

**THE IMPRESSIVE GREAT WAR TRIO AWARDED TO CAPTAIN C. H. A. CARTWRIGHT, ROYAL NAVY WHO WAS MENTIONED IN DESPATCHES AND PROMOTED FOR HIS GALLANTRY IN ACTION WHILST IN COMMAND OF THE TIGRIS GUNBOAT *MOTH* AT THE BATTLE OF NAHR-AL-KALEK, 26TH FEBRUARY 1917. DURING THIS GUNBOAT ACTION, FOUGHT THE DAY AFTER THE RECAPTURE OF KUT, IN WHICH *MOTH* WAS 'MAGNIFICENTLY HANDLED' BY CARTWRIGHT, 50% OF *MOTH*'S CREW BECAME CASUALTIES, INCLUDING CARTWRIGHT HIMSELF. SERVING WITH THE NAVAL COMMAND STAFF, AT ROTTERDAM AT THE OUTBREAK OF THE SECOND WAR, HE WAS KILLED IN ACTION ON 10 MAY 1940 WHEN AMBUSHED BY GERMAN PARATROOPERS WHILST ATTEMPTING TO RECOVER THE STRIKER OF THE S.S. *DOTTEREL*'S 12 – POUNDER. HE WOULD BE ONE OF THE FIRST IF NOT THE FIRST BRITISH OFFICER KILLED DURING THE INVASION OF THE WEST IN MAY 1940**



1914-15 STAR 'LT. COMM. C. H. A. CARTWRIGHT. R.N.'; BRITISH WAR AND VICTORY MEDALS, WITH M.I.D. OAK LEAVES 'COMMER C. H. A. CARTWRIGHT. R.N.' MOUNTED AS WORN CONTAINED IN J. R. GAUNT & SON LTD, LEATHER CASE.

M.I.D. *London Gazette* 15 August 1917. For having: 'been brought to notice by Lieut.-General Sir Stanley Maude, K.C.B., Commander-in-Chief, Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, as deserving of special mention'

M.I.D. *London Gazette* 21 September 1917. Operations of H.M. Gunboats in Mesopotamia from December 1916, to March, 1917: *"..There were casualties in all three ships, "Moth," which was magnificently handled by Lieutenant Commander Charles H. A. Cartwright, who was himself wounded, had three officers wounded - all severely - out of four, and two men killed and eighteen wounded, which is about 50 per cent, of her complement."*

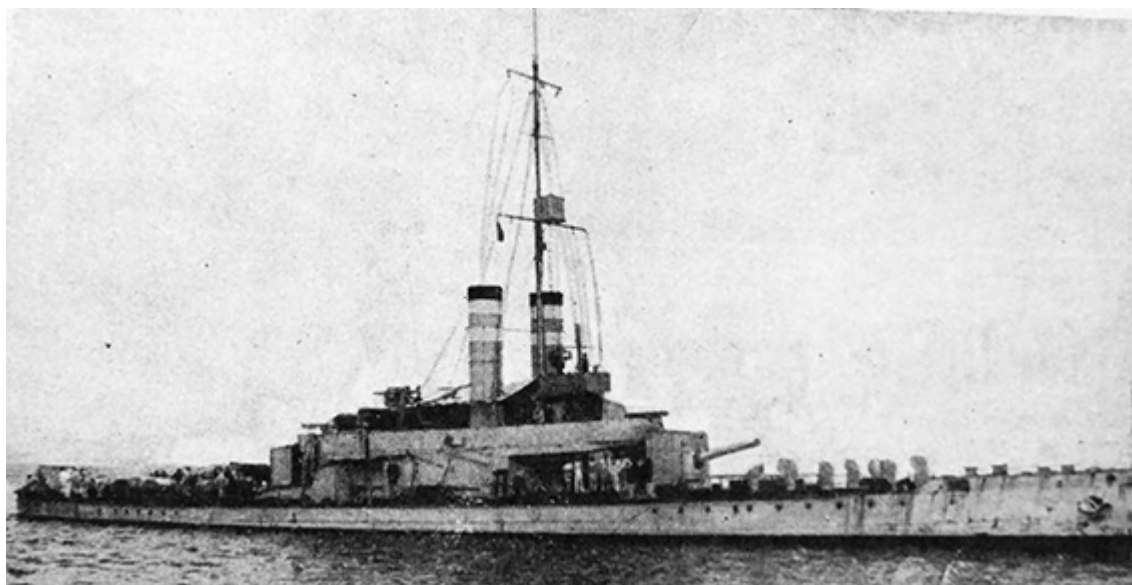
'I have the honour to submit the following for special mention, promotion, honours or awards':

