

The Man behind the Medal

Able-Seaman W. N. Finlay

Group of Five – 1939-45 Star; Atlantic Star (Clasp – France & Germany); Burma Star (Clasp – Pacific);
War Medal; French Legion of Honour Medal



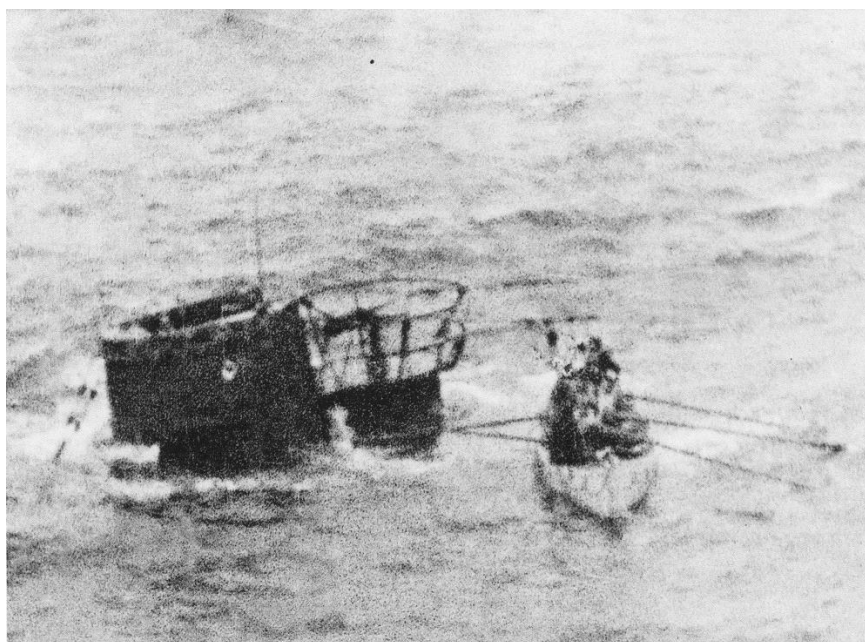
I was very privileged to attend the 100th birthday of William McNaught Finlay who was born on 19 February 1922. Better known to his friends as Bill and to his children as William (hereafter fondly referred to as Bill).

Bill was born in Glasgow, Scotland and after completing his schooling he worked in the office of a local cabling company. In 1940, having turned 18 he was called up for service in the Royal Navy, and was with the Navy until the end of the war in 1945.

He entered service in Portsmouth and after completing his training on HMS Drake, was posted to HMS Fame. HMS Fame was an F-class destroyer built for the Royal Navy during the 1930s. After running aground in 1940, when repairs were completed in early 1942, Fame was converted into an escort destroyer and was assigned to escort duties in the North Atlantic. She sank two German submarines before she was transferred back to British coastal waters in May 1944.



Picture: HMS Fame



Picture: Taken from the deck of HMS Fame – by Bill Finlay – of a captured German Submarine

In April 1942 Bill was posted to HMS Osprey, an anti-submarine training establishment, which had been moved from Portland on the south coast of England, to Dunoon in Scotland, due to Portland becoming a prime target for the Luftwaffe. Bill spent three months in anti-submarine training before re-joining Fame. In June 1945 he was transferred to HMS Hart, which was a modified Black Swan-class sloop, and saw service in the Far East. Bill was present on Hart, at Rabaul on 6 September 1945, for the formal surrender of Japanese forces, the surrender being signed on board HMS Glory. HMS Glory was a Colossus-class aircraft carrier of the British Royal Navy and was commissioned on 2 April 1945. Glory immediately left for the Pacific, joining the 11th Aircraft Carrier Squadron of the British Pacific Fleet as the war was ending.



After the surrender, Bill spent some time in Hong Kong, before returning to the UK. He was 'demobbed' in April 1946.

In 1944, whilst on HMS Fame Bill was part of the convoy involved in the D-Day landings, Fame protecting the troop carrying vessels from German submarine attack. Many years after the war he was made aware, that having been part of the D-Day landings, he was entitled to the French Legion of Honour Medal. At a proud, lavish ceremony in 2018 this was awarded to him, at the French Embassy in Johannesburg, South Africa.



Bill, his wife Nan, daughter Eileen and son Ian emigrated to South Africa from Scotland in 1953 and he enjoyed a long successful career with African Cables. Bill was always an active man and he played tennis until back problems forced him to give up the sport. He played golf at The Wanderers, often 'shooting his age', a rare feat for golfers.

I have known 'Mr. Finlay' since the 1960's having been a friend of his son Ian since school days. Together with my wife we visit Mr. Finlay regularly and, being interested in military matters, it is totally absorbing when he relates stories of his day in the Navy during the war years. He can recall absolutely what happened at any one time and relates to how they captured a submarine, only to find that the Germans managed to sink it before any action on their part could be taken. He is passionate about his time in the Navy, passionate about his support for Rangers Football Club, and speaks often about his support for his son, now living in Australia, who played semi-professional football for a top club in South Africa, Highlands Park.



Mr Finlay, his son Ian and myself at his 100th Birthday Celebrations

There have been many highlights in Bill's life to date, but he eagerly awaits the letter that all one hundred year old, British citizens, receive from the Queen.

He is now waiting for the opportunity to reciprocate – to write a congratulatory letter to the Queen on her one hundredth birthday.

REMEMBER to keep an eye on our website (www.battletoursza.com) - for regular articles, updates, etc.

Allan Gordon