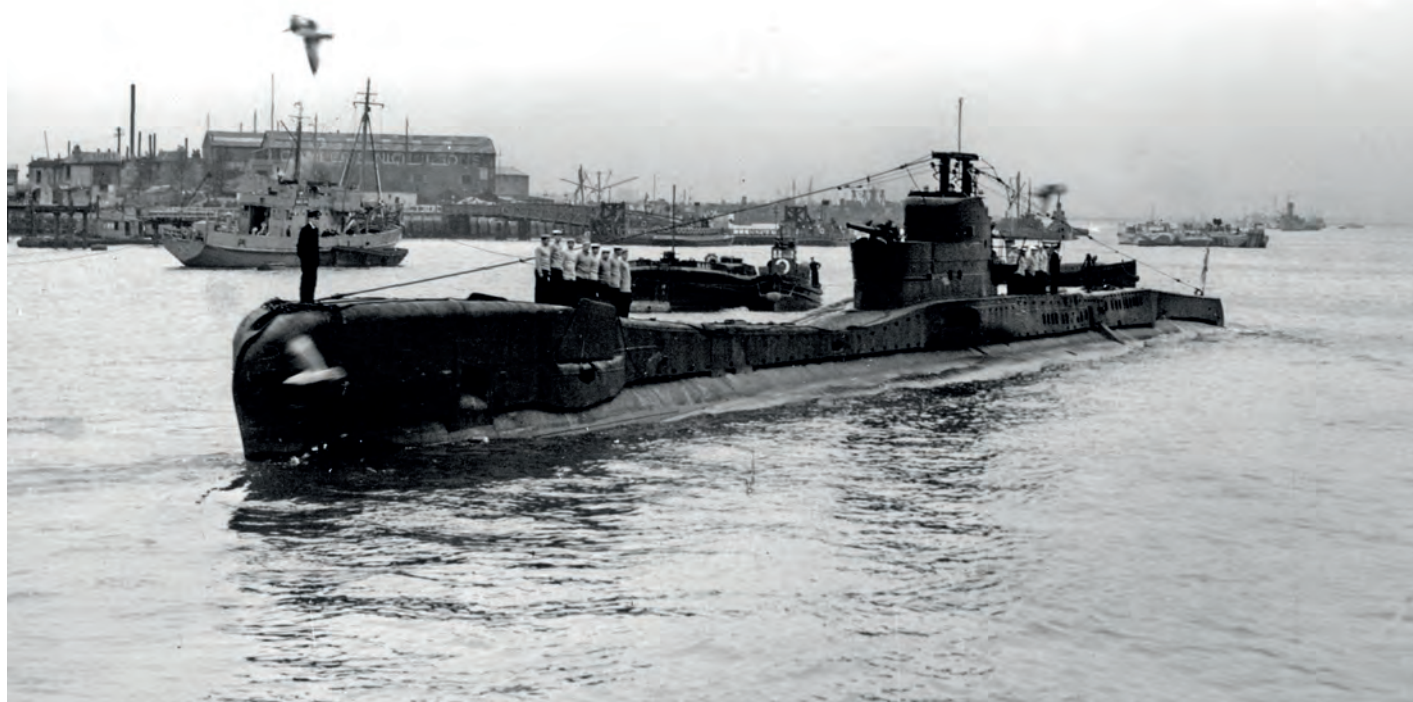


Rear-Admiral  
Sir Anthony Cecil Capel Miers  
VC KBE CB DSO & Bar



# HERO *of the* MONTH

By Lord Ashcroft



**R**ear-Admiral Sir Anthony Miers was a courageous, highly-decorated – yet controversial – VC awardee of World War Two. He was one of only three submarine commanders to be awarded Britain and the Commonwealth’s most prestigious gallantry award for actions in the Mediterranean. I purchased his medal group privately in 2009 and feel privileged to be their custodian.

Anthony Cecil Capel Miers was born in Birchwood, Inverness, Scotland, on November 11, 1906. He was the younger son of Captain Douglas Miers, of the Queen’s Own Cameron Highlanders, and his wife, Margaret (née Christie).

Miers was proud of both his Scottish and military roots. Through his grandmother, Mary Macdonald, he was a direct descendant of Donald Macdonald, the 16th Chief of Clanranald, while his paternal grandfather, Lt-Col Capel Miers, also served in the Queen’s Own Cameron Highlanders. His father was killed in action at Bourg on the Aisne, France, during the opening year of the Great War.