“..Lieutenant-Commander Charles H. A. Cartwright, R.N. For excellent handling of his ship and gallant conduct on all occasions under fire, and particularly on 26th February 1917. I submit that this officer is fully worthy of special promotion.”

Naval Gallantry Awards *London Gazette* 28 September 1917: “The promotion of Commander Charles Henry Aubrey Cartwright, R.N., has been antedated to the 26th February, 1917, in recognition of his services as described in the Despatch published in *London Gazette* of the 21st September, 1917.”

His recommendation reads: “Handled “Moth” magnificently on the 26th February, 1917, when rounding a bend of the Tigris under heavy fire at short range, and for his gallant conduct on all occasions.”

Charles Henry Aubrey Cartwright, the Son of Aubrey Cartwright, Esq., JP, was born in London on 18 September 1882. Joining the Royal Navy aboard *Britannia* as a Cadet on 15 January 1897, he was advanced to Midshipman aboard H.M.S. *Caesar* on 15 June 1898. Promoted Lieutenant, 31 March 1904, he served on numerous ships over the following 10 years and at the outbreak of the Great War, was serving aboard the armoured cruiser, H.M.S. *Suffolk*, which he had joined in February 1913. He was commended for his services rendered during the wreck of the ammunition transport; S.S. *Pollokshields*, off Bermuda on 7 September 1915. He is listed as departing *Suffolk* on 30 September 1915 but seems he stayed on in Bermuda before returning to England via New York. Promoted Lieutenant-Commander and to *Valiant* on 14 December 1914 appointed, on 5 January 1916 he was given command of H.M.S. *Moth*, an Insect-class ‘Tigris’ Gunboat.



With a compliment of 55 Officers and men, *Moth* was armed with 2 BL 6-inch Mark VII guns, 2 12-pounders and Maxim machine guns. Shortly after, *Moth* was sent to the Persian Gulf to join the Tigris River flotilla, taking a most active part in the Mesopotamian campaign, in particular the recapture of Kut and the advance on Baghdad.

On 26 February 1917, following the recapture of Kut, three Royal Navy gunboats; *Tarantula*, *Mantis* and *Moth*, under the overall command of Captain Nunn, proceeded up the Tigris, the gunboats, overtaking retreating enemy as they did. As they approached the Nahr al Kalek bend, about 30km from Kut, Captain Nunn observed a large body of enemy on which he ordered all guns to fire. This was the enemy rearguard entrenched at the apex of the complete hairpin turn which the river makes here, the ships came under very heavy artillery, machine



gun and rifle fire, causing much damage to and inflicting many casualties aboard the gunboats as they passed. Captain Nunn and his little flotilla did not hesitate but steamed on, passing the rearguard. In Captain Nunn's despatch, he would report how as they:

*"passed the enemy rearguard, and large numbers of the retreating Turkish Army were on our starboard beam. I opened rapid fire from all guns that would bear (this included heavy and light guns, pom-poms, maxims, and rifles), and at this short range we did enormous execution, the enemy being too demoralized to reply, except in a very few cases. We were also able to shoot down some of their gun teams, which they deserted, and several guns thus fell into the hands of our forces when going over this ground. The vessels ahead were now in easy range, and several small craft stopped and surrendered, including the armed tug "Sumana," which we had left at Kut during the siege, and had been captured at the fall of that place. About 5.20 p.m. the large Turkish steamer "Basra" stopped and surrendered when brought to by a shell from H.M.S. "Tarantula," which had, I was afterwards informed, killed and wounded some German machine gunners. The "Firefly" kept up a heavy fire from her 4-inch gun, but our reply began to tell on her, and having been hit several times she ran into the bank and fell into our hands about 6.15 p.m. in the north-west part of the Zalzah reach, to westward of Umm al Tubul. The "Pioneer" having been badly hit by "Mantis," was in flames near her, and some barges laden with munitions in the vicinity. The Turks had endeavored to set fire to the "Firefly's" magazine, but we were able to put it out and took possession of her at once, and I put a prize crew on board and hoisted the White Ensign. Darkness now came on, and I considered it inadvisable to go on further, as we were far ahead of our troops."*



