

## HMS CONWAY – WORLD WAR TWO

### COMPANIONS OF THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER

Wing Commander Robert Swinton **Allen** (29/30) DFC RAFO

**LG 25263 dated 02/09/1941**; DSO awarded *in connection with bombing raids on Brest, Pelice and Cherbourg recognising the bravery, determination and resource displayed by the leader and air crews.*

Wing Cdr R S Allen DSO, DFC\* RAF retired at his own request in March 1956.

Interesting site mentioning Allen and with photograph at:  
<http://cranstonmilitaryprints.com/hampden/ww2/aviation/prints.htm>

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Captain Jack Grant **Bickford** (10/13) DSC RN

**LG 34925 dated 16/08/1940**; DSO awarded *“for good services in the withdrawal of Allied troops from the beaches at Dunkirk”*

Captain Bickford commanded HMS Express and was Captain (D) 20<sup>th</sup> Destroyer (Mine-laying) Flotilla from August 1939; he was mortally wounded in action when Express herself was mined and attacked by Enemy aircraft during operations off the Dutch/Belgian coast on 31/08/1940, subsequently succumbing to his wounds in hospital on 10/09/40. He was buried at sea.

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Commodore Denis Arthur **Casey (02/04)** CBE DSC RD RNR

**LG 35369 dated 21/07/42**; Casey was the Commodore of Convoy PQ10 from Murmansk and was awarded the DSO *“for bravery seamanship and resolution in bringing a convoy from Murmansk in the face of relentless and determined attacks by Enemy U-Boats and aircraft”*.

Casey won his DSC in World War One for service in submarines; he became the RNR ADC to the King in 1944 and was noted as being Commodore Master, RMS Andes 1948/49. Born in Ireland in 1889, he died in Ryde, Isle of Wight 20/07/68.

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Captain Archibald **Day** (13/14) RN

**LG 37358 dated 20/11/1945**: DSO awarded for *“Courage, efficiency and devotion to duty in establishing navigation aids in the approaches to the Rangoon river, in mine-sweeping and the survey of the river prior to the assault on the city in May 1945”*

Captain day commanded the Far East Fleet's survey ship HMS White Bear. After the War he was promoted to Flag rank and eventually served as Hydrographer of the Navy 1950-

55.

Vice Admiral Sir Archibald Day, KBE CB DSO died 13 July 1970 in office as Chairman of the Dover Harbour Board, See:

[http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0373463300020828](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0373463300020828). His medals and honours were sold at auction for AusD11,000 in 2005.

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Acting Commander Francis **Douglas-Watson** (09/11) RN

**LG 34979 dated 25/10/1940:** awards the DSO "*For good services in the withdrawal of Allied forces from the French coast*".

Douglas-Watson, a career naval officer who spent two periods serving with the Rpyal Australian Navy between the wars, was in command of HMS Pangbourne and Senior Officer of a flotilla of minesweepers operating in Home waters. Pangbourne was diverted to assist in the evacuation of troops when, on 29th May, she was bombed and damaged by German aircraft in Dunkirk and two officers were wounded. Despite this and persistent attacks, Pangbourne continued to ferry troops across the Channel, making several successful return trips.

Douglas-Watson was subsequently appointed to work in the Mediterranean and was killed in April 1941 when SS Clan Fraser, carrying ammunition, was bombed in Piraeus harbour and blew up, causing widespread damage and loss of life. This story is told in the 9<sup>th</sup> "Tales from the Boards" feature in The Cadet.

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Commander John Charles Keith **Dowding** (04/06) RD RNR

**LG 34925 dated 16/08/1940:** awards the DSO "*For good services during the withdrawal of Allied Forces from the beaches of Dunkirk*".

Dowding, a pre-war Staff Commander in the Orient line was in command of HMS Mona's Isle during the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940; there is an excellent first hand eye-witness account of this paddle-steamer, requisitioned as an Armed Boarding Vessel, and her contribution to the events, during which she was badly damaged, suffered casualties, but saved 2643 troops in two round trips:

[http://website.lineone.net/~tom\\_lee/monas%20isle%20hms.htm](http://website.lineone.net/~tom_lee/monas%20isle%20hms.htm)

Dowding was promoted to Captain RNR. He then became a Commodore of Convoys and was in that role for the infamous Convoy PQ17, surviving the sinking of his ship "River Afton" and being awarded the CBE; he continued serving and was Principal Sea Transport Officer for Operation Neptune and Overlord – the invasion of Normandy in 1944. After the war he became Principal of the Prince of Wales Sea Training School 1945-1949 (<http://www.pwsts.org.uk/johndowding.htm>).

