

ROBERT WILLIAM CHRISTOPHER

Leading Signaller, Royal Navy

Born 31st October 1919 Poole Dorset and died 1995 Poole Dorset.

Joined Royal Navy 1937 at Victory Barracks as a Signaller. Service Number
on leaving RN P/SSX 23317

(By Ken Sutton: When Bob joined the RN his official number would have probably been P/JX 23317. However, in 1943 the Admiralty decided to change the numbering system and Bob's PJX became P/SSX.

P = Portsmouth

SS = Seaman and Communicators

X = denoted that he was serving for 7 years in the Royal Navy plus 5 years on the books of the RNR

(For more information on Official Numbers it is recommended that you take a look at [http://www.godfreydykes.info/ROYAL NAVY OFFICIAL NUMBERS \[RATINGS\].htm](http://www.godfreydykes.info/ROYAL NAVY OFFICIAL NUMBERS [RATINGS].htm))

Service Record:

HMS Ark Royal	1938 to	Mar 1940
HMS Atherstone	1940 to	Late 1942
HMS Betony	1943 to	1945

(By Ken Sutton: The following is a transcript from a short diary kept by Bob whilst serving on HMS Ark Royal.)

1939.

3rd Sept

Scapa Flow.

1100

Great Britain declared war on Germany. We were on patrol at the time in the North Atlantic. In company with the Home Fleet, the object being to intercept German Raiders etc. Several merchant vessels were captured including *SS Hannah Boge* (by *HMS Somali*) and *SS Westernland* (by *HMS Boreas*).

Several submarines detected by ASDIC but no actual results of depth charging. Had been keeping look out for the *Bremen* but no sign of her. British *SS Athenia* torpedoed 200 miles off north west coast of Ireland by German Sub, 1400 passengers.

Monday 4th September

Carried on patrolling about 800 miles from west coast of Scotland.

Tuesday 5th September

Patrolling, on passage back to Scapa. German Fleet reported left Willemshaven. RAF bombed *Deutschland*, *Graf Spee* and *Admiral Scheer* at Willemshaven. Scored hits on *Admiral Sheer*.

Two German reconnaissance aircraft sighted over Scapa. Reports received that 800 German bombers preparing to attack Fleet.

Wednesday 6th September

0800 Entered harbour to complete with fuel. Closed up at action stations several times, when aircraft sighted, but in most cases aircraft were friendly.

1800 One enemy bomber came over and we opened fire but he was flying at 14,000 feet, so did not hit him but he sheered off.

Thursday 7th September

0600 Sailed from Scapa on a course 050 degrees, object being to patrol between Norway and Scotland. One of the screening destroyers made contact with a submarine and dropped depth charges. Ran into thick fog about 1230.

1600 HMS *Faulknor* contacted a submarine on our starboard side and a torpedo was observed making towards *Ark Royal*. This was evaded and charges dropped on the sub, which was destroyed.

Friday 8th September - North Sea

Steaming along in bad weather, blowing half a gale. *Hood*, *Belfast*, *Edinburgh* and *Renown* have been detached to carry out full calibre firings between Iceland and Faeroes. Now about 600 miles from Norwegian coast. Very rough seas. Nothing sighted.

2100 Now about 80 miles north of Norway

Saturday 9th September

Humber Force yesterday and today trying to intercept a convoy of 9 German merchantmen bound Rotterdam to Hamburg under escort.

Carried on patrolling north of Norway and then down the coast, just outside territorial waters.

1130 Only ship sighted was small Norwegian *SS Island* bound for Augesmund. Learnt later that 2 German merchantmen who had been trying to dodge us were run aground in the fjords. Very bad weather, blowing a gale and very cold.

Sunday September 10th - North Sea to Scapa Flow

Heard that *SS Goodwood* had been torpedoed 1 mile off Flamboro Head and sunk but crew of 23 saved. Also report that master of *SS King Arthur* had sighted a large vessel resembling *Europa* in Breman steering north at high speed in Lat 70 degs 10' N 16 degrees 05' E.

1500 Investigated a Swedish merchant ship who was allowed to proceed.

1600 Screening destroyer hoisted signal for "Sub in sight starboard side" but this proved to be a buoy.

2000 Arrived in the Flow and anchored.

Monday 11th - Scapa Flow

Fuelling and taking in stores. Air anti submarine search has been arranged. Aircraft and destroyers co-operating.

