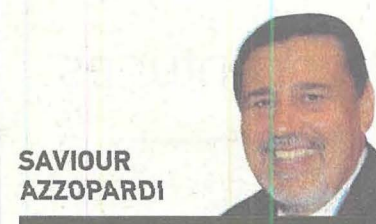


LIFE AND WELLBEING HISTORY

Eighty years since the tragic sinking of HMS *Glorious*



SAVIOUR AZZOPARDI

During World War II many Maltese lives were affected by events that were to unfold as the war progressed. A huge shock-wave hit Malta on June 8, 1940 with the news that the aircraft carrier HMS *Glorious* had been sunk with a huge loss of life. Many Maltese ratings were among the dead, and in fact, no Maltese survived the tragedy.

These are the stories of two families whose lives were affected by this loss.

I first met Tessie Rizzo five years ago during our 75th anniversary remembrance service. She said her grandfather, Fridolin Ernest Schraner, had died on HMS *Glorious*. Quickly checking the list of casualties, I found no Schraner. She replied that her grandfather had changed his name to Frederick Ernest Harwood. I found this surname and the story became even more interesting when Tessie confessed that she has no knowledge as to how or why her grandfather had changed his name.

Fridolin Schraner was born in November 1901 in the county of Dorset, the eldest child to Swiss-German parents, Fridolin and Dorcas Schraner. He joined the navy in 1918 at the young age of 17. Fridolin gave his date of birth as June 30, 1900, instead of November 4, 1901, making him a year older; something that was very commonly done in those days.

She told me her grandmother Carmela Bartolo was very young, and to help her family she worked in a lace shop in Valletta, near Castille. A young Fridolin saw her there and became a regular visitor to the shop. He would explain his frequent visits by saying he was buying presents for his mother in the UK whom he loved so much.

When Carmela accepted his invitation to meet after work Fridolin never looked back, and the two were soon meeting on a regular basis. They married in 1922 and had nine children, seven boys and two girls.

"Seeing her so distraught the architect told her he would take care of the bill himself. The young man was Dom Mintoff"

A curious fact is that while his naval records show him as Frederick Harwood, he is listed as Fridolin Schraner on his marriage certificate. Tessie's mother, also named Carmela, recalls how when he used to come home from a trip abroad, he would take his children to the shops, buy them clothes and shoes and make them wear them there and then. Carmela recalls those were days of plenty when they lacked nothing as her father Fridolin would shower them with whatever they needed.

This was to change drastically with the news of the sinking of HMS *Glorious*. The UK govern-



Alfred Gory Jones with four other unknown Maltese ratings on shore leave somewhere in North Africa.

ment informed them that Fridolin was presumed to be a prisoner of war and as such the Schraner family received no pension from the navy. This carried on for more than a year, and at that time Malta was being ravaged in the Blitz.

Carmela had to find a way of feeding her young family. The children who could work did so

mostly as servants. She lost one of the boys during an air raid. She had previously already lost another boy and this was quite a shock to her. I asked Tessie if she could show me a photo of her grandfather but unfortunately her grandmother Carmela had lost everything, including photos, in a fire that destroyed her home in Cospicua.

Carmela never married again after the death of her husband Fridolin. After the war years, work was hard to find and Carmela's boys left Malta looking for better opportunities abroad. Meanwhile the two girls stayed close to their mother, looking after her needs.

Another person who I have got to know well over the years is Connie Cauchi. She was one of four girls born to Alfred Gory Jones and Elizabeth Dear, who were married in November 1929. She would have tears in her eyes whenever she recounted the story of how the news reached their family of the sinking of the *Glorious*.

Her father Alfred was a generous man not only with his wife and children but also with other family members. Connie re-

counts how on learning that his brother-in-law, a trumpet player, could not afford to buy a trumpet, Alfred went and bought him one. He would also ask his wife to give money from his pay to his relatives whenever they needed it.

The navy was good for Alfred and his family. He liked to listen to the radio and bought a radio for each floor of their home. People would gather to listen to the radio and sometimes ask Elisabeth to raise the volume so they could hear better. On June 10, 1940, people were outside her front window listening to the news when it was announced that HMS *Glorious* had been sunk.

Elisabeth was in hysterics. She started to throw things about, yelling and screaming that her beloved Alfred was dead. People rushed into her house to calm her down but it was very hard to do. Alfred used to tell his wife that he would not enjoy living in the new house they were building. His premonition unfortunately came true.

The tragedy was made even harder for the Maltese families because, as the British Navy was not sure what had happened, they assumed that all those

aboard the *Glorious* were prisoners-of-war and no pensions were given to the surviving families. More hardship was to fall on these and other families because, soon afterwards, the Blitz of Malta was to begin.

To make ends meet, Elisabeth started to sell most of her possessions. Connie told me that the times became so hard that, at one point, Elisabeth was asked for a gold ring in exchange for a bottle of tea.

Friends suggested to Elisabeth that since she had a big house and a young family to feed, she might as well take in some lodgers. At that time the Malta Drydocks was employing many skilled English workers, such as charge men, draughtsmen and shipwrights.

At first, Elisabeth was reluctant because of what people might say with such men in her house. But she eventually gave in. The workmen were slept on the top floor while Elisabeth and her young family would sleep downstairs. She would cook breakfast and their meals as well as do their laundry, and the income helped to relieve the burden of those times.



Alfred Gory Jones in navy summer uniform.

Connie also told me of the times when War Damage department staff came to assess damages to their house. The young architect told her she still would have to pay about £40. She started to cry and told the young man she couldn't afford it. Seeing her so distraught, the architect told her he would take care of the bill himself. The young man was Dom Mintoff, who later in life would become Malta's prime minister. The house where they lived was named *Glorious* and later Elisabeth would turn the front room into a grocer shop.