Of the Moth's part in the battle, the following, taken from *Armed with Stings*, by A. Cecil Hampshire adds the following:

*"The Moth, last to round the turn, was greeted by a storm of shellfire and suffered the most damage of all. Five 5.9 inch Turkish shells scored direct hits on the little gunboat. One went through the casing of the port boiler and the boiler itself; another smashed through the bunker on the port side into the stokehold; two struck glancing blows on the port side of the boiler casing, and the fifth slammed into the starboard side of the after storeroom just above the waterline. Lieutenant Commander Cartwright, her captain, who, Nunn afterwards*

reported, handled his ship magnificently, was himself a casualty. Two of his three officers were also badly wounded, while two ratings were killed and eighteen wounded. Like the rest of the flotilla the *Moth's* funnels and superstructure were sieved by bullets and gashed by shell splinters. Yet, despite the terrible hammering she had received which sent her limping down to Abadan for repairs, the gallant little *Moth* was back in action again within four and a half days. Like her sisters she had an astonishingly long life ahead of her"



Mentioned in despatches for his services on the Tigris 15 August 1917 and again on 21 September 1917; when the above action was reported in detail. He was 'Specially Promoted' to Commander, *London Gazette* 28 September 1917. This promotion backdated to 26 February 1917; the date of *Moth's* gallant action.

Reports and recommendations can be found here:

<http://www.patriotfiles.com/archive/navalhistory/WW1NavyBritishLondonGazette1707.htm>

See Noonans, Lot 1157, 26 March 2013, for another write up of this action

<https://www.noonans.co.uk/auctions/archive/lot-archive/results/229799/?keywords=gunboat+tigris+moth&x=0&y=0>

Period films of *Moth* in action is held in the Imperial War Museum collection:

<https://film.iwmcollections.org.uk/record/2172>

<https://film.iwmcollections.org.uk/record/3226>

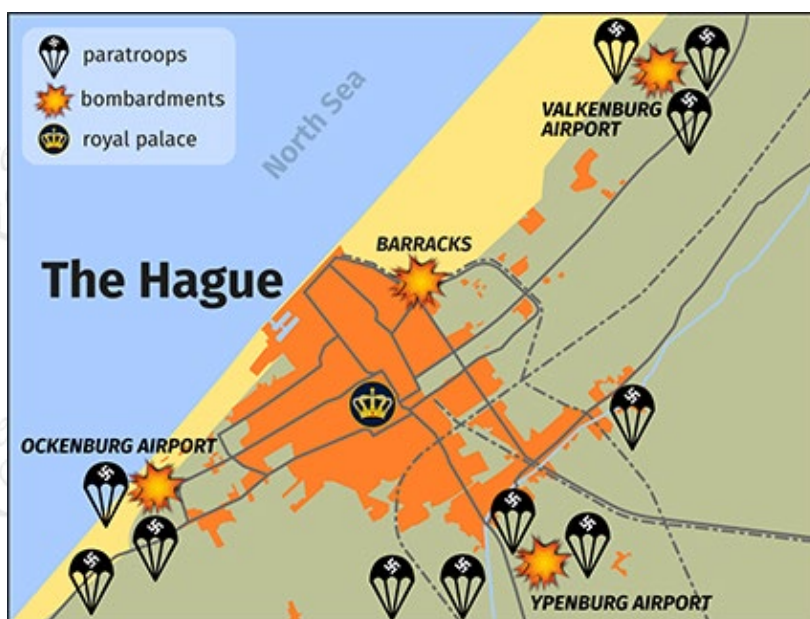
Continuing in Command of *Moth* until 14 March 1918, was appointed to H.M.S. *Collingwood* on 1 June 1918, before joining H.M.S. *Ramillies* on 21 January 1919. Various postings followed until he was placed on the Retired List at his own request, on 3 July 1925.



