



MARITIME PATROL AND RECONNAISSANCE FORCE HALL OF HONOR

Flight Lieutenant John Cruickshank

Royal Air Force

Flt Lt Cruickshank was born 20 May 1920 and at age 92 currently resides in Aberdeen, Scotland. In April 1939, he joined the U.K. Territorial Army and was mobilized for active service at the outbreak of World War II. He served mostly in southeast England. In July 1941, he transferred to the RAF for aircrew duties, undergoing pilot training with the US Navy at Pensacola, Florida and gained his pilot's wings in June 1942. Following a short period with the RAF Ferry Command in Canada and further operational training in the UK he joined 210 Squadron based at Pembroke Dock, South Wales and later Poole Bay, Dorset. As captain of a Catalina flying boat, he carried out Anti-U-boat patrols in the Bay of Biscay and the Eastern Atlantic Ocean until December 1943. During this period, he carried out a detachment to Gibraltar for similar duties. In early 1944, elements of his squadron were moved to Sullom Voe in the Shetland Islands for Anti U-boat duties and General Maritime Reconnaissance in northern waters. On 17 July, 1944, while on an ASW patrol, he earned the Victoria Cross, the U.K. equivalent to our Medal of Honor, for his successful action against a German U-boat. His citation reads:

... When a U-boat was sighted on the surface, Flying Officer Cruickshank at once turned to the attack. In the face of fierce anti-aircraft fire he maneuvered into position and ran in to release his depth charges. Unfortunately they failed to drop...Without hesitation, he climbed and turned to come in again. The Catalina was met by intense and accurate fire and was repeatedly hit. The navigator/bomb aimer was killed. The second pilot and two other members of the crew were injured. Flying Officer Cruickshank was struck in seventy-two places, receiving two serious wounds in the lungs and ten penetrating wounds in the lower limbs. His aircraft was badly damaged and filled with the fumes of exploding shells. But he did not falter. He pressed home his attack, and released the depth charges himself, straddling the submarine perfectly. The U-boat was sunk. He then collapsed and the second pilot took over the controls...Only after he was certain his aircraft was safe and on course for home did he consent to receive medical aid and have his wounds attended to. He refused morphine in case it might prevent him from carrying on...The damaged aircraft eventually reached base but it was clear that an immediate landing would be a hazardous task for the wounded and less experienced second pilot. Although able to breathe only with the greatest difficulty, Flying Officer Cruickshank insisted on being carried forward and propped up in the second pilots seat. For a full hour, in spite of his agony and ever increasing weakness, he gave orders as necessary, until the aircraft was safely landed on the water...When the medical officer went on board, Flying Officer Cruickshank collapsed and he had to be given a blood transfusion before he could be removed to hospital. Throughout, he set an example of determination, fortitude and devotion to duty in keeping with the highest traditions of the Service...