

1939 to 1945: A Lifetime of Experience

This fascinating wartime account is abridged from an article published in 'The Pensioner' some 10 years ago. See page 41 for more details on Ron's life.

In 1939 my intended wedding plans were interrupted by a lengthy telegram from the Admiralty ordering me to make my own way to Halifax, Nova Scotia. As a Reserve Officer I had to travel as a civilian, concealing my uniform to take up an appointment on the bridge of a cruiser of the 18th Squadron. My Commanding Officer was Caspar John who eventually became Commander in Chief and was key to modernising the Royal Navy, as he predicted he would!

A Truculent U Boat Commander

This was when plans for escorting the first convoy to the UK were being developed. We stood duties of four hours on and four hours off to eat and sleep, whilst we were at sea. I had to overcome the problem of acceptance as I was the only Reserve Officer amongst some sixty Regular Officers. My duties took me onto the bridge, which was out of bounds to over half the officers and it took me some while to become part of that closely-knit unit. The Liver Building was always a welcome sight on the horizon as once again we made it home, albeit sometimes- only in part. The triangular course of Bermuda, Nova Scotia and Liverpool became the accepted day-to-day life.

My first encounter with the enemy was in 1939 when a U Boat commander was being interviewed and queried why it was only a junior officer dealing with him. He had been relieved of his pistol and binoculars and I had to remind him of his situation and that he was about to be interviewed by the CO. His truculence got the better of him and he told me he would remember me in due course. I

told him my address was c/o Midland Bank, Poultry! Our Atlantic routine was interrupted by the Norwegian Campaign. We came under constant bombardment from long range aircraft that attempted to strafe the decks. Fortunately they only succeeded in peppering our funnels. Sleep was at a high premium. On the way home we suffered considerable underwater damage and I was posted to Belfast during the repair work.

Some Explaining

I took the opportunity to arrange our wedding; I could not marry in England as France was falling. En route I had left my Scottish bride-to-be with some photographs I had taken in Narvik and special binoculars I had bought. She had many difficulties in explaining these to the authorities when she travelled to join me in Belfast! After a brief spell it was back to sea and we were rather gloomy after the excitement of carrying General de Wart, Commander of Norwegian Forces, and 1000 soldiers. The normal victualling problems, such as producing 600 loaves of bread per day, had been greatly increased but, as the ship had the power reserve of a small town together with necessary supplies, everyone coped. I was fortunate to meet prominent leaders in the UK and in the Canadian and US Navies. I recall going into the US Naval Base at Norfolk, Virginia and asking if our ship could have some pineapple. I was told a load had just arrived and to take the lot, I didn't even have to sign for them!

Those six years were a lifetime of experience.

Ron Crisp Lt. Cdr. RNVR RD.