March 19th 1940

Joined *Atherstone* at Birkenhead

Easter Sunday

0800 Sailed from Birkenhead to Portsmouth

17/18th April - Anchored Yarmouth

19th April - Anchored Weymouth

20th April - Weymouth to Glasgow

May 1st - Arrived Firth of Clyde.

2:15pm French destroyer blew up and sank at 8:30pm. 60 killed

May 2nd - Escorted convoy of 11 liners to Scapa.

May 3rd - Arrived Scapa

May 5th - Sailed from Scapa. Anti Submarine patrol. between Faroes and Orkneys

May 9th - Arrived Scapa

May 12th - ????????????

May 19th - Arrived Lerwick, Shetlands

May 29th - Arrived Scapa

May 30th - arrived Rosyth

May 31st - Rosyth to Immingham area (minelaying)

The following are the convoys that HMS BETONY escorted during the period Bob served on her.

DATE CONVOY SAILED	DATE JOINED CONVOY AS ESCORT	CONVOY NUMBER	LEFT CONVOY	DATE CONVOY ARRIVED	REMARKS
16/11/1943	16/11/1943	OS 059KM	28/11/1943	28/11/1943	Liverpool to Freetown/Gibraltar - convoy splits. BETONY escorts Gibraltar convoy
28/11/1943	28/11/1943	KMS 033G	29/11/1943	29/11/1943	Liverpool to Gibraltar - after splitting from Freetown convoy.
29/11/1943	29/11/1943	KMS 033	09/12/1943	09/12/1943	Gibraltar to Port Said
04/02/1944	06/02/1944	CJ 015	12/02/1944	12/02/1944	Calcutta to Colombo
19/02/1944	21/02/1944	CJ 017	27/02/1944	27/02/1944	Calcutta to Colombo
01/03/1944	07/03/1944	BM 087A	09/03/1944	11/03/1944	Bombay to Colombo
21/03/1944	21/03/1944	MB 069A	25/03/1944	25/03/1944	Colombo to Bombay
29/03/1944	29/03/1944	BM 091A	02/04/1944	02/04/1944	Bombay to Colombo
12/07/1944	14/07/1944	CJ 035	20/07/1944	20/07/1944	Calcutta to Colombo
22/07/1944	22/07/1944	RK 003	26/07/1944	02/08/1944	Colombo t Kilindini
22/08/1944	22/08/1944	HC 066	25/08/1944	25/08/1944	Calcutta to Chittagong
24/08/1944	24/08/1944	CH 038	26/08/1944	26/08/1944	Chittagong to Calcutta
31/08/1944	02/09/1944	CJ 040	07/09/1944	07/09/1944	Calcutta to Colombo
28/09/1944	28/09/1944	MB 078C	02/10/1944	02/10/1944	Colombo to Bombay
08/10/1944	08/10/1944	BP 118A	14/10/1944	14/10/1944	Bombay to Bandar Abbas
17/10/1944	17/10/1944	PB 085A	20/10/1944	20/10/1944	Bandar Abbas to Karachi
<p>Compiled by Ken Sutton using information taken from http://www.naval-history.net/xDKEscorts20Cor-modFlower1.htm and arrival/departure dates taken from http://www.convoyweb.org.uk/hague/index.html</p>					

The following is an extract from Lieutenant Commander Edward Walker - VRD, RNR Rtd internet blog. The extract covers the period Robert served in HMS BETONY. The full story can be found at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/49/a8613849.shtml>

My next appointment at the end of June was to HMS "Betony" an improved Flower Class Corvette fitted out in Aberdeen. She carried the additional armament of a Hedgehog ahead throwing weapon of which there were high hopes at the time. For the first two of three weeks we were living ashore in digs and my wife was able to join me for a while. However, once we had Commissioned, life became hectic as the majority of the ship's company were very green — in fact for quite a number it was their first time at sea. We were ordered to proceed to Tobermory on the Isle of Mull where the Commodore HMS "Western Isles" and his team were waiting to subject us to an intense 10 days "Working up" period of training. (Richard Baker's book "The Terror of Tobermory" gives an excellent account of what life was like during that period).

In due time we joined an ad hoc Escort Force to take a Convoy from the Clyde to Alexandria, calling at Gibraltar on the way. The only untoward incident on this voyage was the death of our Coxwain, who, on being taken ill was transferred to a ship with medical facilities. He was buried at sea, ships in near company dipping Ensigns and stopping engines for a brief moment as a mark of respect.

On arrival at Alexandria we were berthed alongside HMS "Caradoc" an old C Class Cruiser doing duty as a Depot ship. We remained for several days allowing the odd run ashore, then through the Suez Canal and independently down the Red sea to Aden arriving late on Christmas Eve, with many of the ship's company gathered around the Bridge singing carols — very nostalgic.

