

British Cemetery ^[1]

British Cemetery

by Paul Branch, 2006



The British Cemetery of Ocracoke. Photograph courtesy of North Carolina Division of Tourism, Film, and Sports Development.

The British Cemetery on Ocracoke Island is a small cemetery containing the graves of four British navy personnel killed while helping defend the North Carolina coast against German U-boats ^[2] (submarines) in World War II ^[3]. In March 1942, the 900-ton HMS Bedfordshire ^[4] was one of 24 armed trawlers sent by Great Britain to help the U.S. Navy defend the Atlantic coast of the United States against U-boat attacks. On 11 May 1942, the *Bedfordshire* was torpedoed and sunk by U-558 southeast of Cape Lookout ^[5] with a loss of all 37 crew members. The bodies of two crew members, Lt. Thomas Cunningham and Ordinary Telegraphist Stanley Craig, washed ashore on Ocracoke, and the Coast Guard ^[6] buried them in a small cemetery plot donated by a local family. A week later, two additional *Bedfordshire* crew members, unidentified, washed up and were also buried in the plot.

Later fitted with permanent markers and enclosed by a white picket fence, the four graves have since become well known as the British Cemetery of Ocracoke. Currently, a bronze plaque engraved with words from Rupert Brooke ^[7] rests on the fence, serving as a fitting tribute to the four men who died in war far from home:

If I should die, think only this of me/
That there's some corner of a foreign field/
That is forever England.

Reference:

L. VanLoan Naisawald, *In Some Foreign Field: Four British Graves and Submarine Warfare on the North Carolina Outer Banks* (rev. ed., 1997).

Additional Resources:

McCarten, Neala Schwartzberg. "British Cemetery at Ocracoke, North Carolina." OffbeatTravel.com. 2005. <http://www.offbeattravel.com/british-cemetery-outerbanks.html> ^[8] (accessed July 6, 2012).

"The sinking of HMS Bedfordshire." BBC.com. February 15, 2005.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/threecounties/content/articles/2005/02/15/hms_bedfordshire_feature.shtml [9] (accessed July 6, 2012).

"Battle of the Atlantic Exhibition: Exploring WWII in the Graveyard of the Atlantic: HMT Bedfordshire." National Marine Sanctuaries, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
<http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/missions/battleoftheatlantic2/bedfordshire.html> [10] (accessed July 6, 2012).

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The British Cemetery of Ocracoke. Photograph courtesy of North Carolina Division of Tourism, Film, and Sports Development.

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Branch, Paul, Jr. [14]

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Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press. [15]

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