

Kylesku tribute to bravery of wartime raiders

By John Mackay

ONE of the most audacious British raids of World War Two was commemorated in a poignant ceremony at Kylesku on Sunday.

The mighty German battleship, *Tirpitz*, was crippled in the courageous raid by Royal Navy midget submarines as she lay in a Norwegian fjord on 22nd September, 1943.

The attack was launched from Loch Cairnbawn, in Assynt, and resulted in heavy casualties among the submarines' personnel, with two receiving Victoria Crosses (VC).

As a result of the action, the *Tirpitz* was never fully operational again, and the bravery of those who took part is marked by a memorial at Kylesku.

Among those at Sunday's ceremony were representatives of local communities, the Royal Navy, the Lord Lieutenancy of Sutherland, the Sutherland branch of the Royal Naval Association and local service charities.

But most prominent among the visitors, numbering more than 100, were veteran crewmen John Lorimer (91), who received a DSO (Distinguished Service Order), and Adam Bergius (89), who was awarded the DSC (Distinguished Service Cross).

The ceremony was opened by

Depute Lord-Lieutenant for Sutherland Jonathan Brett-Young, followed by a reading by author Paul Watkins from his book, *Midget Submarine Commander - The Life of Godfrey Place VC*.

An address was given by Sea Cadets chaplain the Rev Peter Mosley, followed by singing of the Royal Navy song, "Eternal Father, Strong to Save".

A Royal Marines bugler sounded the last post as the Royal Navy standard was lowered followed by a minute's silence and sounding of reveille and the laying of wreaths.

Among those attending was Highland Council ward manager Andy Mackay.

He told the *Northern Times*: "This courageous raid had taken place exactly 70 years ago to the day and the ceremony was very moving for everyone there."

"Although the weather was pretty foul, it was a very poignant and emotional tribute to those who took part in the raid."

The organisers have thanked the many individuals and organisations which gave both financial and practical help with the event, including Highland Council, its local councillors, Assynt and Scourie community councils, the Westminster Estate, Scourie Primary School and the Scourie fire service members who braved the wind and rain to provide shelter at the memorial.

One of the principal local organisers

was former Royal Navy commander William Sutherland.

He said: "It was wonderful to see the two veterans, now aged into their nineties, standing out front in what was pretty wild weather with wind and rain."

"They would not have been surprised by this having spent months in Loch Cairnbawn before the raid training for the attack. The local community did absolutely magnificently in making this a very special occasion. Even the firemen did their bit in holding down the tent which was giving shelter and in danger of being blown away by the wind."

"At one point my wife was inside playing her 240 volt electric organ - so I was quite pleased they were on hand to make sure it wasn't exposed to the elements. One of the most interesting features of the commemoration ceremony was, I felt, the interface between the old Navy and the new - HMS *Sutherland*, *Sutherland's* affiliated warship, took the trouble to send an officer all the way up from Plymouth for the event, Lt Cdr Chris Morgan, a Principal Warfare Officer. Chris was a superb representative of his ship. Also present, having travelled from the submarine base at Faslane were three warrant officers."

The midget submarines, known as X Craft, were just 50ft long and too small for the four-strong crew members to stand upright.



X Craft survivors Adam Bergius (left) and John Lorimer at Loch Cairnbawn where the pair trained during the war. Photos: Paul Reid



Local man Willie Elliott, who attended Sunday's ceremony, was just 10 when the X Craft were trailed on Loch Cairnbawn.