

DONALD BECKETT'S (39-41) WWII

I left *Conway* in December 1941 and joined the Navy as a midshipman RNR on January 1942. My first ship was HMS *Rodney* on convoy duty in the Atlantic and thence the 1942 convoy to Malta. Dunfermline for repairs and Scapa Flow for a while. Back to the Med., for the North African landings. *Rodney* bombarded the forts at Oran. Back at Gibraltar I was transferred an Italian liner *Duilo* as assistant to an Lieutenant RNR.

When allied troops re-occupied Ethiopia the British and Italian Governments agreed to evacuate thousands of Italian families via South Africa. The ship was controlled by a fascist commissioner and staff. During the passage Mussolini was defeated. I was landed at Malta on 3rd Sept 1943 and witnessed the surrender of the Italian fleet.

From Malta I was transferred to Gibraltar where I was employed by the under-water party with Lt Bailey RNVR and "Buster" Crabb (ex-*Conway*) and made dives on the hulls of ships, especially troop ships. *Oltterra* was towed out of Algeceiras. An escape door had been fitted to enable the frogmen to enter Gibraltar Bay.

In November 1943 I was transferred to the Italian 6" gun cruiser *Duca d'Aosta* as liaison and proceeded to Freetown for patrolling in mid-Atlantic.

In June 1944 *Duca d'Aosta* returned to Italy and I was transferred to Italian destroyer *Velite*.

In August 1944 I returned to normal service and joined HMS *Blackmore* (a Hunt class destroyer). Kierans (eventually of *Amethyst*) joined, in command and after overhaul in Sheerness and service in Scapa and the North Sea she was stationed in Trincomalee for the Burma campaign.

At the surrender of Singapore, *Blackmore* led the fleet instead of a fleet destroyer as we were expendable in case of mines!

I witnessed the official surrender.

In November 1945 I was transferred to *LST 331* and carried Indian troops from India to Sumatra. We evacuated Dutch families and local Ambonese from Padang then loaded a cargo of rice for Thailand. Transferred again to a British LST for passage to the UK.

I was demobilised at Chatham where I played rugby briefly for RN/RM Chatham.