



# Town of Ajax Street Dedication



Street Name: **Harper Hill Drive**

Name of Veteran: Lawrence William John Harper      Nov. 17, 1919-Nov. 27, 2015

Rank: Deck hand, Petty Officer

Ship Served: HMS Ajax

Date of Service on Ship: 1937-1940

Year of Visit/Dedication: n/a

Veteran or Family Visit: n/a

Veteran of the Battle of the River Plate: Yes      Died at Battle: No

Lawrence 'Laurie' William John Harper was born on November 17, 1919 in Hitchin, Buckinghamshire, U.K.

Laurie joined the Royal Navy on April 19, 1937 and began his training at HMS Ganges. A year later, on February 17, 1938 he joined HMS Ajax. It was onboard the Ajax that he found himself in the South Atlantic involved in the famous Battle of the River Plate off the coast of Uruguay. In the spring of 1940 the Ajax and her crew participated in Operation Dynamo, otherwise known as the Dunkirk Evacuation. This was the monumental task of evacuating Allied soldiers from the beaches and harbor of Dunkirk in northern France.



c. 1939

After three years with the Ajax it was decided that Laurie was to be transferred to the submarine service. When he asked how he could avoid the appointment Laurie was told that his only option was to train as a diver, and that is what he did.



Early 1960s

On July 12, 1940 Laurie was transferred to HMS Gnat, an insect class gun boat off the coast of North Africa. The Gnat was torpedoed and spent two days in the water before her crew began the fight on land against the Italians. He then served HMS Pretoria Castle, an aircraft carrier from April 21, 1943 until December 29, 1945.

After World War Two Laurie served HMS Manxman (a minelayer), HMS Sussex, HMS Cleopatra, HMS Superb, and HMS Birmingham. He served in Korea under the command of the United Nations Naval Forces in the early 1950s and eventually returned to HMS Ganges as an instructor of new recruits. It was there that he earned the nickname Sherpa for taking the boys on outward bound courses.

Lawrence appeared in the *Yangtse Incident: The Story of HMS Amethyst*, a drama released in 1957. He had a small speaking part and sailed several of the small Chinese ships in the film.

Lawrence died at the age of 96 on November 27, 2015 in Spalding, Lincolnshire.