Commodore J C K Dowding CBE DSO ADC RD RNR died in 1965. Yet to be confirmed is his relationship to Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding of Battle of Britain fame.

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Captain Douglas Henry **Everett** (13/14) MBE RN

**LG 34796 dated 23/02/1940:** awards the DSO to three officers *“In recognition of the gallant and successful action with the (German pocket battleship) “Admiral Graf Spee” who, as Commanders of their ships, having done as much as they could during the long months of waiting to perfect their ships and ships'companies, so that they stood the test of battle when the day for action came, heartened all by their readiness, example and encouragement.”*

Captain Everett was Commander (second in command) of HMS Ajax at the Battle of the River Plate. Rear Admiral D H Everett CBE CB MBE DSO Mentioned in Dispatches (3 times) RN completed a fine career, being active in both World Wars, as President of the Admiralty Interview Board 1951-52. He died at Milford-on-Sea in 1986.

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Acting Wing Commander John Francis **Grey** (28/30) DFC RAF 207 Squadron

**LG 36816 dated 24/11/1944** awards the DSO *“This officer has, by his gallant example, inspired and maintained a high degree of confidence amongst his aircrews. On 10 occasions his aircraft has been engaged by enemy fighters, 7 of which were shot down in the ensuing fights. The successes obtained are a fine tribute to Wing Commander Grey's great skill and leadership in action. This officer has commanded the squadron with great success.”*

Grey joined the RAF in 1936 on a Short Service Commission and had a distinguished wartime career flying bombers leading to a Permanent Commission after the war as Squadron Leader; Wing Commander J F Grey DSO DFC RAF retired on 29/11/1957

The Conway Honours Board lists his name as GRAY but there seems no doubt that this is an error.

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Lieutenant Commander John William **Hale** (20/22) RN

**LG 5166 dated 16/05/1941:** Awards the DSO *“For outstanding courage and skill in a wholly successful attack by the Fleet Air Arm on the Italian Fleet at Taranto”.*

Lieut Cdr Hale commanded 819 Squadron (Swordfish) from February 1940 to January 1941 and led the second attack on Taranto on 1/11/1940. He was promoted to Commander in December 1940 and retired from the Navy in March 1957. He died in 1985 and is interred in Easton Cemetery, Suffolk.

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Lieutenant George Edward **Hunt** DSC RN

Lieutenant Commander George Edward **Hunt** DSO DSC RN

**LG 36687 dated 01/09/1944:** Awards the DSO for *“Undaunted courage, skill and devotion*

*to duty in successful patrols in HM Submarines”*

**LG 36825 dated 01/12/1944:** Awards Bar to the DSO for “*Undaunted courage, skill and determination in command of HM Submarine Ultor, pressing home a daring attack on strongly escorted enemy ships.*”

The Conway web-site and The Cadet newsletter has more information; also see [http://www.unithistories.com/units\\_index/default.asp?file=../officers/personsx.html](http://www.unithistories.com/units_index/default.asp?file=../officers/personsx.html) for details of this distinguished Old Conway whose remarkable seafaring career began as an Apprentice in Blue Funnel and ended when he retired from the post of Director of Naval Equipment, Ship Department, Admiralty in February 1963.

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Lieutenant Angus **Letty** (29/31?) DSC RNR

**LG 35960 dated 26/03/1943:** Awards the DSO “*For distinguished services*”.

Letty's war service is shrouded in mystery. He is mentioned in the obituary of a Lieut Cdr Peter Williams as being involved in Ian Fleming's “Irregular Warfare Department” of the Admiralty which, *inter alia*, ran agents to and from the Brittany coast in Motor Gunboats. See: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1453356/Lieutenant-Commander-Peter-Williams.html>

Whatever the facts are, he also won a DSC for “*special mine-laying operations*” in 1940. He is recorded as having returned to the Merchant Navy after the war; Captain Angus Letty DSO DSC RD\* RNR served as ADC to the Queen 1963-64 before being placed on the Retired List in July 1968.

