



Joe and Violet's wedding, 1935.

Joe and Violet, winter c1938.



wrote: 'As the *Dunedin* sank, the survivors gave her three hearty cheers; and as she slid from view some sang *God Save the King*. Others just watched in horror and disbelief.' Afterwards, the U-boat surfaced and circled the survivors, who defiantly sang, *There will always be an England*.

It is estimated that half the ship's crew survived the sinking; however, a desolate scene played out that day as the men struggled to haul themselves onto rafts and any floating debris that would hold them. They suffered terribly. Most of the rafts carried several badly wounded men, many of whom died during the first night; they were gently put over the side and a prayer said in their honour.

Joe made it off the ship and managed to get onto the same raft as Bill Gill, who recalled: 'Marine Joe Dyer made it to my raft. He told us that he had not been able to get to his action station, the cutter [small boat] on the port side. He had seen it crammed with men, sliding down the side of the ship and falling into the water. It was immediately swamped – he did not see it again.'

Survivors drifted for four days and three nights; of the 22 men who made it to Joe's raft, only three survived. As crew members perished, a result

of terrible injuries sustained in the attacks, others became hysterical and delusional and some drowned or were claimed by sharks. Mr Gill did not recall how or when Joe died. Only 67 of the crew survived this horrific ordeal.

### The telegram

This event took many lives and affected many others; 419 families lost a loved one. At Devonshire Avenue in Southsea, on a bitter cold morning in April 1942, Vi reluctantly took receipt of the dreaded telegram following a knock on the door. Her worse fears were confirmed, after months of waiting: the telegram announced the devastating news: 'Joseph J Dyer: Missing, presumed killed in *HMS Dunedin* due to enemy action.' Vi was inconsolable. Soon after, she placed a message in the *Portsmouth Evening News*, seeking news of Joe from survivors. Many other families placed poignant messages requesting information about their loved ones.

### The grave site

Joe and Vi's two sons are buried in the same grave at Milton cemetery in Portsmouth. On the headstone, Vi had the following words inscribed: 'Treasured memories of their dear

daddy. Missing *HMS Dunedin*.' A note from an old shipmate was left at the grave site, another one of Vi's treasured keepsakes. It demonstrates the type of person Joe was: 'Remembering Joe for his guidance, advice and his example of good

### Read up on it

- *Blood in the Sea: HMS Dunedin and the Enigma Code* by Stuart Gill, (Phoenix, 2004), ISBN: 9780304366910.
- *The Secret Life of Bletchley Park: The WWII Codebreaking Centre and the Men and Women Who Worked There* by Sinclair McKay (Aurum Press, 2011), ISBN: 9781845136338.