

RON ASHBY.



Ron Ashby was born in 1910 and brought up in Watford where his family were directors of Benskin's brewery. He was educated at King's, Canterbury where he was captain of cricket and rugby although he said his educational qualifications were "nil". At the age of 19 he had a big row with his father - they never spoke again - packed his bags and got on a train. Lots of young men have done that in the past but this one was the Trans Siberian Express! He ended up in Canton, where he worked for Deacon and Co and then for Dodwell and co, who were a big firm of Far East merchants, similar to Jardines. They were also Far East agents for the Canadian Pacific Railway. He said his job was "selling Dodge trucks" but in fact he was head of their motor division, selling military vehicles to the Chinese Army. He had a large bungalow on the cliffs above Stanley bay and had also lived and worked in Swatow, Foochow, Shanghai and Amoy. As a result he spoke 4 Chinese dialects.

His passion was wild fowling and they used to spend weekends up in the marshes of the New Territories, based on a house-boat called Morning Flight. He also had a small gaff cutter and was a member of the RHKYC. As such in 1934 he was one of the founders of the HKRNVR, which was sponsored by the club. Later on in the "Imperial" RNVR, officers had to have sea time and training before being commissioned, but such as Ashby and Kennedy were known as "yachtsmen" and got their training on the job! They also both went on to win the Volunteer Reserve Decoration, for more than 20 years in the RNVR.

When he got back to England he was 1st lieutenant of a steam gun boat, under Sir Peter Scott, and went on to form up and command the 33rd MTB flotilla of brand new Fairmile "Dog boats". They were soon sent to the Med, as part of a convoy, at slow speed and were shelled by U boats in the Bay of Biscay. Ashby ordered the flotilla to "crash start" and they flew off in all directions in the dark at high speed. The U boats, finding themselves in the middle of a hornet's nest, crash dived. They later picked up about 20 survivors who turned out to come from 2 different U boats who had collided in the panic dive. When they got to Gibraltar his claim for the "kills" was refused, as the boats were stripped out for the long voyage and were not fitted with any weapons!

After Italy he was transferred to Calcutta, where he became senior officer, coastal forces, in the Arakan campaign for the re-taking of Burma and as such, was one of the few RNVR officers to reach the rank of acting Captain. He had 8 flotillas of Fairmile "B" ML's (65 boats) with all their attendant landing craft and support ships. The MLs' depot and maintenance ship was the old Heinrich Jesson, the ship on which they had escaped from Rangoon in 1942 and now named HMIS Barracuda. They were all very proud that this, the last civilian ship to leave Hong Kong, Singapore, Rangoon and Akyab in 1941/2 was thus the first to sail back into Akyab, Rangoon and Singapore when they were re-taken in 1945.

After the war he commanded the radar trials ship HMS Boxer and the depot ship HMS Duncansby Head, which he was on board when son Vaughan was born in a

nursing home in London. In 1947 he bought a boatyard on the Norfolk Broads, called Hearts Cruisers, and also bought a 72ft MGB which they converted as a house-boat, and lived aboard for the next 41 years. The boat was called Morning Flight in memory of the boat that he used for duck shooting before the war in Hong Kong. He also became chairman of Blakes Holidays, the famous boat letting agency.

His passion was still shooting and in the 60's he became known as probably the best game shot in Norfolk. In 1988 he moved to a house in the countryside where he spent a pleasant retirement until he died aged 87, just a couple of years after he and Eileen had celebrated their golden wedding.

Vaughan Ashby