

# RAYMOND JAMES VENESS PERRIN RNR

21<sup>st</sup> May 1922 - 20<sup>th</sup> April 2015

In 1937 having expressed an interest in a career at sea, Jim (aged 15) joined the training ship HMS Worcester, moored on the Thames at Greenhythe. In the summer of 1939, the year he was awarded the Worcester Silver Medal, he was accepted by P & O to sail as a Deck Apprentice and appointed to the liner RMS *Strathaird* due to sail to India in September. However the war intervened and Jim (now 19) was sent to Devonport as a Midshipman to join HMS *Shikari*, an aging destroyer commissioned in 1924. One of its first jobs was Operation Dynamo, the evacuation of the BEF from Dunkirk in May 1940. In total *Shikari* made seven evacuation runs, these included helping to save 3,000 French Troops from the steamer *Prague* that had been badly damaged by enemy action. On 1<sup>st</sup>.June *Shikari* was damaged by bombing but continued to make evacuation runs. At 0340 on the night of 3 / 4 June she was the last vessel to leave Dunkirk having embarked in total 3,349 troops. After this, *Shikari* returned to North Atlantic Convoy duties based in Londonderry with the 2<sup>nd</sup>.Escort Group. On the 24<sup>th</sup>.December she suffered serious storm damage whilst south of Iceland – loosing the bridge and funnel.

Jim's next appointment was to HMS *Panther* on her commissioning in April 1942. The first task was running from Scapa Flow to Norway to launch two human torpedoes, which were shipped in the sea-boat davits, to attack the *Tirpitz*. On her return Panther was sent via the Cape to the India Ocean, where following the sinking of the Cruisers, His Majesty's Ships *Cornwall* and *Dorsetshire* off Ceylon, *Panther* assisted in the rescue of approx 1,120 men. In May 1942 she sunk the Vichy French Submarine *Monge*. Back in home waters, as part of an escort for a convoy that included the troopship SS *Strathallan* (a P & O liner) carrying troops for Operation Torch, the North African landings, on the 21<sup>st</sup>.December *Strathallan* was torpedoed. *Panther* with Jim as Pilot (navigator) under command of Lt Cdr Viscount Jocelyn RN, with other destroyers, went alongside and took on board the crew and troops, including General Eisenhower's staff, and delivered them to Oran. Later in 1943 the flotilla moved back to the Mediterranean to serve as part of the Sicily invasion fleet. On 9<sup>th</sup>.October at 1205 she was attacked by a Junkers Stuka, which scored a direct hit in her boiler room. *Panther* sank within a minute. The Greek destroyer *Miaoulis* picked up survivors. Jim had quite a long swim before he was assisted aboard. Tired and wet he fell asleep and was thought to be missing.

After a fortnight's leave Jim was appointed to HMS *Virago* prior to her commissioning at Swan Hunter's yard on the Tyne in November 1943. Jim, now a Lieutenant was the Navigator (Pilot). No sooner was the ship at sea than the action began. She did seven Arctic Convoys, the first one included action in the Battle of the North Cape, on Boxing Day 1943, *Virago* administering the *coupe de grace* (by torpedoes) to the German Battleship *Scharnhorst*, after its engagement with HMS *Duke of York*. The 6<sup>th</sup>. June saw *Virago* back off Normandy firing on the German positions behind Lion-sur-Mer on Sword Beach, and then giving covering fire for the advancing troops. Early in 1945 *Virago*, now part of the 26<sup>th</sup>.Destroyer Flotilla, transferred to the Eastern Fleet. She and *Vigilant* (with Jim's old friend Angus Baber as Navigator), as part

