

Healy

An Eastern Canadian Port – Ten thrill-packed months on a mighty 31,000-ton battleship has been the good fortune of Sick Berth Petty Officer Evan Thomas, R.C.N.V.R., of 2865 Retallack St., Regina, Sask.

Just recently promoted to the rate of petty officer, Thomas left his drug apprenticeship in Regina to join the navy as a sick berth attendant in September, 1940. A few months later he found himself at sea in charge of the ship's dispensary.

He boasts that during all their convoy and patrol work from the tip of Norway in north to the waters of the Mediterranean and the South Atlantic they never lost a ship. His ship was often busy chasing off attacking enemy aircraft, but its main duty was driving away enemy raiders or, by its presence, keeping them under cover, his ship was always screened by the rest of the convoy.

Thomas received his first taste of sea-war when their convoy was attacked by enemy aircraft.

"They came at us in pairs," he said, "and I can't recall ever being so excited. The attack didn't last long, I think about seven minutes. They just dropped their bombs and zoomed off.

"My action station was on the 15-inch gun turret," he continued, "manned by Royal Marines. They gave the planes a hot reception and drove them off. There were several near misses on the destroyers but no damage done. One seaman was hit by shrapnel but just injured slightly."

While convoying in the Mediterranean they were attacked by two German U-boats but the battle lasted only a few minutes. Two cruisers dropped depth charges, brought the subs to the surface and destroyed them, which to Thomas "was a very impressive sight."

Their second air attack came while they were patrolling off the Bay of Biscay.

"Three Dorniers machine-gunned the decks of one of the cruisers with us," he said, "but little damage was done. Our anti-aircraft drove them off again."

Although in charge of the ship's dispensary, Thomas's duties also took him into the operating room. He participated in two appendectomy operations and several bone-setting operations. There were four medical officers and eight sick berth attendants aboard at all times.

"We operated on one merchant seaman who was picked up after being in the water for three hours," Thomas said. "His arm was broken in two places yet he had kept himself afloat without even the aid of a lifebelt. No one could figure out how he did it. He was pretty far gone but we fixed him up. Those boys sure can take it."