Francis Gess



Rank: - Stoker 1st Class

Number: - C/KX75268

Regiment: - Royal Navy H.M.S. Encounter (sunk in the second Battle of the Java Sea 1 Mar 1945).

Died: - Died of illness whilst a prisoner of war at Makassar Celebes, Indonesia 27/07/1945 Age: 37 years.

Cemetery: - Ambon War Cemetery, Indonesia 31.B.12

Francis was born on 10 November 1907, in Cardiff, the son of Son of Francis William and Sarah Ann Gess nee Strand who had married on 15 October 1903 at Bishop Auckland, Co. Durham. Alice Cecelia was born in 1904 followed by Sarah Ann 1906, Francis, William 1909, Joseph 1910, Ivor James 1912 and Patrick 1915.

On 25 November 1925 he joined the Navy for 12 years. His records show he had auburn hair, blue eyes and a fresh complexion, standing at 5’6”.

Francis married Alice Strand on 2 February 1935 at St. Peters Church, Birstall. Derek was born in January 1935 but only survived 4 days, followed by Patrick 1938 and Frances Denise in 1940. The family lived at 19, Leyland Road, Birstall.

Francis was assigned to HMS “Encounter”. On the 27 February 1942 it took part in the seven-hour Battle of the Java Sea. The destroyer Kortenaer was hit amidships at 17:13 pm by a torpedo from the Haguro, she broke in two and sank almost immediately, losing 59 men from her crew of 171. The destroyer HMS Encounter rescued 113 from the stricken vessel with one survivor later dying on board. The Battle of the Java Sea took the lives of 6,339 sailors, from both sides. On 1 March 1942 the HMS Encounter was scuttled by her own crew having been damaged by gun fire from the Japanese heavy cruisers Ashigara and Myoko in the Java Sea. Most of the crew were taken POW by the Japanese.

Francis was taken POW and died at Maccasar, Celebes of bacil dysentry and pellagra whilst a prisoner of war on 27 July 1945. Francis was awarded the 1939-45 Star; 1939-1945 War Medal.

He is remembered with Honour at Batley and Birstall War Memorials Addenda.



Researched by members of
Batley History Group