

Journey of a Signalman

Signalman Ron M. Davis C/SSX 26469

The following was passed to me by Colin Morris (via FB)

Just found this in some of my old stuff. Ron Davis was a old WW2 veteran on my patch at Grange over Sands where I was a beat Bobby. Ron used to ride his dark blue mobility scooter, complete with white ensign stickers, to the Commodore pub every day for his tot. He wrote out his war for me which makes interesting reading.

1939 Drafted to HMS B.V. 10 Contraband Control off the Nore.

1940 Drafted to HMS Wanderer, spending 3 days on railway trying to catch up with her, Chatham to Plymouth to Liverpool. Caught her just leaving Gladstone Dock. Proper pier-head jump!

Down to Plymouth joined D6 Flotilla, French coast patrol.
Lord Mountbatten I/c on HMS Shakespeare, after HMS Kelly was damaged by E-Boats.

Into middle of French fishing fleet with E boats hiding behind them.

Back to Liverpool. Captain Morris relieved by Commander Rick Keene, a very great skipper.

Off to Norway evacuating British troops from Molde Fyorde, Andalsnes on fire. HMS London lending AA fire. Alongside ran aground stern on. Ditched torpedoes and depth charges. Troops on focsle jumping up and down. Got off with a damaged screw, landed troops at Lerwick.

Belfast for replacement screw. Took onboard Army Brass hats and intelligence agents to be dropped off upriver at Boulogne. Dropped them in a inflatable and proceeded to Dieppe.

Offshore, signalman Davis (ME) and S/Lt Clarke-Campbell, (both junior In their department and therefore expendable!) ordered to proceed by motorboat into the port and try to contact Maquis.

Port and town damaged. After all night search found a chateau and Maquis. Given map of road to be shelled at Treport just above the road approach road to Dunkirk.

Put down 500 rounds of H.E into it and proceeded to Dunkirk to do what we could, dropping troops at Dover.

Back to Liverpool and Atlantic Convoys on a 24 hour turnaround basis.

Westward bound convoy to St. John's Newfoundland, despatched to assist SS Staffordshire which was being attacked by a Focke Wulf Condor. The ship had RAF families aboard bound for S. Africa. On Arrival at the scene lifeboats had been machine gunned. We buried 27 dead including women and children.

Rejoined convoy and escorted to 23 degs West out of reach of Wolf packs and full extent of our fuel, picking up inward bound convoy to Liverpool. Refuelled and outbound next day.

Discharged to David Lewis North hospital with shingles.

Jan 42. From hospital to Chatham signal school for trained operators course then dispatched to Aberdeen to join HMS Poppy. After working up trials of Seydisfjord, Iceland to form ill fated convoy PQ17. On leaving Iceland headed for North Cape and N.Russia.

Within 24 hours 2 Blohm and Voss floatplanes were circling the convoy. Between us and the Norwegian coast was a destroyer flotilla under command of Commander Jack Brooke, 40 miles on the horizon.

July 4th US Independence, PQ17 was 75% American liberty ships. Jack Brooke was ordered to leave the convoy and the same day we were attacked by 36 JU88 torpedo bombers. Convoy was ordered to scatter, attacked by Heinkel bombers. HMS Poppy and HMS Dianella gathered as many ships as possible and headed northward in permanent daylight to avoid long range aircraft.

Convoy Commodore Dowding in River Afton, was rescued by HMS Poppy after being sunk.

SS Hoosier was sunk and we took on survivors, now being very crowded.

Commodore was transferred to another ship which was eventually sunk and crew again rescued by Rescue Ship Zamalek .

On losing high level bombers, turned to Russian Coast and made landfall on Novaya Zomlya Peninsular then down coast to River Dvina and Archangel. 11 ships made it out of 38.

Ran short of food and Ruskis would not or could not feed us. We resorted to scrounging and selling our winter woollies for potatoes and greens. After 3 months we were allowed to return to UK.

Cardiff for refit and Articisation. L/sig Pongo Waring got drunk overnight and appeared on the dock in the morning as we were moving berths and proceeded to fling off all the lines as fast as we secured, shouting "F---off".

Got 90 Days jail.

During refit went to Swansea naval base and passed for L/sig and was then instructed to take over as Yeoman of the ship.

On completion of refit proceeded to sea on sealed orders to Med and liaise with 1st Army in invasion of North Africa. Convoys up and down N A coast and supplies to Malta.

HMS Poppy and HMS Lotus sunk U605 off Algiers.

Operation Husky, invasion of Sicily and subsequent patrols in Messina straits.

N. Africa now secure we were ordered back to Londonderry and then to Murmansk, two extremes!

Rough weather but we had cover of dark nights thus getting some relief from air attacks.

Continued on Russian Run until operation Overlord and Pluto, Mulberry Harbour and block ships for Sword, Juno and Gold beaches.

In between Russian trips we did Atlantic run to St. John's Newfoundland.

Passed for acting PO lower grade which made me over complement. Drafted to Londonderry naval base as instructor. Did one trip to Newfoundland In HMS Tintagel Castle as Yeoman had gone sick.

Back to Chatham signal school as instructor.

Discharged April 1946 with £100 and cheap civvy suit!

Ron notes the first Russian anniversary medals for arctic convoys were given on 40th and 50th anniversary by USSR and 60th by Russian Federation.