

John Alexander Mitchell

Petty Officer, Royal Navy

John Alexander Mitchell (known as Jock) was born in 1906 in Girthon. His parents were Robert A Mitchell and Mary Agnes Reid.

His father Robert (known as R.A.) was a clerk in the Cally Estate Office. The family lived in High Street and Jock was educated at Girthon School.

About 1925 Robert and his family moved to Kirkcudbright when R.A. took on a similar role for the St. Mary's Isle Estate. Later Jock trained as a cabinet maker and upholsterer and later joined the firm of Osbornes in Kirkcudbright.

In 1934 Jock married Jeannie Kirk Kennedy at Anwoth Church and the couple had Robert in 1935 and Jane in 1938, both born in Kirkcudbright. After the war they had another daughter Mary in 1952.



Jock's father and his elder brother Robert (Bob) had both served in the First World War in the R.N.V.R. (Royal Naval Voluntary Reserve). The family enjoyed sailing and spent a lot of time at Carrick and on Laurie's Isle so Jock was well suited to joining the Navy.

Jock served in the Royal Navy between July 1940 and September 1945.

Jeannie and the children joined Jock for a time on the south coast of England but they returned to Gatehouse for safety reasons and the Mitchell family lived at Skyreburn during most of the war years.

The following appeared in a booklet "Kirkcudbright's People at War" compiled by Willie McKenzie and published in 1995.

John Mitchell, who lives at 16 High Street, Kirkcudbright had more than his share of dramatic moments in the Royal Navy. He was the lucky survivor of three boats that were sunk by enemy action.

The notice to serve, John recalls, arrived when he was cutting linoleum on the pavement outside Osbornes' furniture premises. Another Kirkcudbright worthy, the late Danny Brown, came along the street to say Dunkirk was being evacuated and the Government urgently required volunteers with knowledge of small craft for patriotic service. At that John immediately volunteered and reported next day to Rosefield Mills in Dumfries and from there he went to Southampton. He was enlisted as a Petty Officer and joined up with the crew of 'The Century', a 56 ft. yacht, formerly owned by the well known film star, Madeline Carroll. They came under enemy action in an air attack, and the crew had to defend themselves with only two Ross Rifles. Eventually they got back to Poole Harbour on one engine and bombed out.

His next ship was a Belgian trawler and for once the crew felt more able to cope with the threat of invasion. Still off Poole, he recalls enjoying a great breakfast of liver and bacon when a flight of German fighter bombers selected their trawler. Immediately all hell broke loose and one bomb hit the top of the galley, close to where they were lying.

John's final boat was another Belgian trawler, the Rodger Robert, which sailed for Italy where they were engaged in mine sweeping into Trieste. With the end of the war now firmly in sight, it looked as though all danger was over, but it was not to be. Close to Trieste they struck a mine and within minutes the boat sank. Following rescue by a whiting trawler and a motor launch, they were taken back to Ancovia. And so ended an exciting five years of service.