

Patron: Lord Cobbold DL
Ivry, Lady Freyberg

JOHN SEDGWICK GREGSON GC (AM)

SEPTEMBER 2016

Writing back to his old school, Pangbourne College, from New Zealand, to notify a change of address John Gregson said "My whole life has been either at sea or connected with shipping such as piloting or marine surveying and I do not regret any of it."

John left school at the age of 16 in September 1940 to become an apprentice with the Blue Funnel line. His first brush with death came quickly when he was bombed and partially disabled on *MV Dolius* in the Firth of Forth in April 1941. He again survived the threat in May 1942 when his ship the *MV Mentor* was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine in the Atlantic. Little did he know that within 3 months he would again be intimately involved in high drama.

On 12th August 1942, by then serving in *MV Deucalion*, he was part of a convoy of 14 merchant ships selected for a vital convoy (Operation Pedestal) to Malta. *Deucalion* was heavily bombed during the voyage and too badly damaged to maintain convoy speed. So she carried on separately through the Mediterranean with one escort. After further air attacks which led to fire on board, the order was given to abandon ship. As the ship sank, John rescued another crew member before being rescued himself by *HMS Bramham*. Subsequently he was awarded the Albert Medal for Gallantry and the Lloyds War Medal in 1971.

Citation, The Albert Medal, The London Gazette. January/February 1943
The ship was set on fire by the explosion of a torpedo during an attack by enemy aircraft. The flames spread rapidly and almost immediately orders were given to abandon ship. One of the ship's gunners, however, was pinned under a raft. Apprentice Gregson immediately went to his assistance and, with help freed him. The gunner had sustained severe injuries and, as it was impossible to get him into a boat or on to a raft, he was dropped overboard. Gregson dived into the sea after him and, in the darkness, towed his helpless shipmate to a ship which picked them up, a distance of about 600 yards.



John Gregson GC 2015



John with his parents Dorothy and Tom after being presented with the Albert Medal in 1943

But for Apprentice Gregson's gallant and determined action, undertaken with complete disregard of his own personal safety, the injured man would have had little chance of survival.

Afterwards John said "I swam with him. They said I saved his life, but I was saving my own at the same time so I don't really take much credit for it."

In 1971 the Albert Medal became obsolete and holders were to receive the George Cross in its place. It took some years to find John in New Zealand for the exchange to take place. He refused. "I kept mine. I said it was given to me by the King so I will keep it, thank you very much."

John went through the rest of the war unscathed, leaving Blue Funnel and sailing another four vessels owned by Brocklebanks Ltd. In 1949 he obtained his Masters Certificate and joined Orient Line. Four years later he became permanently resident in New Zealand, joining the Union Steamship Company and later Shell coastal tankers. He stayed with Shell for eight years before becoming a pilot in 1961 and working at nine New Zealand ports during the next 16 years. In 1977 he re-joined Union Steam and sailed on coastal tankers for the next decade before finally retiring in 1987.



The George Cross



John with the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall at the VC & GC annual reunion in 2010