Connie became a nurse, working mostly with young children. There she met and married a young electrician named Francis. Unfortunately, a few weeks after I interviewed Connie, one of her sons, Simon, informed me that she was in hospital in a bad state. She passed away a few days after I visited her. Rest in peace, dear Connie.

Open wounds, closed files

HMS *Glorious* left the Mediterranean in April, 1940, with over

50 Maltese ratings on board. Its destination was Norway where the British Forces were trying to establish a foothold. By the end of May, the British government realised that it was futile to continue with this campaign and ordered a withdrawal. HMS *Glorious* was part of one of the convoys leaving Narvik.

On June 8, 1940, Captain D'Oyly Hughes on board the *Glorious* asked for permission to leave the convoy and sail independently to Scapa Flow in Scotland. That day at about 4pm, two German battleships, *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, spotted the smoke from the chimney of HMS *Glorious*. They engaged the *Glorious* and its destroyer escorts HMS *Ardent* and HMS *Acasta*. After a two-hour battle all three British ships had been sunk.

More than 900 men survived the battle but were left in the freezing waters for three days before a Norwegian trawler accidentally happened to sail nearby. Only 41 ratings survived the freezing conditions, with two dying on reaching land.

Along with the two convoys, another ship, the battleship HMS *Devonshire* was sailing in-

THE "GLORIOUS" AND TWO DESTROYERS LOST

ALSO TROOPSHIP AND OIL-TANKER

(*Reuter's Service*)
LONDON, June 10. It is officially announced that the British aircraft carrier H.M.S. *Glorious* is presumed lost. Also the transport steamer "Orama" and the tanker steamer "Oil Pioneer". The two destroyers H.M.S. *Acasta* and H.M.S. *Ardent* are also presumed lost.

ADMIRALTY COMMUNIQUE

(*Reuter's Service*)
LONDON, June 10.

The Admiralty communique states that as no further information is received regarding naval operations in connexion with the withdrawal of our forces, referred to in yesterday's Admiralty communique, and as up to the present it has not been possible to establish communication with certain ships, the Admiralty regrets it must now be presumed that the following vessels have been lost:—

H.M.S. *Glorious*, Captain Doyl Hughes, the transport steamer "Orama" and the tanker steamship "Oil Pioneer". It is known that the "Orama" had no troops aboard. Two destroyers: H.M.S. *Acasta* (Commander C. E. Glasfurd), and H.M.S. *Ardent* (Lieut-Commander J. F. Barker).

These ships were in company with the aircraft-carrier *Glorious* and are probably the vessels referred to in the German communique as a destroyer and a submarine chaser.

The Times reporting the sinking of HMS *Glorious*, *Ardent* and *Acasta* in June 1940.



Alfred Gory Jones and his wife Elizabeth Dear

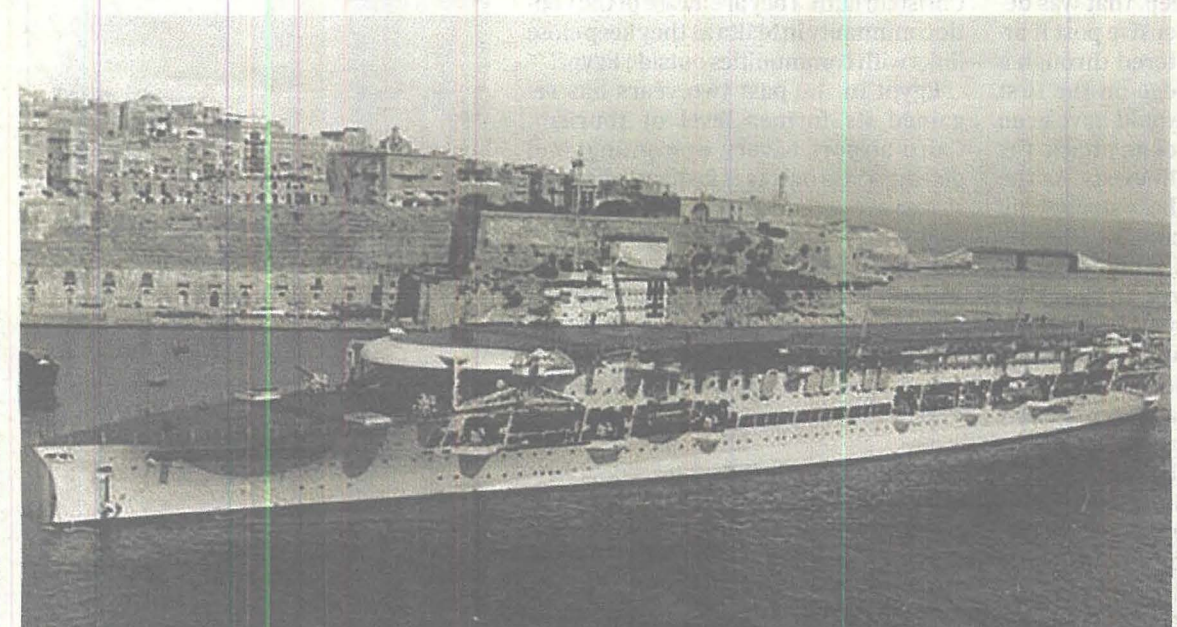


Connie Cauchi, daughter of Alfred Gory Jones

service. This year it will be held on March 22. For more details e-mail Saviour Azzopardi, Malta chairman of the HMS *Glorious*, *Ardent* & *Acasta* Association (GLARAC) on salvuazz@hotmail.com.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Tessie Rizzo, Connie Cauchi Jones and Robert J. Dodd from Hampshire for their help and information without which this feature would not have been possible.



HMS *Glorious* in Grand Harbour.