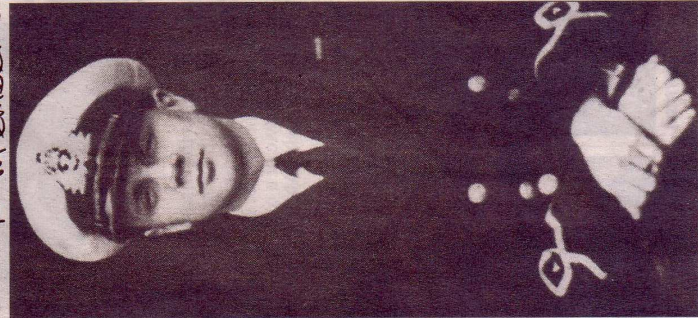


A member of Mildenhall Cricket Club in the 1960s



Lee, and Philip E West's painting of his Swordfish ditched in the Channel



TENANT-COMMANDER EDGAR LEE, who has died aged 88, was the last of the great Fleet Air Arm heroes in the famous Channel Dash, the attack on a powerful German English Channel in 1942.

One morning of February 1942, a Fleet Air Force observer in the second of his sorties over the Channel was sent to prevent the German U-boats from making a run under cover of bad weather. The observer was in the command of the *Schwarhorn* and the cruiser *Prinz Eugen*. The *Schwarhorn* had been raiding British shipping in the Atlantic, but were now being hunted by the Fleet Air Force. The *Schwarhorn* was ordered to return to the English Channel by the Fleet Air Force. The *Schwarhorn* was ordered to return to the English Channel by the Fleet Air Force. The *Schwarhorn* was ordered to return to the English Channel by the Fleet Air Force.

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for their torpedo, which "seemed to be running well", but did not see it hit.

Their torpedo air gunner, "Ginger" Johnson, was slumped over his gun and, as Lee tried to shift his body, Rose managed a barely-controlled ditching in the sea about 500 yards from the enemy destroyer screen.

The *Swordfish* floated long enough for Lee to launch a dinghy. Lee pulled Rose aboard, then returned to the aircraft - but Johnson was too firmly wedged to be shifted before it sank. For an hour and a half Lee nursed Rose until a motor torpedo boat, attracted by his Verrey signals, picked them up.

Among the many men honoured for their heroism during this engagement, Lee was awarded a DSO. The German ships made their home ports, and there were only five survivors from the squadron's 18 aircraft.

Edgar Frederick Lee was born on

May 18 1921 at Gosport, where his father had settled after service in the Royal Navy in the First World War.

Edgar spent his early childhood in Egypt and Singapore, where his father was involved in constructing a chain of bases and mooring towers for the airship route to the East, then went to Northgate Grammar School, Ipswich, where he excelled at sport and became head boy.

He volunteered for the Fleet Air Arm in May 1940, two days before his 19th birthday, and after initial training at HMS St Vincent, began a flying course in Trinidad later that year. In April 1941 he qualified as an observer, and in June served in 825 naval air squadron in the carrier *Ark Royal*, flying the *Swordfish* torpedo-reconnaissance-bomber until the ship was torpedoed by U-81 in November 1941. Lee was rescued by the destroyer *Legion*, which came alongside the listing ship, but regretted losing his large collection

of gramophone records. He rejoined 825 squadron when it reformed in March 1942, and flew with it until July, before being sent to rest at St Merryn on air direction duties.

In February 1943, Lee was one of six naval observers lent to Bomber Command to help make up a shortfall in experienced navigators in the RAF. He flew in Lancaster bombers of No 106 Squadron under the command of Wing Commander Guy Gibson, DSO, DFC, with whom he played squash. Lee and two other observers survived their tours in Bomber Command; the other three were killed.

Between August 1943 and November 1944 Lee passed on his skills at aviation schools in Canada, returning to England to qualify as a signals officer in August 1945. He was demobilised two years later. Rejoining the reserve in 1956, he was promoted to lieutenant-commander in 1961, and served in

numerous Nato and national exercises until 1981, when he retired.

After the war Lee trained as a teacher, and taught at Mildenhall Secondary School, Suffolk, and later became deputy headmaster of Breckland School, Brandon. A keen all-round cricketer, he also enjoyed fishing, gardening and sailing on the river Deben.

He was elected president of the Channel Dash Association, which is committed to erecting a fitting memorial to the Channel Dash heroes. Earlier this year, he was present at St Paul's Cathedral to celebrate the centenary of the Fleet Air Arm. On October 12, he gave a lecture about his Channel Dash experiences.

Edgar Lee, who died on October 29, married first, in 1942, Isabel Lee Robinson. He married secondly, in 1974, Carol Aldham, who survives him with the two daughters of his first marriage.