of the five destroyers comprising the 26<sup>th</sup>. Flotilla took part in the final naval gun and torpedo action of the war. The destroyers armed with 4.5 inch guns and torpedoes, hunted down and attacked the Japanese Heavy Cruiser *Haguro*. *Haguro* armed with 10 eight inch guns was at the time the most heavily armed cruiser in the world, one can hardly imagine the feelings of Jim and his shipmates as they closed in on *Haguro* and its destroyer escort (*Kamikazi*). The action went well with *Haguro* being sunk and the only minimal damage to the Flotilla Leader (HMS Saumarez) and very few British casualties. Jim was Mentioned in Dispatches. *Virago* returned to Chatham in December 1945, when Jim, now 23, turned into a civilian, but remained in the Naval Reserve, he was later awarded his Reserve Decoration. In 2013 the Lord Lieutenant at the Exeter Flotilla Trafalgar Service presented Jim with the Arctic Star. Last year he received the Ushakov Medal awarded by the President of the Russia Federation to those who took part in the Russian Convoys.

*Chris Seaton*

## **R.J.V. PERRIN; ARICS – “JIM” 1922 – 2015**

“Jim” Perrin has died in Sidmouth at the age of 92. He served as a navigator in destroyers for the full duration of the Second World War. Leaving the Royal Navy at the age of 23 Jim trained as a Quantity Surveyor and worked diligently to become the Principal of May and May, Quantity Surveyors. He developed a particular expertise for cost control and financial management of projects involving the skilful repair of ancient buildings.

Raymond James Veness Perrin, always known as “Jim” to his family and friends, was born in Harley Street in 1922. He liked to say that he was “practically a Cockney” as his mother could hear Bow Bells from the maternity unit! Jim attended schools in Ickenham and Marylebone before, at the age of fifteen, joining the Training Ship; “HMS Worcester”, moored on the Thames at Greenhithe. In the summer of 1939 he was awarded the Worcester Silver Medal and had been accepted by P&O as a Deck Apprentice. However with the outbreak of war, as a member of the RNVR, he was sent to Devonport to join the elderly destroyer, “HMS Shikari”.

On “HMS Shikari” Jim became a highly skilled navigation officer and served on North Atlantic Convoys. In 1940 “HMS Shikari” took part in the evacuation of the BEF from Dunkirk. She was the last ship to leave; embarking before she did so 3,349 troops. At Christmas 1941 “Shikari” was severely damaged off Iceland.

Jim’s second ship was “HMS Panther”. With Jim on board she played a significant part in the sinking of the “Tirpitz”. Eventually following a series of distinguished campaigns “Panther” was bombed by a Junkers Stuka off Sicily and sank within a minute. Jim after a long swim was taken aboard the Greek destroyer “Miaoulis” alive but exhausted; believed to be missing he was found in a deep sleep on deck.

In November 1943 Lieutenant Perrin joined the new destroyer “HMS Virago”. As Navigator, Jim sailed with “Virago” on seven Arctic Convoys and took part in the Battle of the North Cape and the sinking of the “Scharnhorst”. In 1944 “Virago” took part in the bombardment of Normandy in the D – day landings. “Virago” with her flotilla then sailed to the Pacific. Jim played his part in “Virago” as the flotilla pursued and sank the Japanese Heavy Cruiser “Haguro”; one of the last naval engagements of the War.

When Jim left “Virago” at Chatham in December 1945 as a veteran of the Naval Campaign he was only aged 23! He became a civilian but remained in the Naval Reserve. He was awarded the Reserve Decoration and in 2013 the Arctic Star. In 2014 he was awarded the Ushakov Medal from the President of the Russian Federation for his part in the Russian Convoys.

It was only in recent years that Jim had talked freely about his wartime experiences. However, as his son, Neil, so wisely stated in his eulogy at Jim's funeral; "He would always downplay his accomplishments and say; "I was just doing my job, and anyone in my position would do the same", but those accomplishments raised a family and helped win a war." "I do believe the war shaped his life..."

Now living a full civilian life Jim set about his studies to become a Quantity Surveyor. He worked with Thompson and Alexander in London and then joined May and May of which he eventually became the Principal.

While working in London he met and married Jean. They set up home in Sunbury on Thames and then later in Walton on Thames where they remained until retiring to Sidmouth. It was a particularly happy marriage and Jim took immense pride in their children Shirley and Neil. Sadly Jean, a gifted wife and mother and talented artist, pre-deceased Jim and although he never complained his last years were incomplete without her.

