. Lieutenant-Commander. At the age of 18 he began an outstanding career in the RNVR, from 1940 to 1946, as a Fleet Air Arm pilot, later becoming Chief Test Pilot with the Mediterranean Fleet. A dangerous job and few of his colleagues survived the war. He himself crash-landed, suffering severe injuries including a smashed pelvis. The prognosis was that he would never walk again but following the Greek motto on his aircraft, meaning "Know Thyself", he characteristically

defied all the odds, learning to ride again both horse and bicycle. He maintained his connection with the Navy through the RNVR, rising to the rank of Lieutenant-Commander.

Born 1921 in Erganagh Rectory where his grandfather Gerald was rector, he maintained his Northern Ireland connections throughout his life. Academically he was a high flyer. His first school was Omagh, then a scholarship to Harrow, and a classics scholarship to Hereford College, Oxford.

On the death of his father in 1958 he had inherited Crevenagh House, near Omagh, where, from his schooldays, he had spent many happy holidays with his extended family. He was proud of his descent from the Auchinleck family who had always lived there, and resolved to maintain it as a family home despite his ties to life in London. In his London office you would find a Donegal landscape and a map showing the wartime achievements of Ulster.

In 1990 he became Deputy Lieutenant of Co Tyrone and in 1993 High Sheriff. In his obsequies address Bishop Hannon of Clogher paid tribute to Gerald Darling's contribution to the work of Edenderry parish, where he had served as parish secretary. In the townlands of Omagh his roots went deep. Bishop Hannon related how, before a major court appearance, Darling would ease the tension by thinking of his favourite spots on the river, the snipe bogs and mountains of Tyrone. Strangely, after a lifetime of trout-fishing, he caught his first salmon only a year before his death. One of his family remembers the fishing picnics in childhood - "as unfortunately a mizzly day is good for fishing the picnics were often rather damp affairs".

But that was balanced by the warmth of bedtime stories in the family flat in the Middle Temple where it is said the family, willy-nilly, added to the appreciative audience for Darling's dramatic readings of Winnie the Pooh. He would, friends say, have been equally at home as a farmer, taking great pride in his forestry and Belted Galloway cattle and never more at home than working in ragged jeans with his chainsaw.

A permanent record of Gerald Darling and his distinction as a lawyer will be his contribution to that definitive work, Halsbury's Laws of England (Admiralty and Ship Collisions), the third edition of 1952. In 1992 he was made an Honorary Bencher of the Northern Ireland Bar.

Gerald Ralph Auchinleck Darling, barrister-at-law: born Erganagh, Co Tyrone 8 December 1921; called to the Bar, Middle Temple 1950, Bencher 1972, Treasurer 1991; Barrister, Northern Ireland 1957, Honorary Bencher 1992; RD 1967; QC 1967; member, Panel of Lloyd's Arbitrators in Salvage Cases 1967-78, Appeal Arbitrator 1978-91; member, Panel of Wreck Commissioners 1967-96; QC, Hong Kong 1968; Judge, Admiralty Court of the Cinque Ports 1979-96; trustee, Royal Naval Museum 1985-90; Lloyd's Silver Medal 1991; married 1954 Susan Hobbs (one son, one daughter); died Londonderry 13 September 1996.

ERSKINE, Colin Jack

RN. Naval Airman. b. 29/05/1925. Son of J. Erskine, Greenisland. Campbell College 2681

ERVIN, Wilson

RN. FAA. CBE. Petty Officer. Radar. Served 4 years. HMS Illustrious. Served in home waters as well as South Africa, the Far East, Ceylon, Burma and Australia. His 21st birthday was

spent in the Indian Ocean. Served in Pacific, kamikaze attacks. Off Burma when war ended. Attended Stramillis and Fane Street Primary Schools, RBAI. Joined the Belfast Banking Company on 15/04/1942 at Dungannon branch. He returned from active service on 22/08/1946. Post-war career in banking, from clerk to chief executive and managing director of Northern Bank in Ireland. He attended the 2000 re-dedication ceremony of the Bank's Rolls of Honour. Governor of RBAI, Vice President of RNLI, RUAS. Trustee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and elder of Fisherwick Church from where his funeral took place 25/02/2015. Aged 91. Son of Robert John Ervin, Lucerne Parade, Belfast. Husband to Joan who predeceased him.

FERGUSON, Robert

RN. FAA. Bob left the family farm in Fermanagh to join the Royal Navy in 1943. As soon as he was old enough he applied to join the Fleet Air Arm as a pilot. He trained in Canada and spent the last few months of the war flying fighter aircraft from carriers in the Pacific. After the war he took a degree in geology at Trinity College, Dublin and worked for several years on the copper mines of Northern Rhodesia. He became interested in a career in medicine and saved enough money to put himself through medical school. After graduating from Queen's University, Belfast, he worked at Belfast City Hospital and at the South Tyrone Hospital in Dungannon. He then moved to Boston, USA, where he served on the staff of the Veterans Administration Hospital and later the Northeastern University Student Health Service. He died 10/02/2010 at Wellesley, Massachusetts, USA, survived by his wife Betty.

