



Tales from the Boards *Author: Geoffrey Haskins (40-43)*

Continuing a series of tales culled from research into names inscribed on the Memorial and Honours Boards now located in the Conway Chapel at Birkenhead Priory. All the information has come from the public domain, including various web-sites and publications. Other sources are the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and London Gazette, together with numerous Associations and specialised sites.

A Greek Tragedy

On 6th April 1941 Allied ships in the port of Piraeus were discharging their cargoes of ammunition, explosives and stores to support hard-pressed troops stemming an advancing German army when enemy Stuka aircraft, based in Bulgaria, bombed the port and scored three direct hits on SS *Clan Fraser*. After blazing for over four hours, her cargo of 350 tons of TNT and ammunition exploded, resulting in a catastrophic amount of damage, setting off chain reactions damaging other ships in the harbour and demolishing most of the port facilities. Two distinguished OCs were among those killed: **Commander John Oswald Buckler (01-03), OBE, RD, RNR (Rtd)**, and **Commander Francis Douglas-Watson (09-11), DSO, RN**.



This contemporary photograph (*left*) indicates the damage to the port. See also the entries in the Admiralty War Diaries for 6th April 1941 and some other relevant web-sites: <http://www.naval-history.net/xDKWW2-4104-31APR01.htm> and <http://www.merchantnavyofficers.com/clanline5rev.html>. Our Memorial Board simply lists JO Buckler and F Douglas-Watson among those whose lives were sacrificed. The CWGC website records their deaths in Piraeus, together with some personal details and a photograph of the cemetery where they now lie.

John Oswald Buckler entered Conway from Birkenhead School. Nominated as Midshipman RNR when he left to go to sea, and after spending a year with the Fleet and passing a course in Gunnery and Torpedoes, he is recorded as diligently attending his required RNR drills. In 1914, he mobilised for Active Service and Lieutenant JO Buckler was gazetted in January 1917 as awarded a *Mentioned in Despatches* for services in the East African Campaign while serving with the Naval Flotilla, Lake Victoria when the lake port of Mwanza was captured from German Colonial forces. In the 1938 New Year Honours, Commander JO Buckler, RD, RNR (Retd) was awarded the OBE for services as Senior Marine Officer, Kenya and Uganda Railways and Harbours Administration. This coincided with his 50th birthday; Colonial Service conditions of service would indicate that he would now be able to retire to his home in Devon to enjoy a quiet family life after being involved for over 25 years in East African maritime affairs.