



Captain George Edward HUNT DSO* DSC* RN

[1916 – 2011]



Captain Hunt is notable for having been one of the Club's most decorated members.

Captain George Edward Hunt was one of the most highly-decorated members of the United Service Club. He was awarded a DSC and Bar, and a DSO and Bar, as well as being twice mentioned in despatches, making him one of Britain's most highly-decorated naval officers.

He sank more enemy ships than any other British submariner of the Second World War, commanding patrols that were considered of *unsurpassed daring and brilliance*. His successes were based on a *technical mastery that was allied to steely courage*.

George Edward Hunt was born on 4 July 1916 at Milton of Campsie, north of Glasgow, where his grandfather had founded a calico printing works. His father was a colonial officer in Africa and George was a child of Empire. Sent back home at the age of seven, he recalled that on the solo train journey from Tilbury a luggage label on his coat read simply: *Moffat, Scotland*. He never saw his father again. He was educated at St Ninian's and cared for on his holidays by two doting aunts.

George left school at 13 to join the Merchant Navy Training Ship *Conway* in the Mersey, and at 16 he joined the Glasgow-based Henderson Line, which sailed on routes to India and Burma; his first ship as deck cadet was the 5,000-ton passenger-cargo ship *Arracan*. In 1930 he was commissioned as a Midshipman RNR.

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In 1938 he was commissioned into the Royal Navy and volunteered for the submarine service. By 1939 he was already serving in submarines. During World War II he was sunk once, rammed twice, and had hundreds of depth charges dropped around him. His fifteenth mission was described by the Admiralty as *unsurpassed in the Annals of the Mediterranean Submarine Flotilla*.

War Service

After joining the Royal Navy, Hunt spent a short time in the destroyer HMS *Foxhound* before volunteering for submarine service. On 1 January 1939 George began his initial submarine officer training at HMS *Dolphin*. During this time the trainees were required to go to sea on two of the L class submarines L26 and L27. He then joined HMS *Unity* as the signals and navigation officer and was soon awarded his first DSC for gallant service on several successful patrols.

On the night of 29 April 1940 *Unity* was accidentally run down in fog by the Norwegian merchant ship *Alte Jarl*, which sliced into the forward section of the submarine. All but two men escaped but after two others were swept away by the tide, Hunt helped keep the rest of the crew together until they were rescued. For this act of leadership he was mentioned in despatches.

Instead of survivor's leave Hunt was appointed, in May and June 1940, as liaison officer to the Dutch submarine *O10*, patrolling the North Sea and covering the evacuation from the beaches of Dunkirk. From July to December he undertook patrols in the North Sea and the Bay of Biscay as First Lieutenant of the submarine H31, and from December to March 1941 he was liaison officer of the Polish submarine *Sokol*.

Hunt was then appointed First Lieutenant of the submarine HMS *Proteus* which deployed to the Mediterranean where, on February 8, 1942, *Proteus* made a night attack on what the captain thought was a U-boat, firing two torpedoes on the surface at 700 yards from her stern tubes but without result. As *Proteus* turned to fire her bow torpedoes the enemy ship, which turned out to be the Italian torpedo boat *Sagittario*, rammed *Proteus* in an attempt to sink her.

Proteus lost her port forward hydroplane and water began to pour into the torpedo room. As the crew scrambled to plug holes and drain the torpedo room, Hunt's leadership and experience proved crucial in saving the boat from sinking. *Proteus* was eventually able to proceed slowly at periscope depth back to her base. Hunt was awarded a Bar to his DSC.

He passed the submarine commanding officers' course (known as *The Perisher*) in April 1942 and took command of *H33* and then of *H50*, working with destroyers practising their anti-submarine work.

With his well-groomed red beard, George was the epitome of a devoted naval officer.



In October 1942 he took command of the submarine with which he would forge his reputation. This was known as P53 before Churchill decreed that all submarines should have names instead of numbers after which she was named HMS *Ulfar* (after Mars Ulfar, or Mars the Avenger).

While in command of *Utor*, he and his crew accounted for 28 enemy vessels (sinking 20 by torpedo and eight by gunfire) and damaging four more ships.

After a very cold and unsuccessful patrol off North Cape, Norway, *Utor* was sent to the Mediterranean in early 1943. There her fortunes changed entirely.