+GLOVER, Harold Aloysius

RN. Petty Officer Airman. FAA/FX. 80001. Died 01/01/1941 Age: 23. HMS Formidable. Husband of Eileen May Glover,

Portrush. St Helens Cemetery, Lancashire. Lee-on-Solent Memorial, Bay 2

+HAMILTON, Samuel Frederick

RN. FAA. Leading Air Mechanic. FAA/FX 76837. Died 29/01/1943. Age: 27. HMS Cormorant, RNAS Station, Gibraltar. Died in N Africa. Son of William John Frederick and Sarah Hamilton, Omagh. Bone War Cemetery. Annaba

+JACKSON, George Balfour Sydney

RN. FAA. Leading Airman, FAA/FX 80569. Assigned to HMS Daedalus (FAA base at Lee-on-Solent). Died 17/01/1941. Age 19. He was a passenger on steam passenger ship Almeda Star lost on passage to Trinidad. The ship was sunk with the loss of all crew and passengers by U-Boat 96. Son of Sydney Herbert and Marjorie Sinclair Jackson, Belfast. Lee-on-Solent Memorial, Hampshire. St Jude's Parish Church, Belfast WM

McDERMOTT, Robert

RNR. Pilot. Flew the Seafire, the naval version of the Spitfire. Served in Canada, USA, Africa and Sri Lanka (Ceylon) where he commanded 742 Squadron and was the Admiral's personal pilot. Married Third Officer Gill Oppenheimer, WRNS, in Columbo, Ceylon, on 10/03/1945. Gill also served at Bletchley Park where the Enigma code was broken. Churchill later commented how successfully the WRNS had kept secret the work of Station X. Robert was keen to stay in the navy but familial duty brought him home to run their shirt and collar making business in Bridge St., Coleraine.

MONARD, Patrick Terence

RNVR. FAA. Petty Officer. 1939 - 45. B20/11/1924. Son of SH Monard, The Warren, Donaghadee. Campbell College 2842

SCOTT, Bobby

RNAS. Aircraft mechanic. Enlisted 1943, aged 18. To USA on Queen Elizabeth. Transferred to USS Albemar, a seaplane repair ship.

+SQUIRES, Francis William

RNVR. Lieutenant (A), 854 Squadron. HMS Illustrious. Died 27/03/1945. Aged 29. Launching attacks on airfields in Sakishma, Gunto. Pacific, from HM Aircraft Carriers Indomitable, Indefatigable and Victorious covered by major units of BPF and with screen of Fleet destroyers. Joint operations with US Task Group in continuation with breaks for refuelling from British Fleet Train. Son of Francis William and Florence Evelyn Squires; husband to Margaret Jane Squires, Limavady. B.Sc. (Eng.) Hons. Lee-on-Solent Memorial, Bay 6

+SURGEONER, William John

RN. FAA. Air Mechanic (1st Class). FX/110964. Died 04/03/1945. Age 20. HMS Malagas, Wingfield, Cape Town, South Africa. Simon's Town (Dido Valley) Cemetery. Son of John and Jeannie Surgeoner, Ballymena. Ballymena WM

TORRENS - SPENCE, Frederick Michael Alexander

RNAS/FAA. Captain. DSO, DFC, AFC and Greek DFC. B Whiteabbey, County Antrim 10/03/1914. Mourne Grange School, at the age of 13 he attended Dartmouth RNC. Husband to Rachel. One of their sons Brigadier Edward John (Johnny) Torrens-Spence CBE, was British Embassy military attaché to the United States. D 12/12/2001, Laurelvale House, Laurelvale. See above

HELP REQUESTED

Please send names of Ex RN/RM/WRNS who served in either of the world wars. Further details also appreciated.

CIRCULATION - Please share 'Brave Report' with your former service colleagues - and we will post direct to them if they simply send an e-mail to: houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com, placing Brave Report in the message bar, and give their name and former arm of service, and if they are members of the RNA or RBL, having knowledge of their branch would be appreciated. There are specific areas where we need information from!

PUBLICATION NOTES

Please note all the material in Brave Report is copyright.

Brave Report is collated and published by The Very Rev. Dr Houston McKelvey, OBE QVRM TD.

Dr McKelvey served as chaplain for 29 years with 102/105 (Ulster & Scottish) Regiment, Royal Artillery TA; for 20 years as Chaplain to the RBL - Northern Ireland Area, and for a period as chaplain to the Belfast Branch of the Burma Star Association. He was involved in the life of HMS Caroline and HMS Hibernia. He was appointed an Honorary Chaplain to the RNR. He is a Past President of QUB Combined Services Club.