## THE SECOND WAR

Promoted Captain (retired), 18 September 1927, in 1939, with War looming, Cartwright offered his services and from 22 August 1939, Cartwright served as Consular Shipping Advisor to the Naval Command Staff in Los Angeles, United States. Three months later, from 27 November 1939, he served as Consular Shipping Advisor with the Naval Command Staff for a Special Military Mission at the British Consulate in Rotterdam.

On 10 May 1940 the invasion of Holland began, with German paratroopers landing in and around Rotterdam and The Hague. During the chaos that ensued, Cartwright flagged down a car driven by Dutch soldiers in it and asked for a lift to The Hague, which was one of the main areas of the fighting. During the journey he was caught up in the fighting around Ockenburg airfield, his car being ambushed by German paratroopers. Captain Cartwright and a colleague were mortally wounded and of the Dutch soldiers, one seriously, one slightly and the Officer uninjured. The latter were taken prisoner and the wounded to hospital where Cartwright died shortly after of multiple gunshot wounds.



The following taken from a Dutch website:

*"...In mid-April 1940 the British had sent 2 old ships of the Harwich Line, owned by the London and North Eastern Railway Company, the Saint-Denis (2435 Brt) and the Malines (2980 Brt) to Rotterdam as a precaution. They were constantly under steam in the IJsselhaven, one of the smaller ports between Rotterdam and Schiedam. The intention was that these ships would take on board the British consulate personnel and the British citizens present in Rotterdam, when Germany would declare war on the Netherlands with a subsequent invasion. Cartwright and his also British colleague did not participate in the British evacuation on 10 May but came across a car in Rotterdam with Dutch soldiers in it and asked for a lift to The Hague. From Hoek van Holland, detours were then made to The Hague.*


*At the command post of the Aviation Regiment, First Reserve Lieutenant Polman, one of the occupants of the car, asked whether The Hague could still be reached via the road to Loosduinen. This was answered positively by Dutch military personnel, but without any guarantee on the part of the officers involved. Cartwright and his colleague were informed, and it was pointed out that German troops might have been left behind or left behind in the immediate vicinity. However, Cartwright and his colleague were in a hurry to reach The*

Hague and at their insistence they drove towards The Hague. About a kilometre past the Bloemendaal clinic, this car was ambushed by German paratroopers, who attacked this car. Cartwright and his colleague were the first victims of this ambush. Cartwright, like his colleague, was seriously injured, then fell on top of First Reserve Lieutenant Polman and was pushed to the bottom of the car. The driver of the car was also seriously injured, while Polman and the slightly injured soldier Van der Sloot were taken as prisoners of war by the German paratroopers. For the transport of 2 seriously wounded (the English soldiers) and a wounded Dutch soldier, the GG & GD was asked for help from Loosduinen for a case of several wounded 'on the road to Ockenburg'. The GG & GD was sent an ambulance to the scene of the incident, after which Cartwright and his colleague Douglas Walter Child. He was taken to the Red Cross Hospital on Sportlaan, but Cartwright died of multiple gunshot wounds and a shock the same day at 4:00 PM in the Red Cross Hospital. On 15 May at 11:00 am he was buried in a 5th class rental grave at the General Cemetery on the Kerkhoflaan in The Hague.

On October 21, 1942, Cartwright's remains were exhumed and reburied in a single grave on a part, for fallen Allied soldiers, of the Westduin Municipal Cemetery in The Hague. Today the grave is located in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) plot."

**KILLED IN  
ROTTERDAM**

**Captain Charles Henry Aubrey Cartwright, R.N.,** who has been killed in Rotterdam, lived at the Oaklands, Gaddesby. Captain Cartwright, who was shipping adviser to the British Consulate in Rotterdam, was arranging the evacuation of British subjects at the time. He was riding in a car near where Dutch troops and German parachute troops were fighting when he was hit by a bullet.



