

Divers find Scottish hero's submarine

BY DOMINIC KENNEDY AND SAM COATES

THE final resting place of an aristocratic naval hero and his First World War submarine has been discovered by a German diver in the North Sea.

Lieutenant-Commander Kenneth Duff-Dunbar, in command of the E16, died alongside two other officers and 28 ratings before he could see his only son, heir to the 15th-century Ackergill castle in Wick.

In a tragic echo of his 29-year-old father's fate, the baby, also Kenneth, grew up to become a captain fighting for his country at sea and was killed nine days after D-Day in 1944. With the loss of the younger Kenneth, the Dunbar title, which featured in many stirring episodes of Scottish history, came to an end.

The cause of the sinking of the E16 and the exact location of the wreck had been a mystery since she disappeared on August 22, 1916. Built in Barrow-in-Furness, the E16 had been one of the most successful of the E-class submarines, a group which pestered the German Navy in the North Sea throughout the Great War.

Her first kill was on July 26, 1915, when three German destroyers were sent to hunt a reported submarine off the Dutch island of Terschelling. At 14.00 hours, a single torpedo from the E16, under the control of a Commander Talbot, sank the destroyer V188 with the loss of five men.

The next triumph for the E16 came when she torpedoed the German U-boat U-6 on September 15, 1915. The German commander, Korvetten Kapitän Lepsius, and four of his crew were captured.

Her final journey began in Blyth, Northumberland, and ended in the cold, grey waters of Helgoland Bight off the German coast. She was last sighted 35 miles east of Yarmouth by a fellow submarine, E38. E38 later observed a group of warships moving north in the vicinity of Terschelling. Splashes were seen near one of the warships as if depth charges were exploding.

The submarine lay undisturbed on the bed of the North Sea, near Helgoland island, until Rolf Schuett, an amateur diver, found an unidentified wreck earlier this year. He was unable to explore the vessel until last weekend brought unusually calm seas.

He located a propeller bearing the identification number E16. A large hole suggested that the submarine had been torpedoed or struck by a mine.

Sascha Kellersohn, the underwater cameraman on the expedition, said: "It was an unbelievable dive. The E16 was a huge ship for its time. It was 60 metres long and 7 metres wide and, even though it has been down there for 80 years, it's nearly perfect.

"We found the starboard propeller which carries the number of the sub. We took pictures and sent them off to German experts and the relevant authorities in Britain who have confirmed that the submarine was the E16 which was officially reported as missing on August 22, 1916.

“We were able to film the sub from the outside and go into the machine room and the captain’s main room. We did not go far and we did not find any trace of the sailors who died or their personal items.”

Beside the E16, the divers discovered another submarine in perfect condition, this one intact. Her identity and cause of sinking are a puzzle, but Herr Schuett believes she is also British.

The E16 discovery is causing excitement in Wick, on the northeast coast of Scotland, where Kenneth Duff-Dunbar is an heroic figure. His family castle, Ackergill Tower, is now in private hands and takes group holiday bookings. One of the attractions is the Princess Royal room, decorated with naval memorabilia, including Duff-Dunbar’s death notice and a Christmas card he sent while serving on *HMS Princess Royal*.

Every year, 4,000 people visit an exhibition dedicated to him at the Wick Heritage Centre. On display is his naval commander’s uniform and the wedding chairs carved from ship’s wood to celebrate his marriage to Kathleen 18 months before his death.

Iain Sutherland, chairman of the Wick Society, said: “This certainly would be an important historical discovery. Kenneth Duff-Dunbar was one of the first cadets in the Navy taken for training as a submariner. Three weeks after he was killed, his son was born. Then the son, in the Army sea force, was killed in Normandy.

“They were an extremely important family. They came here in 1698. They were the landowners of the two estates on which the town of Wick sat. They were confidants of Thomas Telford, the great engineer, who made Wick the first planned industrial town in Britain on their land.”