

John Alexander Cruickshank VC

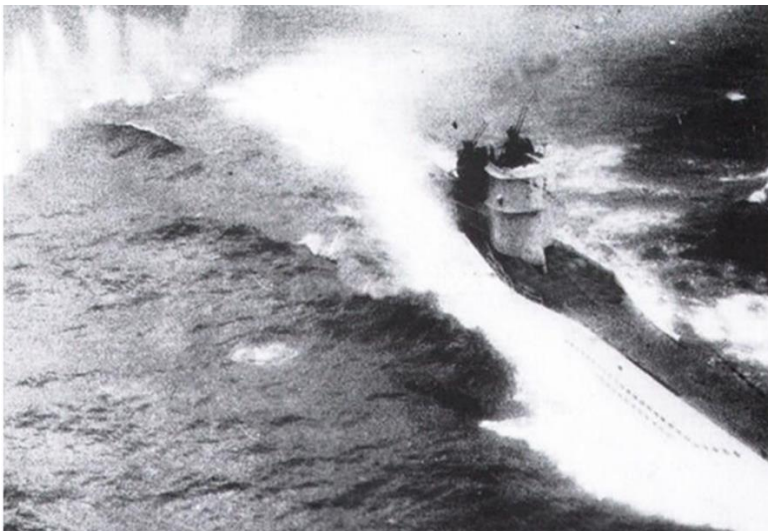
Pooler Sends Very Special Happy 100th Birthday Wishes to John Alexander Cruickshank VC (b.20.05.1920)

In correspondence with Group Capt. Douglas Cook, who was the RAF Adviser for [Pooler Flying Boats Celebration](#), an ex-pilot from a Catalina Flying Boat, which was one of the dozen stationed at RAF Hamworthy in World War 2, recounted his story of arriving-back & alighting safely at Pooler Harbour after an exhausting Bay of Biscay Patrol.

He told of the transfer of his aircrew by a small dinghy to the base at Lake, and a quick unpacking session before the journey to Salterns Pier by RAF Launch for a debriefing at 210 Squadron's HQs in the ex-Pooler Harbour Club. Then clambering on an old bone-shaker of a bicycle which had been issued to him, to make his way to the Mess, but having to endure a bumpy, arduous ride up Lilliput Hill & Bingham Ave., etc. towards Harbour Heights Hotel. Next a 'welcome' wash & brush-up at his Quarters in the neighbouring Harbour Court, with a change of uniform, to join fellow officers enjoying the meal served by BOAC Stewards, who had been recruited from pre-war Liners. The year was 1943, and although 'Harbour Heights' had been requisitioned by the RAF it was shared with BOAC. Both outfits had awaited the full opening of the FB Hub which had depended upon a rebuild of the Salterns Pier. Just a couple of months after the opening of Salterns, the incumbent Coastal Command's Squadron of RAAF 461 (known as the 'Anzac Squadron' due its formation on Anzac Day 25th Apr. 1942) equipped with 9 Sunderland FBs was relocated to RAF Pembroke Dock & switched over with RAF 210 Squadron with Catalinas, in mid-April 1943.

Meanwhile, the pilot who *endured his bike rides* was [F/O John Alexander Cruickshank](#), who after his stint at Pooler continued his service on 210 Squadron (which had re-formed at Sullom Voe in the Shetlands), against the U-Boats. Although he flew his Catalina FB into Arctic Waters, the Shetland Isles were nearer to his home port of Aberdeen, where he'd worked in banking - a career to which he would return postwar, eventually becoming a Bank Manager. After the Army in WW2 he joined the RAF in 1941 and completed flight training programmes in Canada + the USA.

By the 17th July 1944, when on [JV928](#) with the Squadron Code [Y](#), in the course of his [48th Mission](#), an opportunity arose to challenge a U-Boat ([U361](#)) which appeared on radar before being spotted through fog + low cloud when running on the surface. Unfortunately, during the initial attack which took the enemy by surprise, depth charges failed to explode and so alerted the U-boat crew to be ready to strafe Cruickshank's Catalina on its second sortie: Flak hit the aircraft's nose killing the Navigator FO John Dickson & badly injuring the front gunner Paddy Harbison, Cruickshank then pressed home the attack by taking aim himself, to drop 6 more depth charges to straddle [U361](#).



Doomed [U361](#) being straddled by depth charges when under attack from [JV928/Y](#)

There were explosions on the stricken U-boat so that just after 20.00hrs in the Arctic night-light the Cat broke off some 300 miles off enemy occupied Norwegian Lofoten Is. with a return flight of *circa* 500 miles taking 5½ hours. In turning to head homewards, it was realised that Cruickshank as captain was badly injured with multiple wounds. On the point of collapse he was helped from the controls and carried aft to the one available bunk for the flight ! Amidst chocking cordite fumes the Aircrew struggled to put out various small fires that threatened the Catalina and Jack Garnett who had a badly wounded hand (that when bandaged barely staunches his blood), took charge.

The Crew on *JV928/Y* had been: FO John Alexander Cruickshank, F/Sgt. Jack Garnett, PO John 'Dickie' Dickson
Type IVA Catalina (PBY-5A) F/Sgt. John Appleton, Sgt. Ian Fidler (- a novice), F/Eng. S.B. 'Paddy' Harbison
 F/Sgt. H. Gershenson, F/Sgt. Al Gregan, WOps W.C. Jenkins, Sgt. R.S.C Proctor



Catalina Flying Boat *JV928* on 210 Squadron with FO John Alexander Cruickshank at the controls

Lapsing in and out of consciousness, Cruickshank refused morphine medication, so that he could be a 2nd. Pilot, ready to bring the Catalina in, to make a safe alighting upon the waters just off Sullom Voe, then to be beached. He was in command when the aircraft touched down... with sadly one crew member dead and 6 others injured. *John Alexander Cruickshank Thankfully recovered despite 72 notable wounds - but did not fly operationally again. Most had been puncture wounds, including to both lungs and 10 in the lower limbs...* (Ref.: Seymour + Balderson, 1999)

On 21st Sept. 1944, still aged only 24, he was presented with the award of the Victoria Cross by King George VI at Holyrood Palace, Edinburgh, alongside F/Sgt. Jack Garnett who received a Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM).



Jack Garnett (left) and John Cruickshank in front of the North British Hotel, Edinburgh, after their medal investitures. *(John Cruickshank)*

FO John Alexander Cruickshank V.C.

When presenting the VC, King George VI asked him how was feeling now. "I am still a bit weak Sir," he replied... This response typifies his modesty in talking about his exploits, which is the essence of a truly brave gentleman. When he was unable to continue flying, the RAF used him in ambassadorial roles, touring factories + meetings. Today, John Alexander Cruickshank is the oldest surviving recipient of the VC - and *the treasured* Friend of PFBC.

by Aimée

Dedicated to PFBC's late Hon. Vice President Douglas Cook

Extra... *FO John Alexander Cruickshank and Crew of FP277/B when stationed at RAF Hamworthy, Poole and on detachment at Gibraltar*





Crew of [FP277/B](#) captained by FO Cruickshank from RAF Hamworthy detached at Gib. that damaged [U183](#) July 1943
Type Ib Catalina (PBY-5B) while on patrol to the west of Portugal, 0655-0000 on 7 July 1943

(After detachment at Gibraltar [FP277/B](#). captained by FO Cruickshank + crew, returned to RAF Hamworthy 7th. Aug.)

Sgt. Stockden	FO Coulson	FO Cruickshank	PO Dickson	Sgt. Appleton
F/Sgt. Harbison	WO Westby	F/Sgt. Wallis	F/Sgt. Smith	Sgt. Webster

(Crew Photo not did inc. Sgt. Regan) Photo by Bert Mitchell courtesy of Bill Balderson Pub. in Mike Seymour + Bill Balderson, 1999