

## **Lieutenant (A) Frederick F Harsant RNVR**

**12<sup>th</sup> December 1920 – 31<sup>st</sup> May 2017**

### **Early Years**

Freddie was born in Hackney, the fifth of eight children to a mother from Dublin and a father who was a Clarnico sweet sales rep. He went to school at St Ignatius RC College where he achieved his Matriculation with distinction. His first job was in the Divorce and Probate Registry at Somerset House where he met Joan, his wife to be.



### **Naval Career**

1939 September. He enlisted in the RNVR (A) aged 18 as Observer (training), became a star pupil in navigation and was elected captain of the training class at RNAS Ford, Arundel.

1940 May. Midshipman in HMS Eagle 813 Squadron flying Swordfish operations on Tobruk, in the Western Desert, on the Italian fleet at Tripoli and later in the Red Sea, Indian Ocean and South Atlantic.

1941 November. Lieutenant in HMS Edinburgh. CO Walrus flight in two Murmansk Arctic Convoys PQ13 and PQ14.

1942 May. HMS Edinburgh was returning from Murmansk carrying gold bullion when she was struck by a mine and torpedoed while Freddie was OOW. As ship's photographer he took the famous image of the hit on the stern and his cine film was shown on the TV series 'War at Sea'. He recalled that when they abandoned ship he was able to leap onto the rescuing destroyer without getting his feet wet. Most of the bullion was recovered in 1981 and 1986.

### **Photographed as Fairey Swordfish Observer serving in HMS Eagle in the Mediterranean**

1942. Seconded to the American Twelfth Air Force under General Doolittle prior to the invasion of North Africa 'Operation Torch' to train American flying personnel in ship recognition in the Mediterranean. Later in 1942, he joined HMS Furious 822 Squadron as Senior Observer flying Fairey Albacore biplanes in the Mediterranean and North Atlantic. Then he flew its replacement; the Fairey Barracuda (a carrier-borne, monoplane torpedo and dive bomber - the FAA's first all metal aircraft) in the Indian Ocean.

1943. Appointed as Senior Observer Instructor at RNAS Ronaldsway, Isle of Man, preparing Barracuda crews for service in the Far East.

1944. Prior to his appointment as Commanding Officer of a new Barracuda squadron in HMS Indefatigable, medical examination showed lung problems and he was invalided out of the RN.

### **Medals:**

**North Africa gold bar 1942-43**

**The 1939-45 Star GR VI**

**The Atlantic Star GR VI**

**1939-1945 The Defence Medal GR VI**

**1939-1945 War Medal GR VI**

**Russian Medal 40 years 1945-1985**

**The Arctic Star**

**The Ushakov Medal**

## Post-War Career

1945-49 Read English at Downing College, Cambridge.

On leaving Cambridge, he taught English at Varndean Boys School, Brighton, Frimley and Camberley County Grammar School, Thames Valley Grammar School and then became Headmaster at Aveley and Grays Technical High School. Finally he was appointed Principal of Palmer's College in Essex, one of the first sixth form colleges in the country. He produced the annual Shakespeare play, taught ballroom dancing and was a leading light at Camberley Lawn Tennis Club.

## Retirement

Freddie and Joan retired to Dartmouth in Devon in 1979. They were keen sailors and built a 35ft ketch which they sailed from Dartmouth to Larnaca, Cyprus, via Gibraltar and Malta and back home over three years on a wonderful 9,000 mile voyage. He wrote 4 novels and one book '*Life Begins at 70 .. the story of Blue Pearl*' based on their boat and their big adventure sailing to Cyprus.

He was a member of Exeter Flotilla, the Dartmouth YC, Probus and he formed the bridge club in Dartmouth.



From L to R

Cdr Harold Lloyd VRD\* RNR (88), Cdr Tommy Handley RN (90), **Lt Freddie Harsant RNVR (A) (92)**, AB Syd Thompson DSM (94). The first three were members of the Exeter Flotilla. Photographed Easter 2013 at BRNC Dartmouth, having had their award of the Arctic Star acknowledged at Lord High Admiral's Divisions.

Freddie's visit to RNAS Culdrose in 2015; <https://www.fleetairarmoa.org/news/world-war-two-aviator-back-with-his-swordfish>