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Acting Captain Alister Angus **Martin** (18/20?) DSC\*\* RNR

**LG 37127 dated 08/06/1945:** Awards the DSO for “*Minesweeping operations over dense and shallow minefields in opening up the Greek ports in the Gulf of Corinth*”

A pre-war officer in Royal Mail Line, by this stage of the war Martin had been serving continuously in minesweepers since the outbreak, had won three DSCs for his work and been Mentioned in Despatches three times. By 1945 he was Captain (M/S) commanding HMS Rothesay, a Bangor class sweeper, in the Mediterranean. His last appointment was command of HMS Largs, a Head Quarters Landing Ship in the Far East.

In retirement Captain A A Martin DSO DSC\*\* RD\* RNR lived quietly in the Southampton area, an active member of the Southampton Master Mariners' Club; we estimate he died between 1965-73.

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Lieutenant Commander John Isdale **Miller** (17/19) RNR, HM Trawler Blackfly

**LG 34385 dated 23/04/1940:** Awards the DSO for “*Exemplary enterprise, zeal, leadership and resource in Anti-Submarine Trawlers and untiring endeavour to harass the enemy*”.

Blackfly was part of the Belfast-based A/S Trawler Force, Division 1 under Lieut Cdr R B Stannard commanding HMT Arab; Stannard came to fame during the Norwegian campaign in 1940 during which he won the Victoria Cross. The brief words of Miller's citation for a DSO disguise what must have been a remarkable endeavour for such an award to be made. By August Miller had command of a brand new "Flower" class Corvette, HMS Salvia heading for the Mediterranean with the 10<sup>th</sup> Corvette Group, equipped for sweeping magnetic and acoustic mines as well as her anti-submarine escort role.

Three more Gazettes show the award of a DSC, the Reserve Decoration, and a Bar to the DSC with Salvia in the thick of the evacuation from Greece, the Battle for Crete and supporting the Mediterranean campaign. The last Gazette (DSC\*) was dated 6 January 1942, thirteen days after Salvia had been torpedoed and lost with all hands. U-599's captain did not spare a Corvette stopped to recover German POWs from a passenger ship, Shuntien, 100 mile North East of Tobruk.

The late Lieut Cdr J I Miller DSO DSC\* RD RNR's name is inscribed on the War Memorial at Bridge of Earn, Perthshire where his widow, Margaret, lived and his family farmed. Read more on:

<http://theflowerclasscorvetteforums.yuku.com/topic/646#.TeYZJFvK0UM>

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Captain Charles Thomas Mark **Pizey** (12/15) RN

Captain Charles Thomas Mark **Pizey** (12/15) CB DSO RN

One of Conway's most illustrious sons Pizey's first DSO was included with the New Year Honours and Awards on 1 January 1942. Unfortunately, the pages of this gazette and citation are not currently available; however, it is worth quoting the citation for the subsequent CB which was awarded in **LG 35506 dated 27/03/1942**: "*For daring and fine judgement in leading a striking force of HM Destroyers to a resolute attack in daylight at close range and against the odds upon the German Battle Cruisers Scharnhorst and Gnesenau and the Cruiser Prinz Eugen*". This action is often quoted as a prime example of how to conduct such an operation although his collection of elderly V&W class destroyers had a hard time and failed to stop the enemy ships escaping.

As Captain (D) of the 21<sup>st</sup> Destroyer Flotilla he commanded the leader HMS Campbell from 1940-42 in which role he confirmed his skill and daring as a "destroyer man", collecting two Mentions in Despatches and the DSO. In July 1942 he moved to command of HMS Tyne, a destroyer depot ship, and served as Chief Staff Officer to Rear Admiral (D), Home Fleet becoming much involved in organising convoys to Murmansk.

**LG 35805 of 27/11/1942**; Awards a Bar to the DSO for "*For gallantry, skill and resolution in HM Ships escorting an important convoy to North Russia in the face of relentless attack by enemy aircraft and submarines*".

After a long and successful career culminating with his appointment as Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth from 1955 to 1958, he retired to an active life running a small holding and heavily involved in the life of his community and the people of the West Country.

Admiral Sir Charles Thomas Mark Pizey, GBE, CB DSO and Bar, DL died 17 May 1993 a month short of his 94<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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Captain Francis Cecil **Pretty** (04/07) OBE DSC – Federal Steamship Company

Although the Conway Honours Board credits Pretty with a DSO there must be an element of doubt that this is so. No trace can be found either in the London Gazette, or Commonwealth War Graves Commission listings. Pretty was awarded his DSC in the First World War when he served as an RNR officer in Q-Ships; in 1940 he was Master of a Federal ship, SS Cornwall, in the Mediterranean and saved his ship after she was damaged by enemy bombing for which he was awarded the OBE in January 1941.

