

Donny May World War 2 hero, angler & motorcyclist

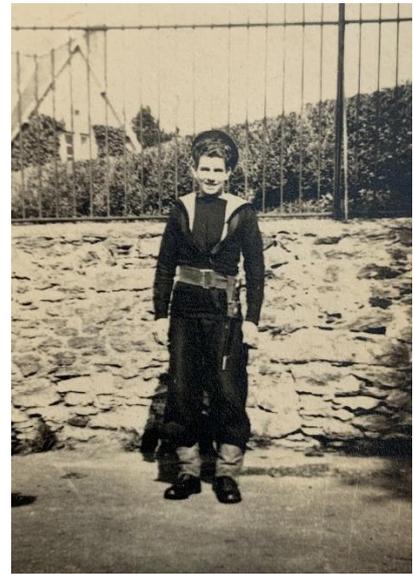
Donny May was born in Templepatrick in 1923. His family later moved to Dunadry, near the confluence of the Sixmilewater and Claudy rivers and close to the Dundrod circuit of the Ulster Grand Prix. It was here that a life-long love of fishing, inherited from his father, and of fast motor-bikes, was born. He described his childhood, with sisters, Sheelagh, Elsie and Peggy and brother Bobby as idyllic.



Elsie, Donny, Sheelagh



Donny signed-up with RN



Donny

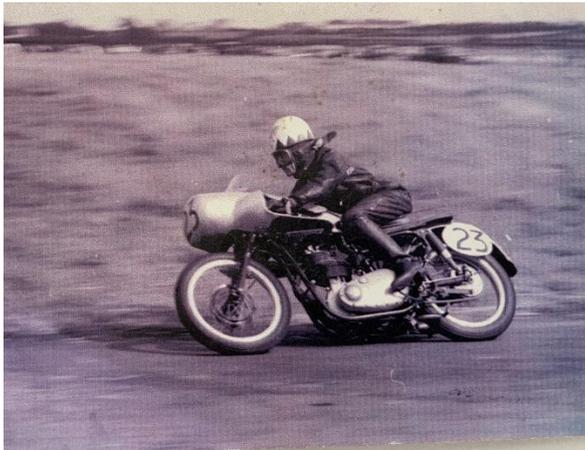
Donny was only sixteen when WW2 broke out but he hid his true age and signed up with the Royal Navy. After basic training, he was posted to Portsmouth where his unit was preparing for the invasion of Europe. It was while he was there, that he rescued two WRNS who were trapped in a burning boat. Donny, a strong swimmer from an early age, dived into the water and brought them to safety. This act of bravery could not be officially recognized as it took place during a news blackout, close to the invasion.

As the Normandy landings began, Donny found himself a crew member on a converted Thames barge which was ferrying munitions and fuel to the beachhead. After surviving many attacks from enemy aircraft, unfortunately his boat was sunk by a mine. Some of his friends did not survive, young men whom Donny remembered and paid tribute to for the rest of his life. Donny relates how one of the crew, a young man, nicknamed Stripey, a confirmed atheist, discovered God when he found himself in the water unable to swim. He and Donny were pulled from the water and landed on the beach by an American vessel where Stripey expressed a wish for a tot of rum after their ordeal. Donny enjoyed sharing the story of how he 'liberated' a barrel of Navy issue rum from the shallows when they



landed and declared that Stripeys prayers were answered again! After the D-day landings, when Donny returned to the UK he was posted to Australia where his crew joined the Pacific fleet. He was deployed on the HMS Woodstock in mine sweeping operations in Japanese controlled waters until the end of the war.

On being demobbed, Donny returned to Dunadry and found employment in Shorts working on aircraft construction. He now had time and opportunity to pursue other interests. Every young boy, who grew up in that area and at that time, dreamed of being Geoff Duke swinging round the Devil's Elbow and snoring along the Seven Mile Straight, but Donny



Donny road racing.



1959 NW200 on a NSU 247cc

made it come true, and in 1948 he made his debut at the Ulster Grand Prix on a Triumph Tiger and came second in the mid-Antrim 100 race. Donny raced until 1959 on a variety of machines, including Triumph, AJS, BSA, Norton and NSU.



Donny in his managers office in Fawcetts Royal Hotel

He competed many times at the North West and won the main handicap in 1955. That was the year he moved to Portrush to work for his sister Elsie and brother-in-law, Jack Fawcett, at their hotel in Portrush. It was then also that he met and married Josephine (Jo) McBurney from Ballymena and they settled at 100, Main Street where their sons Kerry and Kieron were born. Donny became general manager of the Fawcett Hotel Group, which included the Lismara and the Strand, Portstewart, until he retired in 1972, when he opened an off-licence in Main Street.



He now had more time to devote to his other leisure activity – fishing. Sadly, in the 80s, Donny became ill with a rare type of neural disease which affected his movement and coordination but, undaunted, he took to his electric scooter on which he could be seen regularly around the town. He never failed to honour his comrades at the annual Remembrance Day parade when he proudly displayed his campaign medals, even when he had to attend on his scooter.



Donny fishing at Agivey river



Kieron, Donny and Jo May in Normandy for 60th Commemoration of D-Day

At his graveside, in February 2011, the words of a young French woman, wife of Donny's nephew, were read:

I would like to thank you on behalf of my family and my people for D-day. We the French nation, know that we owe you a debt of gratitude and we'll never forget what you did for us. Without your efforts we would never have been liberated. Merci beaucoup!

Our thanks to Kieron and Jo May for providing the text and images and Kate Murphy for editing this tribute to a greatly respected and very brave gentleman. 24th April 2021