Jim developed a considerable expertise in the cost control of repair projects to historic buildings. He was encouraged by another former "Worcester" boy the distinguished architect, the late Gilbert Williams; Chairman for many years of the Technical Panel of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB). Gilbert, introduced him to the Society and for many years Jim served on its Technical Panel. He would advise on the cost implications of a wide variety of cases. The present Chairman Philip Hughes recalls; "He would provide advice when it was needed and made his points swiftly and professionally. He was always self-effacing, good humoured, helpful, kind and generous with his time."

The professional work that Jim undertook was wide and varied; with architects Neil Birdsall and Michael Swash he assisted in the repair of the Church of St. Mary of Lambeth (now the Museum of Garden History). Jim's work with Gilbert Williams included the rescue of many of the magnificent garden buildings at Painshill Park, Cobham, Surrey. Jim also assisted Gilbert Williams on numerous projects involving churches and almshouses. Following Gilbert's death Jim continued with work in the same vein for Roy Gosling and Nigel Hammett of Broadway and Malyon.

I had the privilege of working with Jim and Rodney Melville on the repair of the ancient home of the Dryden family; Canons Ashby in Northamptonshire. The National Trust, encouraged by the boundless enthusiasm of the late Gervase Jackson Stops wished to acquire the decaying mansion. Jim and I had six weeks in which to assess the condition of the house, its church and outbuildings; to report on them and provide a Cost Strategy for their comprehensive repair. I recall vividly the summer of 1980 as Jim and I spent day after day clambering over junk in the disintegrating stately chambers and crawling through dust encrusted roof spaces. We were in pursuit of decay, structural failure, multitudinous dilapidations and their causes. We shared a wry smile or two as dirty and weary we espied from the Great Stair window Gervase entertaining potential donors to delightful picnics on the lawns beneath us! Jim's astonishing stamina for concerted and sustained hard work was remarkable. This ability was always combined with humour and a deep fascination for the ancient decayed craftsmanship around him. His cost analysis laid the rock-like foundation for the immense repair project which followed. In his financial control of the contract he was tireless and vigilant. He was scrupulously fair and gained the respect of Contractors and Employer alike for his firm professionalism. I have a "Team Photo" of those who worked for two years at Canons Ashby; the Regional Team from the National Trust, the consultants, the conservators and the men from Linford Bridgeman; contractors. There, in the back row stands Jim, tall, with his happy open smile, surrounded by that host of craftsmen that he loved to work with; masons, bricklayers, joiners, plasterers; that myriad crew that brings to fruition a great project. However all were dependent on the quiet, self-effacing, professionalism of Jim to navigate their ship safely to harbour. Three years later Jim undertook the Cost Analysis to accompany our Report of Condition for the National Trust prior to their acquisition of Calke Abbey, Derbyshire.

It is to fine but often self-effacing professional men and women like Jim that the SPAB owes so much for its achievements in conservation and education; to achieve its aim of passing on to future generations, Repaired not Restored, the ancient buildings which are our inheritance.

Jim was an upstanding figure, he stood always with perfect posture as befitted a gentleman with his naval upbringing. If his straight backbone was a metaphor for his exceptional discipline and integrity it was his delightful open face and happy engaging smile which defined his warmth of personality and an outlook on life full of joy and gratitude for life.

At his funeral his children, Shirley and Neil and their children and friends, notably those with memories of the war at sea gave deeply moving tributes to Jim. The Prayer of Committal was given in the manner ancient and traditional for sailors. His ashes were buried at sea the following week by Life Boat.

*I am indebted to Jim's family for their contributions to these notes on Jim's life. For the extraordinary war career of Jim I have referred to the detailed account prepared by his naval colleague Christopher Seaton to whom I am particularly grateful. I am most appreciative of the many observations and recollections of architects and surveyors concerning Jim's life as a Quantity Surveyor and his membership of the SPAB.*  
*Johm Bucknell*