

Information sheet no 012

Roger Keyes

Roger Keyes was born 4 October 1872 at Tundiani, India. Keyes entered the Royal Navy in 1885, passing out in 1887. His first seagoing appointment was as Midshipman in HMS *Raleigh*, flagship of the Cape Station. He returned to England in 1890. In 1893, he was promoted to Lieutenant and in 1900 commanded the destroyer HMS *Fame* on the China Station during the Boxer Rebellion. During this period, he captured four Chinese destroyers at Tongku and was at the head of the landing party which secured the key for the river fort on route to Tientsin. This action led to his promotion to Commander.

In 1904, at the age of 32, Keyes became the youngest Captain in the Navy. From 1905-1908, he served as Naval Attaché in Rome and subsequently returned to sea service commanding HMS *Venus*. In 1910, he was appointed Inspecting Captain of Submarines and was later promoted to Commodore in 1912. At the beginning of the First World War, he was Senior Naval Officer at Harwich. He proposed the successful Heligoland Bight operation in August 1914, the result of which was four German ships were sunk and three damaged. In January 1915, he was appointed Chief of Staff to Admiral Carden for the Dardanelles operations and played a prominent role in the planning of naval operations and army landings. For his services during this ultimately unsuccessful campaign, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order.

In 1916, he commanded the battleship HMS *Centurion* in the Grand Fleet and was promoted Rear-Admiral in 1917. Later that year, he was appointed Director of Plans in the Admiralty. In 1918, with promotion to Vice-Admiral, he commanded the Dover Patrol. Within a short time, by changing tactics, the Dover Patrol began to be more successful. Keyes planned the raids at Zeebrugge and Ostend in April 1918 with the intention to sink blockships to prevent German U-boats leaving these ports, though these raids were not as successful as it had been hoped.

At the end of the war he was made a Baronet as well as Knight Commander of the Bath and Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order (KCVO). In 1921 Keyes served as Deputy Chief of Naval Staff until 1925 when he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet. In 1926, he was promoted Admiral and became Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth in 1929. He rose to Admiral of the Fleet and appointed Knight Grand Cross of the Bath in 1930. He was MP for North Portsmouth from 1934 until 1943. With the outbreak of WWII, he asked to be given active employment but was unsuccessful at first. He then used his friendship with Sir Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord and Winston Churchill to urge more offensive action in the Norwegian campaign. This resulted with Keyes being appointed Director of Combined Operations in July 1940 which he held until October 1941. In January 1943, he was created Baron Keyes of Zeebrugge and Dover. He undertook a goodwill mission to Australasia and the South-West Pacific in 1944 and died in 1945.