Hunt's first success came in April, when he fired on and sank the 2,150-ton German motor vessel *Penerf*. This scalp was soon followed by those of an auxiliary minesweeper and a large merchantman, both Italian, before *Utor* accounted for the 800-ton Italian destroyer *Lince* in August.

Other operations included a shore bombardment, landing Special Forces, and carrying manned torpedoes (known as *chariots*). In May 1944 Hunt was again mentioned in despatches during the Allied landings at Anzio, when *Utor* was used as beacon to guide landing craft to their beaches.

Greatest Feat

Perhaps Hunt's greatest feat came on June 27, 1944 when he detected the 3,317-ton cargo ship *Cap Blanc* close to Cap Antibes. Despite her four escorts he managed to sink her with four torpedoes. He was hunted for an hour but eluded the depth charges. As he slowly drew away he spotted the 5,260-ton tanker *Pallas* under tow of two tugs with five more escorts and four aircraft circling overhead. Though conditions were good for an anti-submarine chase, Hunt succeeded in penetrating the strong escort screen and at 08:31 fired his last two torpedoes from 1,500 yards. Both hit. He dived to 300ft (near to maximum safe diving depth) to endure what he knew would be a heavy counter-attack. Hunt stopped counting the depth charges after the first 100! The detonations started several leaks, but none proved catastrophic and Hunt crept away until, at about noon, he came to periscope depth and saw his enemy hull down on the horizon.

His senior officer wrote that while the first attack was *brilliant*, the second, mounted only three hours later, *was the most superlative exhibition... [achieving] an unseen, undetected position inside such a massive and violently zigzagging screen suggests consummate technical skill, but shows, moreover, determination and courage of the highest order.*

Hunt, who was awarded a Bar to his existing DSO, modestly preferred to describe the presence of so many escorts as *very off-putting*.

By the end of the war he held the title of the deadliest submarine Captain. Of the 68 torpedoes he fired, 47 per cent were hits. While Lieutenant Commander David Wanklyn VC sank most tonnage, Hunt, who attributed his success to his *marvellous team on-board*, sank most ships.

Post War

At the end of the war Hunt took command of the T-class submarine, HMS *Taku*, and following the conclusion of the conflict he was First Lieutenant of the aircraft carrier HMS *Triumph*.

By 1947 he was again in command of a submarine (HMS *Ambush*) on trials under the ice of the Arctic Ocean, an experience which he described as a *memorable and unnerving experience*. In 1948 Hunt commanded *The Perisher* course and was responsible for passing British officers fit to command submarines. Subsequently he was, until 1952, Operations Officer on the staff of the Flag Officer Submarines.

After a short time as Executive Officer of the aircraft carrier HMS *Theseus*, Hunt was promoted Captain and went to run the Admiralty Underwater Detection Establishment at Portland, Dorset.

His next appointment was in command of the anti-submarine frigate HMS *Bigbury Bay* on the West Indies station; as Senior Naval Officer West Indies he took the ship to Jamestown, Virginia, and hosted President Eisenhower on-board during celebrations to mark the 350th anniversary of the establishment of the first successful English settlement in North America.

unt's last two appointments were as Chief of Staff to the Flag Officer Submarines and Director of Naval Equipment but at the age of 46 he realised that the Navy had few other challenges to offer and he decided to retire.

After the Navy

In 1963 George migrated to Australia and settled in Brisbane where he transferred to the RAN Emergency List. He worked for the British High Commission until 1976.

George joined the Submariners Association of Australia on 22 October 1985. On the formation of the Queensland Branch George accepted the position of Branch Patron. At the SAA's AGM in 1997, George was elected to Life Membership.



Capt George Hunt DSO DSC* RANER (ret'd) [centre], with Commander Lachlan King RAN, Commanding Officer NHQSEQ., and Don Currell President Submarine Association Queensland Inc, at the publishing ceremony, of the book "Diving Stations".*



He co-wrote his autobiography *Diving Stations* with Peter Dornan.

George Hunt had married Phoebe Silson, a fellow Scot, in 1939 when she was serving as a WRNS. She predeceased him in 2005 and George died on 16 August 2011, survived by their daughter, Susan.

Sources included:

- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents
- Submariner's Association of Australia Inc.
- Mr Peter Dornan AM