**ALDWELL Basil Willington**

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| **Name: Basil Willington Aldwell**  **Born: 23 April 1920**  **Rank: Lieutenant**  **Service Number: FAAFX84758**  **Unit/Regiment: 810 Squadron, Fleet Air Arm, Royal Navy**  **Died: May 1996** |  |

**Pre-War:**

Tony, as he was always known, was derived from the TON at the end of Willington. Tony was born to Frederick Basil and Edith in Aghalee, County Antrim, Ireland. His parents moved to Belfast and in later years he became a student at Trinity College, Dublin.

**Wartime experience:**

On 20 November 1940, he joined the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserves (RNVR) In 1942, Tony became a Temporary Sub-Lieutenant in the Fleet Air Arm; in September 1943 he served with 797 Squadron in Ceylon, becoming a Lieutenant in 1944, before being transferred to the 810 Squadron on HMS Illustrious (aircraft carrier). The 810 Squadron was equipped with Fairy Barracuda 11 (mark 2) aircraft. HMS Illustrious, accompanied by heavy cover provided by Task Force 60, took part in Operation Pedal, which set sail on 19 June 1945. At that time the aircraft carrier was the only one operational in the British Pacific Fleet. On 21 June 1945, 45 miles west of Port Blair in the Andaman Islands, 15 Barracuda and 16 Corsair aircraft were launched. Of the Barracuda aircraft that reached their target, only one was shot down – Tony’s. Together with his Observer, Sub-Lieutenant Robert Michael Gunther and Air Gunner Charles Clifford Rogers, the three men were captured and incarcerated in the Andaman Jail for interrogation. In July 1945, they were moved to Singapore and then transported to Ofuna, Tokyo for further interrogation, which was not registered with the Red Cross, so from the day he was shot down until the day he was liberated his parents just knew he was ‘missing, presumed dead’. Ofuna had an awful reputation, as it was the Japanese Naval Interrogation Centre, used for interrogation and excessive torture on selected POWs. The POWs incarcerated there consisted mostly of officers and any men who were submariners or airmen.

All three men, Tony, Robert Gunther and Charles Rogers were in Ofuna together until on 5 April 1944, Charles Rogers was moved to Omori.

The Japanese Guards found out that Tony was the son of a clergyman, so made him take the funeral services for the prisoners that had died. Tony was not happy about this, as he was not ordained and didn’t feel it was a ‘right and proper thing to do’.

Tony remained there until liberation in August 1945. His name appears on the roster of 135 men liberated from that camp, together with only one of his comrades – Robert Gunther. When Tony was liberated, according to American records compiled at the time, he was suffering from malnutrition and Beri-Beri. *( Source of information; Roger Mansell's site, and David Hobbs book on the British Pacific Fleet.)*

Tony was taken to Auckland, New Zealand, to recuperate on the HMS Tjijalengka and was a patient in Acklend Hospital where the medics told him that, due to his treatment by the Japanese, his life had been shortened by 10 years. Eventually, he arrived home on 8 January 1946 aboard the SS Aquitania.

The United States Eight Army Commission, on the evidence of Commander K (Killer) Kane, sentenced Katsua Kohara, a guard of Ofuna, to five years hard labour for beating Tony and the maltreatment of prisoners under his control.

**Civilian life after return:**

On his return home, Tony spoke with his father about his having to take funerals and how he didn’t think it had been the ‘right’ thing to do. His father reassured him that he had done nothing wrong and that he had been right to do what he had. Tony was affected so badly by his experiences as a Prisoner of War that he found it difficult to hold a job down until 1950, when he got a job in research for Short and Harland.

Tony met and married Hilda Patricia Thompson in October 1953 and subsequently had 3 children, Penny (1954), Susan (1956) and James (1960). During the 1960s he had a yacht’s chandlers in Bangor and also had a farme on the shores of Strangford Lough, which mainly consisted of pedigree Herefords and fattened lambs.

He was a sailing man all his life and twice won the Alison Craig race with his yacht Bonnet Rouge and, also went cruising round Scotland and Ireland with his yacht Helen.

On retirement, during the 1970s, they moved to Guernsey where he became the proud owner of a speed boat.

Sadly, Tony passed away in May 1996 at the age of 76.

Of his crew, only this is known at the moment:-

Robert Michael Gunther’s nickname was Stumpy, his family called him Michael as Robert was his father’s name.

Charles Clifford Roger survived the war, he married and became a policeman – they didn’t have any children.

***The above information and wording has been provided by Penny Grant (daughter) and additional information has been provided by Keith Andrews, COFEPOW Head of Research.***