

FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH

Charles James (Jim) Partridge

Royal Navy service in the Second World War

A consolidated research account

Prepared 8 August 2026



Jim Partridge aged 19

Service number: LT/JX 180231 | Rank: Leading Seaman

Royal Naval Patrol Service - home waters and the Mediterranean

Purpose and evidential basis

This document brings together the information presently known about the wartime naval service of Charles James (Jim) Partridge. It combines published ship and convoy records with details preserved in Jim's papers and family recollection. Where the evidence does not permit certainty, the wording deliberately distinguishes established fact, family evidence and reasonable inference.

The broad outline is secure. Jim joined the Royal Navy by 4 January 1940, trained at Lowestoft and served in the Royal Naval Patrol Service. He survived the sinking of HMS *Mollusc*, later undertook boom-patrol duties at Scapa Flow, and left Britain aboard HMS *Unst* on 9 August 1943. He then served for more than two years in the Mediterranean, visiting North Africa, Sicily, Italy, the Levant and Greece, and recalled helping to clear Piraeus harbour of mines.

Key personal and service details

Field	Present evidence
Name	Charles James Partridge, known as Jim
Service number	LT/JX 180231 (sometimes transcribed as LJ/JX 180231)
Rank	Leading Seaman
Branch	Royal Naval Patrol Service, Lowestoft division
Entry	Joined by 4 January 1940; the exact enlistment date remains to be confirmed
Training	HMS Europa at Lowestoft, commonly known as Sparrow's Nest; 'the Crow's Nest' survives in family wording
Known ships/duties	HMS Mollusc; boom patrol at Scapa Flow; HMS Unst (T213)
Mediterranean places	Algiers, Sicily (including Taormina), Naples, Haifa, Beirut and Piraeus
Release	Official release recorded as 8 March 1946; accumulated leave reportedly expired 11 June 1946

Chronology at a glance

Date	Event
By 4 Jan 1940	Jim had joined the Navy and was associated with the Lowestoft division of the Royal Naval Patrol Service.
Training period	Training at HMS Europa, Lowestoft ('Sparrow's Nest').
17 Mar 1941	HMS Mollusc was bombed and sunk approximately two miles east-south-east of Blyth while on anti-submarine duty. No fatalities are reported in the loss summaries consulted.
21 May 1941	HMS Hood and HMS Prince of Wales sailed from Scapa Flow to intercept Bismarck. Jim recalled being on boom patrol when Hood passed out on her final voyage.

Date	Event
9 Aug 1943	Jim left the United Kingdom aboard HMS Unst as the combined convoy OS 53/KMS 23 assembled off Oversay.
15 Aug 1943	The convoy was attacked west of Portugal by German Focke-Wulf Fw 200 Condor aircraft. Warfield was fatally damaged and other merchant ships were hit.
17-18 Aug 1943	The convoy divided; Unst continued with the Mediterranean section and reached Gibraltar on 18 August.
21-30 Aug 1943	The convoy called at Algiers on 21 August. On 30 August Unst escorted HMS Tally-Ho into Algiers at the end of the submarine's patrol.
1943-45	Mediterranean service included Algiers, Taormina and other Sicilian connections, Naples, Haifa, Beirut and Piraeus. The exact order and dates remain incomplete.
26 Sep-5 Oct	Recorded leave at Haifa; the year is not yet certain and may have been 1943, 1944 or 1945.
From Oct 1943	Jim's presence at Naples must post-date the Allied entry into the city on 1 October 1943.
From Oct 1944	Jim recalled helping to clear Piraeus harbour of mines after the German withdrawal from Athens and Piraeus.
Nov 1945-11 Jun 1946	Papers refer to 35 days' foreign-service leave and 56 days' resettlement leave, with leave expiring on 11 June 1946.
8 Mar 1946	Official release from the Navy.

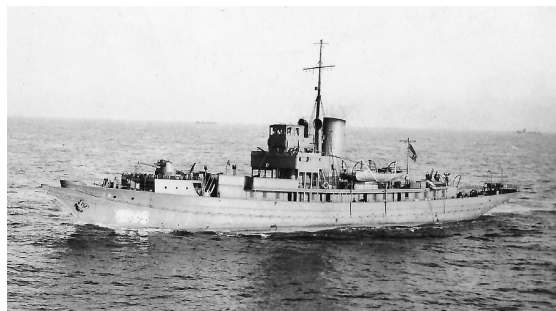
1. Entry into the Royal Naval Patrol Service

Jim had joined the Navy by 4 January 1940, and may have entered during the mobilisation of late 1939. His number is best read as **LT/JX 180231**. The LT prefix denotes the Lowestoft division and fits his service in the Royal Naval Patrol Service. The earlier transcription LJ/JX is almost certainly a simple reversal of the letters.