I had now been promoted to First Lieutenant an advancement which I found challenging, but one which I thoroughly enjoyed.

Our next task was to accompany HMS “ Woolwich “ a Destroyer Depot ship and also a floating dock which was being towed by tugs from the UK . Both were bound for Trincomalee on the East coast of Ceylon . (the floating dock was to have a later impact on my wartime experience) .

Several days into our journey we suffered a mechanical breakdown which left us without propulsive power and initially we were left to our own devices while the engine room staff tackled the problem . A somewhat eerie experience for we were a sitting target had there been enemy around , which of course was a possibility . Some hours later “ Woolwich “ took pity and came back , taking us in tow by means of an excellent piece of seamanship . We laid out a shackle of cable with the anchor attached to act as a “spring” , but some time later the tow parted and we were left with the task of recovering the anchor and cable before the tow could be passed again .

This was easier said than done for our windlass was defective and kept slipping so that we would haul in — say 6 links of cable and loose three . However the job was done some hours later , meanwhile the erring mechanical parts had been dealt with in “ Woolwich’s “ workshops . WE went on our way rejoicing and in due course reached our destination and base , Colombo .

The next few months are something of a jumble in my mind , for small convoys up and down the East Coast of India were interrupted with two short spells in hospital and a few days leave in a rest camp in the hills at Diyatalawa (first used as a POW camp for Boers and then used as an Army Training Camp — it is still in use) . This leave also included a visit to a tea plantation .

During one of my spells in hospital I was accommodated in a four bedded side ward and on night duty we found that we were looked after by a very attractive VAD . Each night we required of her a Fairy Story before she turned out the lights . (Her wedding photo after the war was given some prominence in the “ Tatler “)

During one of our Convoy trips we put into Viskhapatnam for stores . These were brought to us by a British Army Officer (probably RASC) who told us he was seconded to the Indian Army and further seconded to the RIN . He was invited to dine but said that his wife was with him . The invitation was immediately extended to her as well . As the appointed hour approached we learnt that he was attired in full Mess dress and she in full evening dress . We just had time to change and match their appearance . (I cannot remember another occasion on which I wore Mess dress while serving in Corvettes . The evening was a great success .

On one discharge from hospital I was told that “ Betony “ was at sea but would call in at Bombay where I was ordered to rejoin her by taking passage in an Australian Sloop . On enquiring what duties I would undertake , the CO said he would be very glad if I would sort out the Wardroom Wine books ! a task which kept me fully occupied during the voyage . Several days followed with routine duties in RN Barracks — mainly reading Punishment Warrants and watching what was to all intents and purposes , first class cricket at the Cricket Club of India . (I still have the scorecard which features inter alia Major Jardine and Sgt. Hardstaff) .

I learnt that “ Betony “ was nowhere near Bombay but had returned to Base at Colombo where I rejoined her by means of a four day train journey via Madras which I found interesting .

I have said that during the first months of 1944 my memory of exact detail is hazy , but , checking records it must have been sometime between 27th January and 1st February that I had my first sight of a Battlecruiser HMS “ Renown “ in Colombo Harbour and on her way to join the strengthened Eastern Fleet and wearing the Flag of the Vice-Admiral Sir John Power . The ship that was to give me my happiest two years afloat .

I was seated in the stern sheets of a harbour launch returning from shore to "Betony". The launch passed down the length of "Renown" and at once I became entranced with her elegance and grace. Early in May the Medical people decided that I should leave "Betony" and be appointed to a ship carrying a doctor and I was told that there was a shortage of watch keeping Officers in the Fleet Destroyers — which after my previous service as an Officer I found somewhat daunting. By the end of the month I had received an appointment to "Renown" and I was horrified. However a Master at Arms who was present reassured me "Don't worry Sir, I served in her in 1927, she was a happy ship then and will be a happy ship now". How correct he was.

Mention in Despatches.

