



NEWS RELEASE

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PLAN TO RECOVER HMS HOOD'S BELL AS A MEMORIAL

An operation to recover the bell of the battle-cruiser *HMS Hood* sunk in 1941 has been agreed by the Government.

If recovered successfully, the bell will form a tangible and fitting memorial to the ship and the 1,415 men who were lost in her when she was sunk by the *Bismarck* in the North Atlantic. *Hood* is the largest Royal Navy vessel to have been sunk, causing the largest loss of life suffered by any single British warship.

The Ministry of Defence and the Royal Navy are grateful for the very generous offer by the US philanthropist Paul G. Allen, to recover the bell at no cost to MOD. Mr Allen's yacht *Octopus*, equipped with a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) will be used for the operation which will be supported by Blue Water Recoveries Ltd which specialises in the search and investigation of shipwrecks.

In a previous expedition which did not disturb the wreck, the bell was discovered and photographed by Blue Water Recoveries. It is lying on the seabed well away from the parts of the battle-cruiser's hull which will not be disturbed by the recovery operation.

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The recovery is fully supported by the HMS Hood Association whose members include veterans who served in the ship before her final mission in 1941, and relatives of those lost with her.

President of the Association is Rear Admiral Philip Wilcocks whose uncle was among those who died on board *Hood*. Admiral Wilcocks said today: "There is no headstone among the flowers for those who perish at sea. For those who lost their lives in *HMS Hood*, the recovery of her bell and its subsequent place of honour in the Museum will mean that, well after the remains of *Hood* have gone, future generations will be able to gaze upon her bell and remember with gratitude and thanks the heroism, courage and personal sacrifice of Hood's ship's company who died in the service of their country."

If the recovery mission is successful the bell it will be put on display by the National Museums of the Royal Navy (NMRN) and will form a major feature of a new exhibition hall dedicated to the 20th and 21st century Navy. It is due to open at the Royal Navy Museum in Portsmouth Historic Dockyard in 2014. It is a fitting location as *HMS Hood* was based in Portsmouth.

Commenting on the proposal, Professor Dominic Tweddle, Director General NMRN, said: "It will be an honour and privilege to display the bell from *HMS Hood*. Our new galleries, opening in April 2014 will recall and commemorate the heroism, duty and sacrifice of the people of the Royal Navy in the 20th and 21st centuries. *Hood's* bell encapsulates the whole of that story as no other single object could."

The wreck of *HMS Hood* is designated under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986. The Government has licensed the recovery of the bell: as well as providing a memorial, the recovery will prevent it being taken by any illegal operation for personal gain.

Director of Blue Water Recoveries, David Mearns, located the wreck of *HMS Hood* in 2001 and is coordinating the current expedition on behalf of Vulcan. He said today: "This is a wonderful opportunity for us to return to the wreck site of *Hood* with camera and lighting technologies far superior to that available to us 11 years ago.

“Our aim is to conduct a comprehensive, non-intrusive video investigation of the wreckage, which we believe will allow experts to definitively determine what happened to Hood in her final moments before she sank and answer why the loss of life was so great. Hopefully the weather and subsea conditions will be right for us to recover Hood's bell so that it is protected beyond doubt and returned to the Royal Navy.”

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