By 7 November 1941, Francis Pretty was Master of the MV Nottingham on her maiden voyage when the ship was torpedoed and lost with all hands. The U-Boat web site records:

*“At 22.34 hours on 7 Nov, 1941, the unescorted **Nottingham** (Master Francis Cecil Pretty OBE DSC), on her maiden voyage, was hit in the stern by a stern torpedo from [U-74](#) about 550 miles southeast of Cape Farewell **after she tried to ram the U-boat**. The ship was missed at 22.50 hours by a spread of two torpedoes because she stopped and sank following a coup de grâce at 22.59 hours. The crew was seen to abandon ship in lifeboats, but they were never seen again. The master, 55 crew members and six gunners were lost.”*

Nottingham clearly went down fighting and if her Master was not awarded the DSO it was not because this gallant seaman did not deserve such recognition.

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Wing Commander Basil Vernon **Robinson** (28/29) RAF – 35 Squadron, Bomber Command

LG 35413 dated 06/01/1942 awards the DSO with a terse citation *“For the December 1941 attack on Scharhorst and Gneisenau in Brest”*. Wikipedia records:

*“After [a successful raid in the Atlantic](#) in 1941, Gneisenau and her sister put in at [Brest, France](#). The two battleships were the subject of repeated bombing raids by the [RAF](#); Gneisenau was hit several times during the raids, though she was ultimately repaired.”*

Robinson had a remarkable record in Bomber Command before losing his life during a raid on Berlin for which he was the Master Bomber in the Pathfinder Group. His exploits were told in a Tale from the Boards article in “The Cadet”.

Group Captain B V Robinson DSO DFC\* RAF was killed in action August 1943; he is buried in Berlin Cemetery.

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Lieutenant Commander Harry Marcus Crews **Sanders** (16/18) DSC, RD, RNR

LG 35268 dated 05/09/1941: awards the DSO for "*Enterprise, skill and devotion to duty in action against enemy submarines*".

The most effective tribute to Sanders is to repeat the descriptive text posted when his medal collection was auctioned by Dix, Noonan in London in 2007, selling for a hammer price of £8000.:

### **Description**

*The Second World War D.S.O., D.S.C. group of eight awarded to Lieutenant-Commander H. M. C. Sanders, Royal Naval Reserve, who was killed in action in command of the first of the flower-class corvettes, the Gladiolus, when she was torpedoed and sunk in October 1941: her C.O. from March 1940, he had participated in the destruction of at least two U-Boats in the interim, a gallant wartime career with parallels to the Compass Rose of Cruel Sea fame*

*Distinguished Service Order, G.V.I.R. 1st issue, the reverse of the suspension bar officially dated '1941', silver-gilt and enamel; Distinguished Service Cross, G.V.I.R., hallmarks for London 1940 and officially dated '1940'; British War and Victory Medals (Mid. H. M. C. Sanders, R.N.R.); 1939-45 Star; Atlantic Star; War Medal 1939-45; Royal Naval Reserve Decoration, G.V.R., silver, gilt, unmarked, generally extremely fine (8) £4000-5000*

### **Footnote**

*D.S.O. London Gazette 9 September 1941:*

*'For enterprise, skill and devotion to duty in action against enemy submarines.'*

*D.S.C. London Gazette 13 November 1940:*

*'For good services in a successful attack on a U-Boat.'*

*Harry Marcus Crews Sanders, who was born in Lowestoft in November 1900 and was appointed a Midshipman in the Royal Naval Reserve in August 1918, was appointed to the command of the flower-class corvette Gladiolus on her commissioning in April 1940 - the first of some 250 such corvettes to be built in the 1939-45 War, she had been laid down at Smiths Docks on the River Tees in October 1939. And she quickly proved herself in action on convoy work, when, on 28 June 1940, she picked up 35 survivors from the S.S. Llanarth, which had been torpedoed by the U-30 about 220 nautical miles west by south of Ushant.*

*Just a day or two later, in the Western Approaches, Sanders orchestrated her first "kill", when he successfully depth-charged the U-26. Severely damaged, the enemy submarine was then attacked on the surface by a Sunderland from No. 10 (R.A.A.F.) Squadron, as a result of which her commander, Heinz Scheringer, took the decision to scuttle her - seven of his crew perished and the remainder were taken prisoner. Sanders was awarded the D.S.C. and the Gladiolus became the first flower-class corvette to be credited with a confirmed U-Boat "kill".*