Lieutenant-Commander Lawrence St. George Rich,
Royal Navy.
Temporary Sub-Lieutenant Percival Frank Pallot,
R.N.V.R.
Mr. Pearson Rodney Tiffin, Commissioned
Engineer, Royal Navy.
Chief Petty Officer Harold Edgar Brown,
D/J.30606.
Acting Chief Petty Officer Gordon William Munn,
D/JX. 144643.
Petty Officer Frank Harvey Leslie Croucher,
P/JX.139401.
Yeoman of Signals Kenneth Howard Baker,
P/J-H457&-

Stoker Petty Officer Robert Keeling, P/K. 66794.
Leading Signalman Walter Cook, D/JX. 129929.
Able Seaman Denis Stanislaus Horton, C/JX.
133892.
Able Seaman Frederick Howell, D/JX.127220.
Stoker First Class Leonard Glanville, D/KX. 115713.
Officer's Cook First Class Albert William John
Harvey, D/L. 14325.
Cook (S) James Livingstone, P/MX.79949.

For bravery and devotion to duty:

*To be a Companion of the Distinguished
Service Order:*

Lieutenant-Commander Edward Albert George
Davis, R.N.R.

For courage and enterprise in air attacks
against Enemy Submarines, while serving in
H.M.S. Argus:

*To be a Companion of the Distinguished
Service Order:*

Lieutenant - Commander Gerald Alexander
Llewellyn Woods, Royal Navy.

The Distinguished Service Cross.

Lieutenant Basil Edward Boulding, Royal . Navy.
Lieutenant (A) Philip Henley Phillips, R.N.V.R.
Lieutenant (A) Leslie Charles Plummer, R.N.V.R.
Sub-Lieutenant (A) Paul McQuhae Wilkinson, Royal
Navy.

The Distinguished Service Medal.

Petty Officer Arthur Granger Brown, FAA/F. 55063.
Petty Officer Airman Philip Douglas Lee Reason,
B.E.M., FAA/FX.77517. Temporary Leading Airman
Henry John Oppenheim, FAA/SFX.827.

Mention in Despatches.

Chief Petty Officer Air Fitter (E) Francis Joseph
Taylor, FAA/F.55140.
Air Artificer Fourth Class Jack Henry James
Flanagan, FAA/FX.75868.
Leading Air Fitter Clifford Roy Bounds,
FAA/FX.77772.
Leading Air Fitter Claude Raymond Jarvis,
FAA/FX.81381.
Air Fitter Frederick Marshall, FAA/SFX.997. Air
Mechanic First Class Robert William Ellison Swales,
FAA/FX.79619.
Air Mechanic Stanley George Cassey,
FAA/FX.75751.
Air Mechanic Henry Grundy, FAA/FX.75787. Air
Mechanic Patrick Keohane, FAA/FX. 79743-

For courage, endurance and devotion to duty
while Minesweeping in H.M. Ships Hussar, Leda,

Bramble, Speedy, Gossamer and Seagull:

The Distinguished Service Cross.

Commander Alan David Hastings Jay, Royal Navy.

Lieutenant John Geoffrey Brookes, Royal Navy.

The Distinguished Service Medal.

Chief Petty Officer Cornelius Stephen Collins, "D/J.
30396.

Leading Seaman Henry Mitchell, P/JX. 139776.

Mention in Despatches.

Lieutenant - Commander Thomas Crosbie Crease,
Royal Navy.

Lieutenant - Commander Charles Harington
Pollock, Royal Navy.

Chief Engine Room Artificer Major Richard Arthur
Sowter, D/MX.48275.

Engine Room Artificer Third Class Thomas Leslie
West, D/MX.54393.

For coolness and skill in action against Enemy
aircraft and Supply ships while serving in H.M.S.
Atherstone and H.M.T. Cornelian:

The Distinguished Service Medal.

Ordnance Artificer Third Class Joseph Sidaway
McKinlay, P/MX.55968.

Able Seaman David Chalmers, P/SSX.30995.

Mention in Despatches.

Lieutenant-Commander Robert Fergus Jenks, Royal
Navy.

Lieutenant John Merryn Atkinson Fairbank, Royal
Navy.

Temporary Lieutenant Douglas Bond Symons,
R.C.N.V.R.

Mr. John Darroll Vickerstaff, Gunner, Royal Navy.

Mr. Lester Drew Gearson, Warrant Engineer, Royal
Navy.

Leading Signalman Robert William Christopher,
P/SSX.23317.

Able Seaman Reginald William Turner,
P/JX.138616.

Seaman Frank Charles Butler, LT / JX. 240843.

Seaman Frederick Ernest Nicholson, LT/JX.
176755-

For courage and enterprise when H.M.T.
Milford Earl was sunk:

The Distinguished Service Cross.

Temporary Lieutenant Francis Roger Derek Corbett,
R.N.V.R.

The Distinguished Service Medal.

Telegraphist Leonard Edward Welch, D / WRX. 401,
R.N.V.(W)R.