Captain Cartwright came to Leicestershire about eleven years ago, making his home at Sludge Hall, on the Billesdon side.

**Captain Cartwright.**



The S.S. *Dotterel*, a cargo coaster, had been in the process of loading at Rotterdam when German paratroopers began landing on 10 May. The ship's Captain (Green) proceeded to destroy the ship's secret papers and prepared its 12-pounder gun for destruction, also making plans to scuttle the ship. However, they soon after received orders from the Legation at The Hague, to proceed to IJmuiden to evacuate British consular staff, civilians and press correspondents. It also took aboard a large portion of the industrial diamond stock belonging to J. K. Smit & Zonen, one of the largest diamond merchants in Amsterdam. It seems Captain Cartwright, who was at the time of the landings in Rotterdam, had either received orders to, or on his own initiative, left for The Hague to obtain the impounded striker for *Dotterel*'s 12-pounder gun, which would have been the ship's only means of defence. Captain Green attempted to get in touch with the British Naval authorities for instruction and was informed:

*"..that Captain C. H. A. Cartwright , R.N. , while attempting to recover the striker of the Dotterel's 12 - pounder , which under neutrality rules had been impounded while the ship was in port , had been killed by German paratroops.."*

On 11 May, *Dotterel* proceeded to the port of IJmuiden and started the evacuation, often being subjected to aerial attacks. With the last evacuees boarded in the early hours of 18 May, the *Dotterel* sailed for Harwich, escorted into the port by a destroyer. The passengers were disembarked and Captain Green delivered several packages of diamonds to the naval authorities.

Details on the battle for The Hague can be found here:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_for\\_The\\_Hague](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_for_The_Hague)



#### **AWARDS FOR THE ACTION AT NAHR-AL-KALEK, 26TH FEBRUARY 1917**

Four DSO's and nine DSC's were awarded to Officers specifically mentioned in despatches for this action. Each of the Gunboats commanders and other officers particularly mentioned being awarded one of other, bar Lieutenant-Commander Cartwright but including both one of his Lieutenants and his Surgeon. Cartwright, who's recommendation seems to be better than any of the others and certainly better than the other commanders was the only Officer to be awarded a "Special Promotion for Service in Action", this being specifically recommended in the despatch. This may seem at odds with the thought that a gallantry award is the greater award and in today's terms; as far as value of medal groups, an award will almost certainly increase the value of a medal group. However it must be noted that at the time of his award,

Cartwright's Special Promotion was of greater significance. He would not have been up for promotion for some years and his promotion would have brought a more prestigious rank, an increase of pay and critically, the rank to command a higher rated ship if such a position became available. The award of a DSO or DSC added none of these.

### **CALLANTRY ON THE TIGRIS.**

#### **LT.-COMMANDER C. CARTWRIGHT'S HONOURABLE MENTION.**

The despatch of Vice-Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss and Captain Wilfrid Nunn on the work of the gunboats on the Tigris has been published, from which it will be seen that Lieut. Charles Cartwright, son of Mrs. Aubrey Cartwright, of Wardington, has been recommended for special promotion.

The despatch says:—

"In the act of turning round the bend of the river shots came from all directions, and casualties of Moth, which came last in the line, were particularly severe.

"There were casualties in all three ships, Moth, which was magnificently handled by Lieut.-Commander Charles H. A. Cartwright, who was himself wounded, had three officers wounded—all severely—out of four, and two men killed and 18 wounded, which is about 50 per cent. of her complement.

"She was hit eight times by shell—one from ahead hit the fore side of stokehold casing, burst, and pierced the port boiler, both front and back, but luckily missed the boiler tubes. The after compartment was holed below the water line, and the upper deck and funnels of all ships riddled with bullets.

"H.M.S. Moth, Lieut.-Commander H. A. Cartwright, R.N.—For excellent handling of his ship and gallant conduct on all occasions under fire, and particularly on Feb. 26, 1917. I submit that this officer is fully worthy of special promotion."



Condition GVF. Mounted as worn contained in J. R. Gaunt & Son Ltd, leather case. Sold with digital research