*In April 1941, while escorting Convoy HX. 121, the Gladiolus made an unsuccessful attack on the U-96, one of five U-Boats that came to haunt the convoy and sink several ships - the destroyer Douglas had more luck, sending the U-65 to the bottom with no survivors. But in the company of her sister ships the Nasturtium and Celadine, in Convoy HX. 133,*

*south-west of Iceland on 26 June 1941, Gladiolus shared in the destruction of the U-556 and assisted in driving off another attack by the U-201 - 41 crew of the former U-Boat were taken prisoner, including her famous skipper, Herbert Wohlfarth, who had recently been awarded the Knight's Cross. For his own part in this well executed depth-charge attack, Sanders was awarded the D.S.O., while members of a boarding party that reached the crippled U-Boat were likewise decorated, one of them coming away with Wohlfarth's torpedo range tables.*

*Then in September, as part of Convoy SC. 42, Gladiolus played an important part in engaging a large wolf-pack, and no doubt assisted others in gaining a final score of two U-Boats. Sadly, however, in the following month, on the night of the 16th-17th, during the course of Convoy SC. 48, Gladiolus herself was to fall victim to a torpedo attack. Having picked up a survivor from the Empire Heron, Sanders decided to carry on his search, but no further news was ever heard from him - German records revealed after the War that the Gladiolus had fallen victim to the U-558, or possibly the U-432. If the former, it was the command of another famous U-Boat ace and Knight's Cross holder, Gunther Krech.*

*Sanders never set eyes on his D.S.O. and D.S.C., both decorations being forwarded to his widow, Janet, then a resident of Bitterne, Southampton. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial.*

*Sold with the recipient's original D.S.O. warrant, dated 9 September 1941, with related forwarding letter to his widow, dated 13 August 1942, and his Admiralty condolence slip.*

It was a very fortunate that the Allies had men like Harry Sanders available to win the war at sea.

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Commander (E) Charles Edward **Simms** (12/14) RN

**LG 34796 dated 20/02/1940** Awards the DSO: "... who, by his zeal and energy, brought his engines to full power in record time, and his thorough knowledge of the ship and perfect organisation, checked the damage. His calm and cheerful manner set a fine example to his fellows."

Charles Simms was the Engineer Commander of HMS Exeter at the Battle of the River Plate. He is not listed as being in the ship when she was lost, and survived the war at sea being shown as promoted to Captain (E) 05/01/1945.

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Lieutenant Commander Vivian Funge **Smith** (23/25) RNR

LG 35237 dated 01/08/1941: the DSO awarded "*For enterprise and skill in action against enemy submarines*".

This terse citation hides a momentous moment in the Battle of the Atlantic. Vivian Smith was Commanding Officer of the Flower class Corvette HMS Aubretia when on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1941 she was involved in the capture of U-110 and the acquisition of the German "Enigma"



machine and cypher details. This action has been told many times in many media.

Vivian Smith remained at sea for throughout the war, commanding anti-submarine convoy escorts.

Commander V F Smith DSO RD RNR retired 31 August 1950

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Harry Jeffreys **Tippetts** (38/40)

Tippetts' name is included on the Conway WW2 Honours Board under "DSO"; he was a well remembered and respected Chief Cadet Captain in the Summer term 1940 and left with an appointment as Temporary Midshipman RNR. The London Gazette shows him promoted to Ty Sub Lieutenant RNR 18/06/1943 and again to Ty Lieutenant RNR on 24/11/1944; the Navy List shows him in command of HDML 1181 from 14/10/1944. There is no mention of a DSO.

Seedie's Roll – a very reliable listing of awards to naval personnel available to researchers in the RN Library, Portsmouth - does not include the award. The possibility is that this is a case of mistaken identity and the award was made to someone with a similar name. However, his name is recorded and must remain, surely he gave good service to his country and should be appreciated and perhaps the digitised copies of the LG has lost the record of his DSO.

An interesting by-product of this research is in connection with his name: he may be a descendant of the famous Judge Jeffreys (1645-1689) , the "hanging judge" during the Monmouth rebellion, according to one researcher:

<http://genforum.genealogy.com/jeffreys/messages/269.html>

If any reader can cast more light on this matter, please let the Club Secretary know.

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