

Welcome to the

NAVAL ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



Queensland Section INC
Monthly Ceremony.

Jack's Memorial
Southbank



At 11:00 on 26th November 2020

Through the Monthly Ceremony the association wishes to highlight the service of members of Royal Australia Navy. This month in conjunction with the Submariners Association of Australia we commemorate Sub Lieutenant Kenneth Briggs RANVR DSC.



Ken as a crew member of the Submarine XE4 at 12:29 on 31 July 1945 while underwater departed the Submarine and with 10 minutes was required to locate and cut the Japanese Communication Cables between Saigon-Singapore and just to prove the point he returned to the Sub with a short length of the cable.

Despite enormous pressure, limited time and primitive equipment, the sub lieutenant and his accomplice successfully severed a Japanese underwater communication cable linking Singapore and Saigon.

It took the X-craft three days to return to its mother ship HMS Bonaventure, which was waiting in Brunei Bay.

The cable had restricted the Allies' ability to overhear and intercept radio messages.

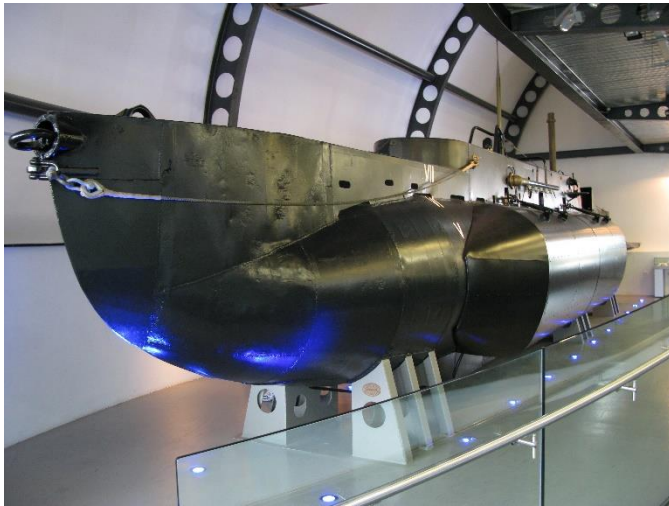
As part of Operation Sabre, midget submarines cut cable in a number of different locations.

For his efforts Ken was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross

These operations, carried out in July 1945, were intended to cut the undersea telephone cables connecting Singapore, Saigon, Hong Kong and Tokyo. The intention was to oblige the Japanese to use radio and render themselves open to message interception.

X-class Midget Submarine	
Country	United Kingdom
Displacement	27 tons standard; 30 tons full
Length	51 feet
Beam	6 feet
Draft	5 feet
Machinery	One Gardner 4cyl Diesel engine, one Blackman electric motor
Power Output	42 SHP
Speed	6 knots
Range	1,200 miles
Crew	4
Armament	Two large detachable explosive charges
Submerged Speed	5 knots submerged

Operation Sabre was directed at the Hong Kong to Saigon telephone cable, and carried out by XE4, which was towed to within 40 miles (64 km) of the Mekong Delta by the submarine HMS Spearhead, where she looked for the two telephone cables by using a towed grapnel. She eventually snagged the

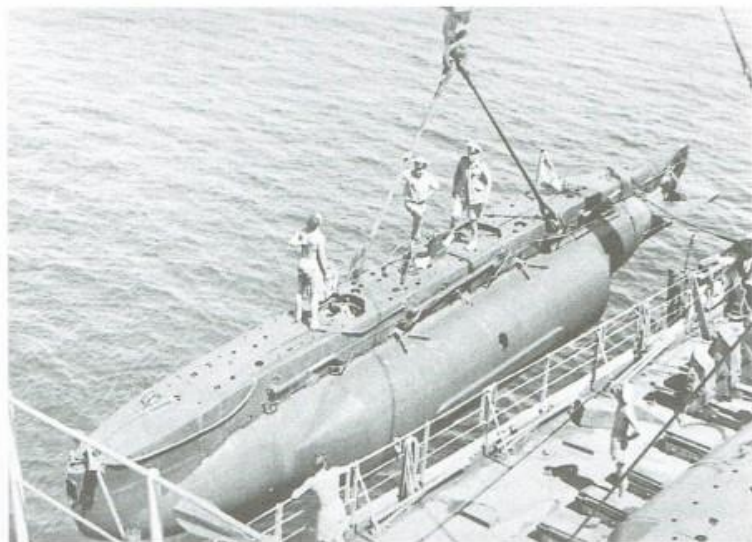


first cable, and managed to haul it about 10 feet (3.0 m) off the seabed. XE4's diver, Sub-Lieutenant K.M. Briggs, used the net/cable cutter to sever it. The second cable was soon found as well, and was severed by the second diver, Sub-Lieutenant A. Bergius. Two divers were carried due to the operating rule that a diver should not spend more than 20 minutes in depths over 33 feet (10 m) and no more than 10 minutes over 40 feet (12 m). XE4 and Spearhead returned to Labuan on 3 August 1945.

Operation Foil was directed at the Hong Kong to Singapore telephone cable and carried out by XE5 against the Hong Kong end of the cable, after being towed into position by the submarine HMS Selene. Operating close inshore near to Lamma Island, working conditions were poor, XE5's divers having to work in thick mud under the constant threat of oxygen poisoning. Despite repeated attempts it was not completely certain that the cable had in fact been severed, and it was not until after the Japanese surrender that it was confirmed that XE5 had succeeded in doing so. XE5 and Selene returned to Subic Bay on 6 August 1945.

The XE-class submarines were a series of six midget submarines (HMS XE1 to XE6) that were built for the Royal Navy during 1944. They were an improved version of the X class used in the attack on the German battleship Tirpitz.

