

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE



THOMAS RAYMOND KELLY GC (1928-1947)

Merchant Seaman

Thomas Raymond Kelly was born on 19th March 1928 at 7 River Street, Newry. He was the eldest in a family of three boys and three girls. His father Robert, a seaman, died at the young age of 37. Raymond left school at 14, and in May 1942 he joined the SS Rowan, one of the coastal fleet operated by Joseph Fisher and Sons of Newry.

1942 was the worst of the war years for the merchant navy and the Newry ship, MV Karri, was badly damaged in the River Mersey due to enemy action. A seaman, James Brennan, was killed, and several crewmen were badly injured.

Raymond left Fishers, and following spells with other coasting companies, he joined SS Empire Plover on foreign trade. In March 1947 the Empire Plover left Rio De Janeiro in Brazil, bound for Britain, with a cargo of grain. On March 18th a distress call was received from another vessel, SS Famagusta, which was in difficulties in heavy seas in the notorious Bay of Biscay. Empire Plover responded and when she arrived on the scene, a lifeboat was launched from the Famagusta. The lifeboat overturned in the boiling seas throwing the occupants into the water. Without hesitation, Raymond dived into the sea and rescued a badly injured seaman. Diving in again he pulled a second man from the waves and seeing a woman in difficulties he went in a third time. He succeeded in getting a grip on the woman but a huge wave broke over them and they disappeared. Raymond was a day short of his 19th birthday.

On 10th February 1948 the London Gazette announced that Raymond had been awarded the George Cross by King George VI. Raymond's mother Brigid and his sister Rebecca travelled to London to collect the award which remains with the family.

Raymond Kelly was also awarded the Lloyds Medal for Gallantry for his selfless and courageous action.

Patrick Devlin