His Lowestoft training establishment was HMS *Europa*, generally known as Sparrow's Nest. The establishment was the principal depot through which many patrol-service ratings passed.

Training for service in small naval vessels would normally have included seamanship, lookout and signalling duties, gunnery, anti-submarine procedures, minesweeping and boat work. Jim eventually reached the rank of Leading Seaman. On a small patrol vessel or trawler this was a position of practical authority: he could be expected to supervise part of the deck crew, organise watches and take charge of men during anchoring, boat work, action stations or minesweeping operations. The precise duties he performed require his service record or ship records for confirmation.

2. HMS Mollusc and the sinking off Blyth



HMS Mollusc © M. J. Partridge

Jim's first known operational vessel was HMS *Mollusc*, a former private steam yacht converted for anti-submarine patrol work. She had been built of steel in 1906, displaced about 597 tons, was steam-driven with auxiliary sail, and had originally been a yacht for the Guinness family. Sources identify her earlier name as *Medusa* (sometimes styled *Medusa II*). She was taken into Admiralty service and recommissioned for wartime patrol duties.

On 17 March 1941, while approximately two miles east-south-east of Blyth Harbour, *Mollusc* was bombed by German aircraft and sank while on anti-submarine duty. Jim's recollection identifies two Heinkel aircraft and places the ship about three miles off Blyth. The wreck record confirms the date, approximate position, bombing and anti-submarine duty; the number and type of attacking aircraft have not yet been independently verified and should therefore remain attributed to Jim's account.

Published loss summaries consulted for this research report no fatalities. Jim therefore survived the loss of his ship without the sinking becoming a fatal loss for the company, although the experience itself was plainly serious. It would be valuable to preserve any further family recollection of where he was stationed, whether he entered the water, how the crew abandoned ship and how they were taken ashore.

3. Boom patrol at Scapa Flow

After the loss of *Mollusc*, Jim served on boom patrol at Scapa Flow. Boom-defence vessels guarded the controlled entrances through the anchorage's anti-submarine barriers. Their work included checking approaching vessels, opening and closing boom gates, maintaining nets and obstructions, and watching for mines, submarines and suspicious craft.



Jim's own photo of HMS Hood © M. J. Partridge

Jim recalled being on boom patrol when HMS *Hood* left Scapa Flow for her encounter with the German battleship *Bismarck*. Shortly before midnight on 21 May 1941, *Hood*, HMS *Prince of Wales* and their destroyer escort sailed through Hoxa Sound. Some chronologies describe the departure as 22 May because it occurred around midnight. *Hood* was destroyed in the Denmark Strait on 24 May, with only three survivors. Jim's duties may have given him a direct view of the force passing through the boom, although that particular vantage point cannot be proved from the family account alone.

A domestic memory: Providence Street and Chico

A vivid family story belongs to Jim's northern service. Coming home on leave, he discovered that his mother had moved from number 13 to number 22 Providence Street. He brought with him from Aberdeen Chico, described as the ship's dog. His mother decided to keep Chico herself. The anecdote gives a human glimpse of naval life and family disruption during the war. If the vessel from which Chico came can be identified, it may also help to establish Jim's posting between *Mollusc* and *Unst*.

4. HMS Unst: the ship



HMS Unst © M. J. Partridge

HMS *Unst* (T213) was an Isles-class minesweeping trawler, purpose-built for the Royal Navy rather than converted from civilian fishing service. Ferguson Brothers of Port Glasgow laid her down on 16 October 1941, launched her on 28 May 1942 and commissioned her on 6 August 1942. Her normal complement was about forty: four officers and thirty-six ratings.

The class had a speed of about 12 knots. Typical armament comprised one 12-pounder gun and three 20 mm Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns, together with depth charges and minesweeping equipment. These were sturdy working warships, but they were small, slow and crowded. Their tasks included sweeping moored mines, patrolling harbour approaches, escorting coastal shipping and submarines, and providing limited anti-submarine and anti-aircraft defence.