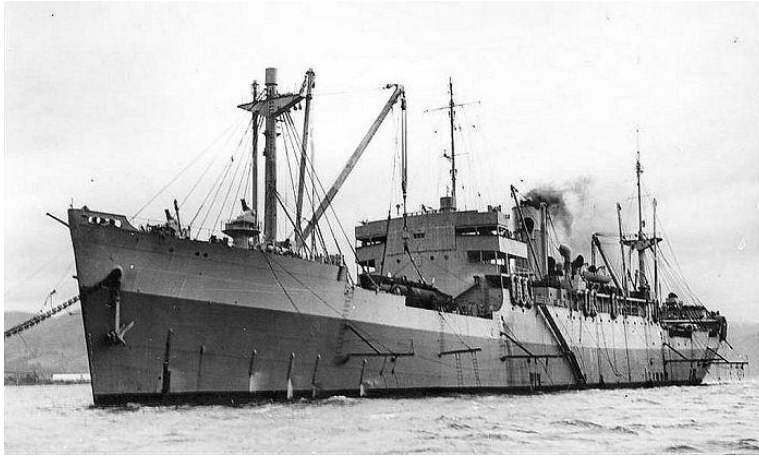
They carried a crew of four, typically a lieutenant in command, with a sub-lieutenant as deputy, an engine room artificer in charge of the mechanical side and a seaman or leading-seaman. At least one of them was qualified as a diver.



An XE type midget being hoisted out of HMS *Bonaventure* before Operation SABRE in July 1945. (G.R. Worledge)

In addition to the two side charges (each of which contained two tons of amatol explosive), they carried around six 20-pound (9 kg) limpet mines which were attached to the target by the diver.

They and their depot ship HMS *Bonaventure* arrived at Labuan in July 1945. Four of them managed to take part in operations before the war ended.



HMS Bonaventure was a submarine depot ship of the Royal Navy. She was initially built for civilian service with the Clan Line, but on the outbreak of the Second World War she was requisitioned by the Navy and after being launched, was converted for military service.

After completing work-up trials, Bonaventure sailed to Loch Striven on the west bank of the

Clyde to become the main training base and depot ship for the X craft midget submarines. In August and September 1943, training and trials were carried out for the midget submarines HMS X5, X6, X7, X8, X9 and X10. They were to be used to carry out the attack on the German battleship Tirpitz in Altenfjord, Norway, codenamed Operation Source.

During the operation, the submarines HMS Thrasher, Truculent, Stubborn, Syrtis, Sceptre and Sea Nymph each towed a midget submarine to Norwegian waters. Despite a number of the X craft being lost, the operation was a success and Tirpitz was put out of action for six months. In October Bonaventure sailed to Govan to be refitted at the yards of Alexander Stephen and Sons. The refit took until 2 January 1944 and included fitting new radar equipment. Some work was not completed before Bonaventure was recommissioned on 22 January to serve with the British Pacific Fleet. She again deployed at Loch Striven in preparation. She remained deployed there until March, when she returned to Govan to complete the outstanding dockyard work. The refit lasted until August, when after post-refit trials, she returned to Loch Striven in September. October to November was spent training on the loch. During this period, the modified XE-class submarines, which had been under construction since January 1944, became available. Several were embarked aboard Bonaventure for use against targets in the Far East. In December she was nominated for deployment as the depot ship for the 14th Submarine Flotilla in the south west Pacific.



Bonaventure's departure was initially delayed, and in January she embarked six XE type submarines. She left the United Kingdom on 21 February, sailing for Australia via the Panama Canal. After going through the canal, she crossed the Pacific, arriving at Pearl Harbor on 7 March. The attitude of the United States Navy was discouraging, and the use of midget submarines was not looked on with much enthusiasm. Bonaventure arrived

at Brisbane on 27 April and received approval to move nearer to the operational area and to approach the local US Navy authorities. She subsequently sailed to Townsville, Queensland in May, where a visit was made by a senior officer of the 14th Flotilla to the US Navy Base at Subic Bay. The Americans remained sceptical and suggested that Bonaventure be converted to perform a wider support role. On 31 May the proposal was made to use midget submarines to cut Japanese underwater telegraph cables.

Bonaventure was transferred to Hervey Bay, Queensland in June, and then to an area south of Townsville, to prepare for the cable cutting operations. She carried out extensive training and experiments off the coast of Mon Repos using a disused telegraph cable between Australia and New Caledonia. During these exercises, two divers (Lt Bruce Enzer and Lt Bruce Carey) died after suffering oxygen poisoning.[2] After the operational targets had been selected, Bonaventure sailed to Labuan, Borneo. Throughout July she prepared for three operations. Operation Struggle aimed to place limpet mines on the Japanese cruisers Myōkō and Takao, based at Singapore with the 10th Fleet. Operation Foil aimed to cut telegraph cables off Lamma Island, Hong Kong, and Operation Sabre was intended to cut telegraph cables at Cap St Jacques, off Saigon. These cables were vital to Japanese signal security as radio signals could be deciphered by US code breakers.

The operations began on 26 July. HMS Stygian towed XE3 and HMS Spark towed XE1 for Operation Struggle. Takao was badly damaged, sinking to the seabed, but the attack on Myōkō failed. For Operation Sabre, HMS Spearhead towed XE4, which succeeded in cutting two cables and bringing sections back to Bonaventure. Operation Foil was undertaken with HMS Maidstone, based at Subic Bay, as the depot ship. HMS Selene towed XE5, but the tow failed part way through the voyage. XE5 was able to reach the target under her own power and succeeded in severing the cable. The submarines returned in tow to Bonaventure on 3, 4 and 5 August. Bonaventure's last activity before the end of the war was to sail to Sydney from Labuan on 20 August.