Young Anthony was educated at Stubbington House School, Fareham, Hampshire, before attending the Edinburgh Academy in Scotland and Wellington College, Berkshire. In 1924, he joined the Royal Navy as a special entry cadet and from 1925 to 1927 he served as a

midshipman in the battleship HMS *Valiant*. On January 1, 1928, he was promoted to sub-lieutenant and, on April 29 the following year, he joined the Submarine Service. Miers was a fine athlete, playing tennis, squash and rugby, for the last of these being selected to play for London Scottish, the Combined Services and Hampshire, and being chosen for trials for the navy and Scotland.

*“During the opening year of the war, he was on the staff of the Commander-in-Chief Home Fleet, serving in HM ships Nelson, Rodney and Warspite”*

### Ups and Downs

After various appointments and promotions, he suffered a career setback in 1933 when, as a first lieutenant, he voluntarily reported an attempt to strike a rating after a football match. Miers, who could be volatile and short-tempered, was

court-martialled and dismissed from his ship, the fishery protection vessel *Dart*.

However, he soon put that unhappy episode behind him and, in 1936, he was given his first submarine command, *L54*, and was promoted to lieutenant-commander on January 1, 1938. During the opening year of the war, he was on the staff of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, serving in HM ships *Nelson*, *Rodney* and *Warspite*.

However, on November 12, 1940, Miers returned to the Submarine Service as commanding officer of one of the new T-class boats, HM Submarine *Torbay*. For a time, he was based in Scotland but, from May 1941 to May 1942, *Torbay* operated from Alexandria, Egypt.

On July 5, 1941, while based in the Mediterranean, his vessel sank the Italian submarine *Jantina* and two tankers. Controversially, in the same month, Miers attacked four German ships carrying soldiers from a garrison and, during the operation, he ordered the machine-gunning of soldiers leaving the vessel in a rubber raft.

On December 31, 1941, Miers was appointed to the rank of commander. ►

ABOVE: MIERS WAS AWARDED HIS VC FOR HIS ACTIONS IN COMMAND OF HMS TORBAY. (ARKIVI/GETTY)

RIGHT: HMS NELSON SEEN FROM HER SISTER SHIP RODNEY AS THEY PROCEEDED TO SEA FROM THE FIRTH OF FORTH. (LT R G G COOTE/IWM VIA GETTY)

BOTTOM: THE ITALIAN SUBMARINE JANTINA, SUNK BY HMS TORBAY ON JULY 5, 1941. (KEYSTONE-FRANCE/GAMMA-RAPHO/GETTY)

OPPOSITE: THE MEDAL GROUP OF SIR ANTHONY CECIL CAPEL MIERS VC KBE CB DSO AND BAR. (LORD ASHCROFT)

For bravery in 1941 while commanding his submarine, he was honoured with the Distinguished Service Order and later a Bar to his DSO. These two awards followed the sinking or damaging of more than 70,000 tons of Axis shipping and rescuing more than 130 Allied soldiers from Crete.

During this period, however, he again became involved in a controversial incident when he ordered an embarked corporal of the Special Boat Squadron to canoe to the shore in Crete in a Force 8 gale. When the corporal refused on the grounds that it was far too dangerous, Miers threatened to shoot him with his revolver before eventually calming down.

### Constant Danger

Late February 1942 witnessed the start of a frantic period of action for Miers and his submarine crew. *Torbay* sailed from Alexandria on February 20 in order to patrol the west coast of Greece. On the morning of February 26, having surfaced to recharge her batteries, the submarine's crew sighted a tanker escorted by a destroyer. At Miers' command, *Torbay* dived, surfaced astern and fired one torpedo that was spotted by the enemy.

Once *Torbay* had been seen, she had to



dive again and 11 depth charges were dropped in the hope of disabling her, but they all missed. Miers had endured great difficulty shutting the upper hatch as the destroyer advanced towards his submarine and later discovered that this was because the hatch was jammed by his own pillow.

On both March 1 and 2, *Torbay* was depth-charged by destroyers, and six near misses saw the submarine lifted several feet upwards in the sea. When Miers later spoke of the stresses and strains of being depth-charged, he was full of praise for the calmness of his crew: "I am bound to confess that on many occasions I have felt extremely frightened when the depth charges have been going off around us. Yet even then the crew of *Torbay* has never failed to amaze me. In fact, they almost seem to enjoy themselves keeping a scoreboard of the number of enemy depth charges dropped."

### VC Action

On March 3, 1942, an enemy convoy escorted by three destroyers was seen by *Torbay's* crew entering Corfu harbour. "All out of range," Miers told Lt Hugh Kidd. "I am going to trail 'em. May take some time, but it should be worthwhile." Overnight, having already surfaced once, only to dive again to avoid a motor-ship, Miers followed the convoy through a narrow channel in heavily patrolled waters, having told Kidd: "They're going in. We'll follow later. Can't catch them otherwise, and we're not coming all this way for nothing – don't you agree, Kidd?"