Known commanding officers

Approximate period	Commanding officer
May 1942-mid-1943	Temporary Lieutenant Jack Reardon Smith, RNR
Mid-1943-1945	Temporary Lieutenant Fred Maurice Cornall, RNVR
Late 1945	Temporary Lieutenant Robert Alexander Smith, RNVR

Early operations in home waters

The surviving online operational record places *Unst* on coastal submarine-escort work before Jim joined her:

- 17 December 1942: escorted HMS Thrasher and HMS P221 from Falmouth towards Portsmouth.
- 3-4 January 1943: escorted HMS Oberon, HMS P229 (later Sportsman) and HMS P31 from Portsmouth towards Rothesay, handing them over to the armed yacht HMS Star of India on 4 January.
- 3-4 March 1943: escorted HMS Taku from Plymouth towards Portsmouth; bad weather forced both vessels into Dartmouth before they resumed passage the following morning.

These duties illustrate the kind of work for which the ship was already being used. Submarines travelling surfaced through coastal waters required protection against mines, German aircraft and U-boats. They do not, however, form part of Jim's personal service unless evidence emerges that he joined *Unst* earlier than the documented sailing of August 1943.

5. Departure for the Mediterranean

Jim left the United Kingdom aboard *Unst* on 9 August 1943. That date places him aboard during the passage of combined convoy OS 53/KMS 23. The convoy departed Liverpool on 8 August and assembled off Oversay on 9 August. It comprised approximately sixty-six merchant vessels; *Unst* and her sister trawler HMS *Staffa* were among the escorts assigned to the Mediterranean section.

On 15 August, west of Portugal, the convoy was shadowed and attacked by German Focke-Wulf Fw 200 Condor aircraft. Sixteen to eighteen aircraft took part in the main attack according to the detailed ship record. The merchant ship *Warfield* was fatally damaged, while *Baron Fairlie* and *Ocean Faith* were damaged. *Unst* was not reported hit, but her company would have gone to action stations, manning anti-aircraft weapons, supplying ammunition, keeping lookout, controlling damage and handling the ship as required. Jim's exact action station is not yet known.

The convoy divided on 17 August. *Unst* continued with KMS 23 and reached Gibraltar on 18 August. Merchant ships detached for Algiers on 21 August. On 30 August, *Unst* met HMS *Tally-Ho* at sea at about 0605 and escorted the submarine into Algiers at the end of her third war patrol. This provides independent confirmation of Jim's recollection of Algiers and establishes that his Mediterranean service began under active wartime conditions.

6. Service across the Mediterranean



Jim's recollections and papers place him in Algiers, Sicily - specifically Taormina - Naples, Haifa, Beirut and Piraeus. Together these locations trace service extending from North Africa and Italy to the Levant and Greece. The online operational record of *Unst* becomes fragmentary after August 1943, so the places are firm family evidence while their precise sequence remains under investigation.

Algiers

Algiers is independently documented in August 1943. Beyond being a convoy port, it was an important Allied naval base from which escorts, submarines and minesweepers operated. Jim may have returned there on later occasions; the record so far proves the August visit but does not establish the complete number or duration of visits.

Sicily and Taormina



Jim was definitely in Sicily and specifically at Taormina for a rest camp. British Eighth Army forces occupied Taormina on 9 August 1943, the same day on which Jim left Britain aboard *Unst*. His arrival therefore followed the fighting for the island.

Naples

Jim was also definitely in Naples. Allied troops entered the city on 1 October 1943 and found the harbour obstructed by wrecks, demolitions and mines. British minesweepers began clearance work immediately. *Unst* was designed for precisely this general class of work, but no record yet examined proves that she herself cleared Naples harbour. She may instead have swept approaches, escorted vessels through cleared channels, patrolled locally or used Naples as a naval and supply base. Because Naples became a major Allied base, more than one visit is possible.

Haifa and Beirut

Jim's papers record leave at Haifa from 26 September to 5 October, but the year remains uncertain. It could have been 1943, 1944 or 1945. Haifa and Beirut were important Allied naval and logistical centres, and *Unst* may have undertaken minesweeping, harbour patrol, coastal escort or general local duties in the eastern Mediterranean. A ten-day period ashore would have been a welcome interruption after prolonged service in a small and crowded vessel.

A 1943 date is geographically possible because the convoy reached the Mediterranean in August. It is not established. If Naples came before the Haifa leave, the leave cannot have been in 1943 unless Jim reached Naples after 1 October and the family sequence is mistaken. Ship's logs or the original leave entry should settle the matter.

