Obituaries

Margaret Brooke

Margaret Martha Brooke joined the Royal Canadian Navy in 1942, serving as a nursing sister with the rank of sub-lieutenant.

She was aboard the ferry SS Caribou in October that year when it was torpedoed by a German U-boat while crossing the Cabot Strait off the coast of Newfoundland. The ferry quickly sank.

Margaret and her nursing colleague, sub-lieutenant Agnes Wilkie, were thrown into the freezing water but kept afloat by holding on to the rope of an overturned lifeboat, eventually scrambling onto it.

Hypothermia caused Agnes to fall off, but Margaret pulled her back up and held her with one hand, gripping the rope with the other. By first light, Margaret could no longer hold Agnes, and a wave carried her colleague away.

Agnes, one of more than 130 people who died in the sinking, was the only Canadian nurse killed by enemy action during the second world war. Many years later Margaret said: ‘I try not to think of that day too often. It’s too hard.’ She was awarded the military MBE for her actions.

Margaret left the navy in 1962, having reached the rank of lieutenant-commander. After doing a PhD in geology and palaeontology, she pursued a career as an instructor and research associate at the University of Saskatchewan.

Last year, the Canadian navy named one of its Arctic offshore patrol ships after her. At the time, Canada’s minister of national defence Jason Kenney said: ‘It is a privilege for our country that Margaret Brooke will lend her name to one of our naval ships, as her courage and self-sacrifice have inspired, and will continue to inspire, generations of Canadian naval personnel.’

Margaret told her local paper she was overwhelmed by the attention. ‘The navy just doesn’t name ships after people,’ she said. ‘It’s surprising.’

Commander of the Royal Canadian Navy vice-admiral Mark Norman said Margaret was ‘a true Canadian naval hero’ and expressed condolences and gratitude for her service on behalf of the navy.

John Adams, honorary research associate, faculty of nursing and midwifery, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

Anna Bolam
1987-2015
Royal Navy nurse killed in car crash

Sub-lieutenant Anna Bolam died in a road accident in Dorset shortly before Christmas.

She trained as a nurse at Plymouth University, qualifying with a BSc in adult nursing. After working in the NHS at Derriford Hospital in Plymouth, she joined the Queen Alexandra’s Royal Naval Nursing Service and undertook her training at Britannia Royal Naval College in Dartmouth.

At the time of her death she was assigned to the Defence Medical Group South West, based back at Derriford Hospital, as the nursing officer on Stonehouse ward. By serving in the Royal Navy she was following a strong family tradition of military service. She was a keen road and off-road cyclist and had been planning to take up the biathlon with the aim of representing the Royal Navy.

Defence Medical Group commander Neale Piper described Anna as well known and respected throughout the unit and wider Royal Navy, adding: ‘Sub-lieutenant Bolam’s tragic death has shocked and saddened us all. She had the presence of a leader, showing early promise for a highly successful career in the Royal Navy. She will be a sad loss to the service.’

Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust’s director of nursing Greg Dix said: ‘Anna was extremely popular, enthusiastic in all she did and a team player. This is how we want to remember Anna, and staff on the wards where she worked are thinking of a fitting way to honour and remember a great nurse and good friend.’

Dozens of Anna’s friends left comments in tribute to her on the Facebook page of Plymouth newspaper The Herald. Diane Sheppard wrote: ‘I was so pleased for you when you joined the Royal Navy. Always remember you saying you were leaving to travel the world, in fact you ended up working on the ward next door.’

Ben Hart posted: ‘I met Anna Bolam while a patient in Derriford. She was an amazing nurse who went above and beyond her duty to make me feel comfortable and reassured.’

John Adams, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland