

FRANCISZEK ANTONI RUMINSKI

Frank's war medals bear testament to his personal courage throughout the Second World War. The Polish ships he served on were at many of the major scenes of conflict - Dieppe, Sicily, Salerno, North Africa, Normandy, as well as accompanying many convoys across the Atlantic.

Frank never saw himself as a hero, just a young Polish lad caught up in the fight for his family's homeland. Although Frank was born in 1922 in eastern Germany and brought up in Northern France, his family were staunchly Polish, in common with the thousands of Polish families which made up the mining community in the area at that time. Polish schools and churches were well established with Polish teachers and priests integral to the lives of all the families. These economic migrants kept their language and traditions alive by founding Polish bands, choirs and sports teams, and so created their bit of Poland in a foreign land. Subsequently, when the Germans invaded France, some brave Polish men and women established their own Resistance Units to clandestinely disrupt German activities in the area.

So, just before the fall of Poland, Frank, together with many other young men from the area, did not hesitate to join the Polish Navy to defend their homeland against invasion. They were sent to Britain for basic training, and eventually in June 1940 Frank joined an all-Polish crew on board O.R.P. Burza, at Devonport, and later in April 1942 he joined O.R.P. Slazak, taking part, for nearly 3 years in many of the World War II conflicts.

Post war the Polish Navy was disbanded, and disillusioned with the outcome of the war for Poland, Frank found himself in O.R.P. Ballyk, the resettlement camp at Okehampton. At one of the dances there he met his future wife, Irena, who had also arrived in Britain from Northern France to serve in the Polish Navy. Irena, spent all her teenage years in France under the occupation of the Germans, but during this time was a courier for her Father, Casimir Szatny, the leader of a Polish Resistance group.

Frank and Irena married in 1947, had two children, and worked hard to learn English and to integrate into their newly adopted country. However at home only Polish was spoken until their daughter, Danusia, started to attend a local primary school in Devonport. Irena prepared Polish food, and Polish friends dropped in at weekends. They sang and danced to Polish polka music, which they played on an old record player. Once again Polish traditions were being kept alive in a foreign country!

After the War Frank's first job was with Mr Baskerville in Devonport, who owned a small bakery in Albert Road. Later he moved to work as a baker and confectioner for a well known Plymouth Quaker family firm called Goodbodys, whose bakery shop, snack bar, and restaurant was a well known eatery in New George Street in the 1960's and 1970's.

Frank and Irena were founder members of the Polish Eagle Club off Mutley Plain until its gradual demise just before Frank's death in 2005. Much of their social life was centred around the club, where most of the Polish community would congregate to swop stories over a glass or two of Polish vodka! Irena also joined the Polish Cultural Association, where she became a member of Krakoviac, a Polish folk dancing and singing group, where she enjoyed contributing

to many performances sung in Polish, and also spent many hours making Polish costumes for them.

Throughout his life Frank could never forget the friends and comrades who fell and died around him during the many engagements at sea in which the Burza and Slazak were involved. In memory of them, he proudly attended every Remembrance Day Parade, and for many years travelled to Dieppe to continue to commemorate his fallen comrades with other Polish survivors from Northern France.

He also felt very honoured when Captain Timinski from the Slazak, who had settled in Canada after the war, made several trips to visit Frank at his home in Plymouth. Frank was very proud of his role as Chief Steward to the Captain during the war, and during the Captain's visits their comradeship and high regard for each other was obvious.

Frank always took great pride in the achievements of his family, and in his twilight years particularly enjoyed watching his 4 grandchildren each gaining a place at University, and going on to establish successful careers. Successes which were made possible by the courage and sacrifice of brave men like Frank and his comrades.

Danielle Bennett - nee Danusia Ruminski