



However, in 1939, the Admiralty needed his expertise once again, so he volunteered and mobilised for active war service in support of operations in the Eastern Mediterranean. In April 1941, he was assigned by the Naval Base HQ in Port Said (HMS *Stag*) to manage the supply of war materials being shipped to Greece through the port of Piraeus. He was there when the German air force hit the port so spectacularly and he lost his life.

**Francis Douglas-Watson** was born in Glasgow in 1896. From Conway, he entered the Royal Navy in May 1911, subsequently seeing war service at sea, being promoted to Lieutenant in 1918. The following peacetime years saw him serve two three-year periods on loan to the Royal Australian Navy and in several destroyers; however, by 1933, promotion seems to have passed him by and he found himself in the Reserve Fleet for four years. Back at sea in 1938, he was in command of HMS *Pangbourne* and a flotilla of WW1 'Smokey Joe' coal-burning minesweepers tasked with preventing sea-borne illegal immigrants filtering into Palestine. When war came, the old sweepers found themselves back in home waters at the forefront of the battle - sweeping mines. *Pangbourne* became a significant participant in the evacuation of British and Allied troops from Dunkirk: she was bombed more than once, made several crossings, and towed casualties towards Dover and Ramsgate. Douglas-Watson was awarded a well deserved DSO for his work and left *Pangbourne* in September 1940.



<http://www.captantifer.org.uk/sweepers/textZA ZBZC.html>. By April 1941, he was on the books of HMS *Nile* in Alexandria, the headquarters of a number of Special Service naval parties in various roles around the Eastern Mediterranean. On 6th April, he was in the wrong place at the wrong time - Piraeus - and suffered the same sad fate as Buckler.

Both gallant OCs are buried near each other in Plot 4 in the same section of the carefully tended Commonwealth War Graves Commission field of remembrance, Phaleron War Cemetery, near Athens (*above right*).

But the tale does not stop here. A third OC lies in this cemetery; he was killed in an accident on 29th March 1941, a week before the Great Piraeus Explosion. Flying Officer Frederick Redfearn Ainley (29-31) RAF, a pilot in 69 Squadron flying Marylands (*left*) on strategic reconnaissance missions, is also interred in Phaleron. An Old Boy of Birkenhead Institute before entering Conway, he was no doubt one of the many young Merchant Navy deck officers who joined the



RAF during difficult employment times in the Thirties. His death was also reported in the New Zealand press, inferring that he had resided there, although his next of kin, his wife, is shown as living in Bebbington, Cheshire.