



CLARENCE HOUSE

Few parts of Britain, especially on a geographic scale of only 15 miles long by 5 miles across at its widest, could have witnessed greater and more varied wartime military involvement than your tiny Isle of Bute - strategically located amongst neighbouring islands and mainland peninsulas in the Clyde Estuary. Its war record has sacrifice, heroism, ingenuity, commitment and compassion emblazoned across it.

Even before war was officially declared in September 1939, the people of Bute had opened their hearts, and their homes, to receive wave after wave of evacuees from Glasgow. With further subsequent arrivals, altogether approximately 2000 children were relocated to your island as a precautionary measure against possible enemy air raids on the industrial areas of the Clyde. The warm-heartedness shown by the people of Bute was a model of compassionate hospitality. Likewise, the hundreds of volunteers who gave so unstintingly of their energy in various Home Front capacities or in accommodating, feeding, caring for, and entertaining the forces stationed on Bute, was an inspiration.

From 1940 onwards Rothesay's seascape was dominated by the presence of HMS Cyclops, depot ship of the 7th Submarine Flotilla home-based in Rothesay Bay, and a key element in Britain's Atlantic naval operations. At Port Bannatyne, the luxury 88-bedroomed Kyles Hydro Hotel was requisitioned by the Admiralty to serve as the headquarters of the 12th Flotilla. It was from this location, known as HMS Varbel, that the top secret deployment of X-Craft Midget Submarines was masterminded, including the famous and audacious attack on the German battleship, Tirpitz. Port Bannatyne's War Memorial records the names of 39 Midget Submariners who lost their lives during their heroic missions. Many parts of your island served as training grounds for British and Canadian Commando forces in preparation for an invasion of the continent.

Your three War Memorials on Bute bear eloquent testimony to those 105 brave Bute residents who made the ultimate sacrifice on active service during World War II. Many of these would have been part of Bute's Territorial Army, constituted as Bute's First Battery 202 Anti-tank Regiment that went to France in October 1939. This group suffered heavy losses at St Valery en Caux in June 1940, while those who did survive were marched long distances to prisoner-of-war camps in Eastern Europe.

On the occasion of your special commemoration marking the 60th Anniversary of VE-Day I wish not only to acknowledge the unique role played by the Isle of Bute during World War II and to pay tribute to the fallen, but also to extend my personal good wishes to all the people of Bute, and express the hope that the wartime sacrifices of your community will never be forgotten among succeeding generations.

Charles P.