

AGASS, FRANK

RANK: REGIMENTAL SERGEANT MAJOR

DECORATIONS: BEM

YEARS OF SERVICE: 1936? – LATE 1960's?

SHIPS: HMS IRON DUKE, HMS FIJI, HMS BERWICK

OPERATIONAL SERVICE: WW11, MEDITERRANEAN, CRETE EVACUATION, RUSSIAN CONVOYS

UNITS: POST WAR COMMANDO SERVICE: 42 & 45 COMMANDO's, HQ 3 COMMANDO BRIGADE, OPERATIONS NOT MENTIONED, FLEET RSM

Born in East London in 1920, one of 10 children, Frank left school at 14. He joined the Royal Marines and carried out his training at Eastney Barracks in the mid-1930's. His description of life and training within the barracks at that time is most evocative. Life was ruled by 20 bugle calls a day. Every man in his squad, apart from him, would die later with the sinking of HMS HOOD.

After Naval Gunnery training, he joined the light cruiser HMS FIJI, which carried out convoy duties before supporting the defence of Crete. In May 1941 ship was torpedoed and Frank, found himself blown into the sea with shipmates dying around him.

He was then drafted to HMS BERWICK, an escort on the Russian Convoys. Frank declared these diabolical trips were the worst time of his life. The Scapa Flow to Murmansk convoys were freezing, dangerous and pitiless. He describes what he saw when ashore in Russia, the local's dreadful lifestyle and their shocking handling of German prisoners. Frank was full of praise for the Royal Marine Bandsmen on board, their professionalism within the Naval Gunnery system.

After the war Frank served some time in London and then had to attend the Commando Course, which he admits, at his age nearly killed him. His grit and experience prevailed, and he was promoted Sergeant Major, then RSM, and served in 42, 45 Commando and 3 Commando Brigade Headquarters. He thoroughly enjoyed his time in the Commando Brigade but felt he reached pinnacle as Fleet RSM, back in the Royal Navy Ships where he had started.