

Francis John GAHAN

Born: 1923

Parents: John George Walker and Rosa Ellen Gahan

School admission year: 1930s?

Civilian occupation – Unknown

Armed Forces Record

846 Squadron – Fleet Air Arm

Service Rank: Lieutenant

Service Record: 846 Squadron

Launched from Aircraft Carrier HMS Trumpeter

Service Number:

Date of Death: 24 May 1945



'Always threatening'



Fleet Air Arm Grumman 'Avenger' fighter bomber 1944

On 1st May 1945, a naval attack task force sailed from Scapa Flow in the Orkneys. The fleet comprised three escort carriers *Trumpeter* (carrying eight Grumman Avenger fighter bombers and four Grumman Wildcat fighters) of 846 Squadron, *Queen* (carrying eight Avengers and four Wildcat fighters) of 853 Squadron and *Searcher* carrying 20 twenty Wildcat fighters) of 822 Squadron a total of 44 aircraft.

Accompanying them were two cruisers and six destroyers. The tasks code name was *Operation Judgement*.

By this stage of the war, the German navy had abandoned its U-boat stations on the Atlantic coast and Northern Norway and relocated to a natural inlet base further south at the Black Watch anchorage Kilbotn, Norway which was the task force's target.

Due to a German communication error, the strike was a complete surprise. The attack on the Black Watch anchorage lasted just seven minutes in which time two enemy ships and U-711 were sunk. In the initial attack a Wildcat of 822 Squadron hit the water with the loss of the pilot Lt. Hugh Morrison a New Zealander and an Avenger of 846 Squadron made a forced landing from which the three man crew 'old boy' Lt. Francis Gahan (pilot), Sub/Lt. Alasdair Elder (navigator) and L/A Peter Mansfield (air gunner) did not survive.

Adolph Hitler committed suicide on 30th April 1945 and in his will left the shattered Third Reich trusting Grossadmiral Karl Donitz to be its future leader. Donitz ordered the immediate cessation of U-boat attacks on Allied Shipping on the 4th May *just a few hours before the Kilbotn attack took place!* U-boats continued to sink Allied shipping until the 7th May.

Operation Judgement was to be the last allied aerial raid of the 1939-1945 European theatre of World War Two.

Of the aircrew lost one, Lt. Hugh Morrison from Wellington, New Zealand the senior pilot of 882 Squadron is buried in Narvik New Cemetery. The three British aircrew 'old boy' Lt. Francis John Gahan, Sub/Lt. Alasdair Elder and L/A Peter Mansfield were buried by the Germans, assisted by a Norwegian priest, in Sandfjord churchyard in the nearby village of Solvik, Norway.

The loss of these four men at war was grievous enough but the knowledge that their deaths could have been avoided must have left their families in utmost despair.

In June 2013 people of Kilbotn and Harstad fixed a board on the hillside as close as possible to the Black Watch anchorage giving details of the action.

Francis John Gahan was the younger brother of S.D. Gahan a staff member of Chichester High School for Boys for many years.