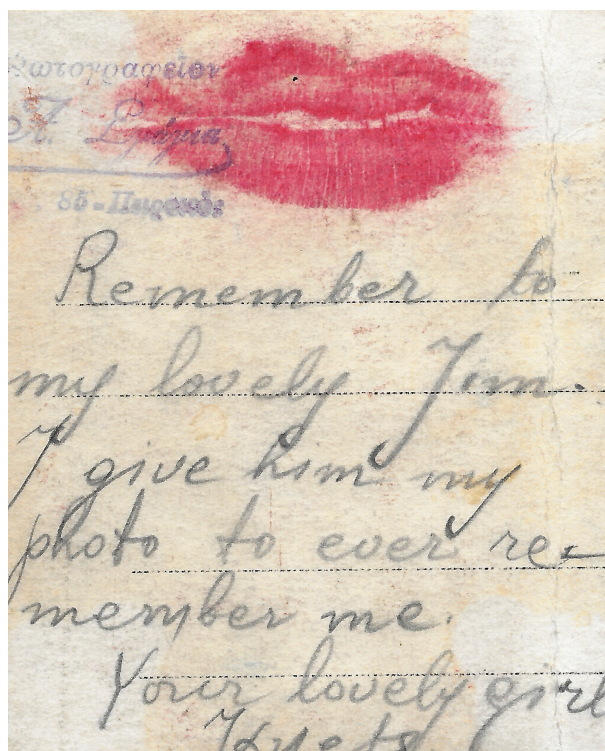
Piraeus and mine clearance



Jim at the Acropolis



Taken at the beach at Alykes Rest camp near Athens.
Sept 7 1945



Jim's recollection that he helped clear Piraeus harbour of mines is both technically and chronologically credible. German forces withdrew from Athens and Piraeus in October 1944, leaving demolitions and mined approaches. British and Royal Hellenic naval forces reached Piraeus on 15 October. Minesweepers first had to establish safe channels before larger vessels could enter with troops, supplies and food relief. The water carrier *Petronella* was mined off Piraeus on 15 October, demonstrating that the approaches remained dangerous.

As an Isles-class minesweeping trawler, *Unst* was built for this work. Jim's duties as a seaman may have included operating or recovering the sweep, keeping lookout for mines, marking cleared water, firing at mines brought to the surface, handling boats or helping manoeuvre the vessel. These are informed possibilities, not individually documented assignments.

After the war's end, while still on active service, he was at the Alykes Rest camp 45kn from Athens. See photo dated 7 September 1945 at the nearby Anavyssos Beach.

7. Life and responsibility aboard a small warship

With only about forty people aboard, Jim belonged to a close ship's company. Accommodation was cramped and the trawler's slow speed and pronounced motion could make long passages exhausting. During minesweeping the crew worked close to the danger they were trying to remove. During convoy duty, a ship of this size had limited protection against bombs, gunfire, submarines and heavy weather.

As a Leading Seaman, Jim was no longer merely one rating among many. His rank suggests experience and trust. He would likely have supervised junior ratings and taken responsibility for part of the upper-deck routine. His wartime experience combined ordinary seamanship with moments of acute danger: the sinking of *Mollusc*, the departure of *Hood*, the Condor attack on OS 53/KMS 23, and the hazardous clearance of mined harbours.

8. Leave, release and the end of service

The surviving information refers in November 1945 to thirty-five days' foreign-service leave and fifty-six days' resettlement leave, with leave expiring on 11 June 1946. Jim's official release from the Navy is recorded as 8 March 1946.

The two forms of leave total ninety-one days. Ninety-one days from 8 March reaches early June rather than precisely 11 June. The discrepancy may arise from travelling time, an intervening administrative posting, inclusive naval calculation or imperfect transcription. It is also possible that 'official release' and the end of leave or residual naval liability refer to different administrative stages. The original release documents should be transcribed line by line before a final conclusion is drawn.

9. HMS Unst after the war

An officer's appointment record indicates that *Unst* remained continuously commissioned until October 1945. After the war she was sold to the Italian Navy in January 1946 and became RD 303, later DR 303. She subsequently served as a hydrographic vessel and was finally expended as a target in 1965.

10. Overall assessment

Jim's wartime service falls into four clear phases:

- Entry and training in the Royal Naval Patrol Service at Lowestoft.
- Anti-submarine patrol work and survival of the sinking of HMS *Mollusc*.
- Boom-defence service at Scapa Flow, including his recollection of HMS *Hood*'s final departure.