There were many risks: becoming grounded, striking a mine or being spotted, shot at and sunk by enemy ships. Once *Torbay* was deep into the harbour, Miers upped periscope and could see he was surrounded on three sides by enemy territory and several Axis vessels. Knowing it was too dangerous to attack at night and escape afterwards, he decided to wait until the morning.

However, first *Torbay* was forced to surface under a full moon to recharge her batteries, before diving once again having not been spotted. By dawn on March 4, Miers discovered that the convoy had sailed again, leaving only two 5,000-ton transport ships and a destroyer at anchor. "Right. Stand by to attack," were his orders to his first lieutenant. The *Torbay* fired a torpedo at each of the three ships, missing the destroyer but hitting both transports, which subsequently sank.

Miers took his submarine to the seabed, not knowing if the torpedoes had hit their targets, and waited there for an hour. That was the easy part. They now had to make a hazardous withdrawal to the open sea in broad daylight, enduring constant depth-charging by the pursuing foes. In all,





some 40 depth charges were dropped, but none found its target.

The submarine made for the nearest exit in a straight line and, at one point, was right among small boats searching for them. *Torbay* also avoided the anti-submarine craft that were hovering along the long exit channel, as well as Axis aircraft continuously patrolling overhead. It was mid-morning when Miers finally reached open water, fully 17 hours after he had led his men into their foe's lair.

### Recognition

Miers' VC was announced on July 7, 1942. The citation read: "For valour in command of HM Submarine *Torbay* in a daring and successful raid on shipping in a defended enemy harbour, planned with full knowledge of the great hazards to be expected during 17 hours in waters closely patrolled by the enemy. On arriving in the harbour he had to charge his batteries lying on the surface in full moonlight, under the guns of the enemy. As he could not see his target he waited several hours and attacked in full daylight in a glassy calm. When he had fired his torpedoes he was heavily counter-attacked and had to withdraw through a long channel with anti-submarine craft all round and continuous air patrols overhead."

After the announcement of his VC and other gallantry awards for his officers and crew, it was suggested that the four officers would be invested at one ceremony and

*"Miers is said to have responded that if they could not all attend together, he would turn down his VC"*

the ratings at another. Miers is said to have responded that if they could not all attend together, he would turn down his VC. This meant that, on July 28, 1942, the ship's company remained united, as they had been under the sea, for the investiture at Buckingham Palace by George VI. In all, 28 officers and men from *Torbay* were decorated by the King.

Miers continued to serve with considerable distinction for the rest of the war. In 1943, he was appointed as Submarine Staff Liaison Officer on the staff of Admiral Chester W Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, and of Admiral Lockwood, Commander Submarines, Pacific. As part of this role, he took part in a 56-day war patrol with the US submarine *Cabrilla*. From 1944-1945, Miers was Commander Submarines, the 8th Submarine Flotilla, which was based at Trincomalee, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and, later, at Perth, Australia.

### Post-war

On January 20, 1945, he married Patricia Millar, who served in the Women's Royal

Australian Naval Service (WRANS) in Perth. The couple went on to have a son, who served in the Royal Navy, and a daughter. After the war, Miers was promoted to captain on December 31, 1946, and the same year was given command of the shore establishment HMS *Vernon II*.

From 1948 to 1950, he commanded HMS *Blackcap*, the Royal Naval Air Station at Stretton, Cheshire, and during this time he gained his pilot's licence. From 1950 to 1952, he commanded HMS *Forth* and the 1st Submarine Flotilla, and from 1952 to 1954 he was in charge of Royal Naval College, Greenwich, London. He then commanded the aircraft carrier HMS *Theseus*. He was promoted to rear-admiral on January 7, 1956, and on March 15 of the same year he was appointed Flag Officer, Middle East. He retired on August 4, 1959, having been made a Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB) in 1958 and a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (KBE) in 1959.

Miers led an interesting and active life after his retirement. Assorted business interests aside, he was President of the Royal Navy Lawn Tennis Association and the Royal Navy Squash Racquets Association and, in 1967, was appointed President of the Submarine Old Comrades Association.

During his final years, he and his wife lived in Roehampton, London. He died at his home on June 30, 1985, aged 78, when his last word was "Cheerio".

Sir Anthony Cecil Capel Miers VC KBE CB DSO and Bar is buried in Tomnahurich cemetery, Inverness. ●

### Victoria Cross Heroes Volume II



Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His sixth book on gallantry, *Victoria Cross Heroes II*, was first published in 2016 and is available in hardback and

paperback. For more information, visit:

[www.victoriacrossheroes2.com](http://www.victoriacrossheroes2.com)

Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC

collection is on public

display at the Imperial War

Museum London. For more

information, visit:

[www.iwm.org.uk/heroes](http://www.iwm.org.uk/heroes)

Details of his VC collection

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