- More than two years aboard HMS Unst in the Mediterranean: an attacked convoy, work or visits in Algiers, Sicily, Naples, Haifa and Beirut, and mine clearance at Piraeus.

This was substantial operational service, conducted mainly in small ships whose work received less public attention than that of battleships and destroyers but was essential to keeping harbours, coastal routes and convoy passages open. The family evidence does more than name the places Jim visited: it reveals a service life stretching from the North Sea and the anchorage at Scapa Flow to almost the full breadth of the Mediterranean.

Questions still to be resolved

- The exact date on which Jim entered the Navy and the full sequence of his shore establishments and ships.
- His precise dates aboard HMS Mollusc and the identity of his posting between the sinking and HMS Unst.
- Whether the two attacking aircraft at Blyth can be independently identified as Heinkels.
- Which ship kept Chico as its dog, and when Jim brought Chico home from Aberdeen.
- The name of Jim's boom-patrol vessel or unit at Scapa Flow.
- Whether he held the rank of Leading Seaman before leaving Britain in August 1943 or was promoted later.
- The year of his Haifa leave from 26 September to 5 October.
- The exact dates and order of visits to Taormina, Naples, Beirut and Piraeus.
- The precise role of HMS Unst and of Jim personally in clearing Piraeus.
- The administrative meaning of the 8 March 1946 release date and the leave expiry of 11 June 1946.

Recommended next records

The most useful single document would be Jim's full Royal Navy service record. It should give his service number, ratings, training and shore establishments, ships or accounting bases, dates of joining and leaving, promotions, qualifications, conduct and discharge. Records of this period remain obtainable through the Ministry of Defence application process for a deceased serviceperson.

The next priority would be the Admiralty movement books, ship's logs and relevant flotilla records for HMS *Unst* from August 1943 to late 1945. These should be used to build a day-by-day itinerary and test the dates for Sicily, Naples, Haifa, Beirut and Piraeus. Surviving papers should also be photographed or scanned at high resolution, especially the original leave and release entries.

Sources and archival leads

1. [Royal Naval Patrol Service Museum, Lowestoft](#) - Background on HMS Europa and the Royal Naval Patrol Service.
2. [Historic England Research Records: HMS Mollusc wreck](#) - Wreck location, construction, former yacht service, bombing date and anti-submarine duty.
3. [Tyne and Wear HER: St Mary's Island, Mollusc \(Medusa\)](#) - Local wreck record confirming the 17 March 1941 loss.
4. [Naval-History.net: British naval losses](#) - Chronological loss summaries and wartime context.
5. [HMS Hood Association: wartime chronology](#) - Hood's departure from Scapa Flow and final operation.
6. [uboat.net: HMS Unst \(T213\)](#) - Ship specifications, commanding officers and known operational movements, including OS 53/KMS 23 and HMS Tally-Ho.
7. [Convoyweb: Convoy OS 53/KMS 23](#) - Convoy composition, departure, division and arrival data.
8. [Imperial War Museums: Mine Clearance and Relief Work in Naples](#) - Admiralty film record of harbour-clearance work after the Allied entry into Naples.
9. [US Naval History and Heritage Command: Naples](#) - Context for the Allied use and condition of Naples during the Italian campaign.
10. [Admiralty War Diary, October 1944](#) - Operational context for the entry into Greece and clearance of the approaches to Piraeus.
11. [Imperial War Museums: British Navy at Piraeus](#) - Photographic evidence of the naval arrival at Piraeus on 15 October 1944.
12. [GOV.UK: Apply for the records of a deceased serviceperson](#) - Application route for Jim's Royal Navy service record.
13. [Imperial War Museums: photograph of HMS Unst, item 205120812](#) - One of two identified IWM images of the ship.
14. [Imperial War Museums: photograph of HMS Unst, item 205037222](#) - A second identified IWM image of the ship.

Note on interpretation

Published online sources provide a useful framework but do not amount to a complete service history. Statements about Jim's actual presence at Taormina, Naples, Haifa, Beirut and Piraeus derive from family evidence and his papers. Statements about the tasks he may have performed at those places are reasoned interpretations based on the capabilities of *Unst* and the rank of Leading Seaman. The ship's logs and Jim's full service record remain the decisive sources for a more exact reconstruction.