

Bryan Pringle ~ Royal Navy 1943 to 1946

This brief summary recollects some of our father's service in the Royal Navy during World War II; as reminisced over the last few weeks - almost seventy years afterwards. Recounting such a unique period in history, that will probably never be experienced again, it is no wonder that it had such a powerful effect on his life and values.

Rank: Tel-'S'

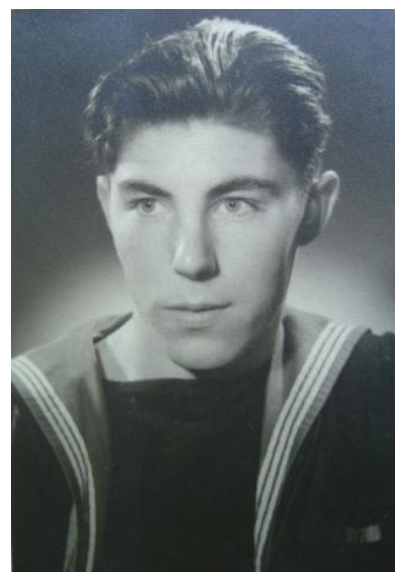
Number: 573405

Date of volunteering: 6th February 1943 (17th birthday)

Date service commenced: 17th April 1943

Ship: HMCS Annan K404 (Frigate with a 4" gun forward plus two oerlikens on top)

Shore Bases: Skegness, Newcastle (Rutherford College), Winchester, London (Earls Court), HMS Scotia (Ayr), Farnham, Portsmouth (Pompeii Barracks)



Home Guard

Left school at 15 and joined the Home Guard, which met at Croft Spa Hotel. During a demonstration of a Bren machine gun at the rear of the hotel, the gun was fired accidentally – ripping open the barrel and firing a live round through the wall. The hand of the corporal holding it was badly injured, a man from the hotel came out in his underpants shouting “*What the *?#@ is going on!*” and several of the platoon were believed to need new underwear. The captain was lost for words, but was heard to utter - “*Stop laughing Private Pringle!*”.

Signing up

Volunteered for active service at 17 – “*I told my mother before I did!*”.

Signed up for ‘*Hostilities only!*’, although stayed in the navy until 1946. Joined with Ernie Bryan, but were soon separated into different jobs.



Undergoing training

Initial training was mainly at Rutherford College, Newcastle – on the site now occupied by the Civic Centre. For some extra money, would do potato digging sessions for half a crown, out towards Whitley Bay.

Started as a mobile radio mechanic at Earl's Court, London, before being sent to HMS Scotia in Ayr (based in the Butlin's holiday camp). Then it was on to Eastbourne –

notable for the bus driver “*putting his foot down!*” on the hill away from the seafront, to escape coming under fire from enemy fighter planes, which happened occasionally.

On the open seas

Sailing from Aberdeen to the Hebrides we threw five depth charges overboard to catch some fish. Around Skye and Mull we undertook forced landings as training and were required to live off the land.

Going up the river mouth at Derry some men in boats came alongside wanting to buy cigarettes and whisky, but the officer asked them to keep their distance. When they wouldn't he fired a shot from his pistol - which did the trick.

During some maintenance in Londonderry, I had to climb to the top of the mast, in quite strong winds, to secure the lighting. From the very top I dropped a spanner above some drums on deck containing delicate instruments – fortunately the sway of the ship meant it missed them by inches – very lucky!

HMCS Annan was at the mouth of a Norwegian fjord when we caught a German submarine on the surface recharging its



batteries. I had to work out the bearing forward and

aft, and the angle to the sub. Did this by listening to their transmissions to Berlin (which was A bar DA in Morse code). After sundown there was an opening burst of fire from the sub and 'action stations' was called. The sub was hit time and time again – "*they were the bravest men I've ever seen, as one was killed the next one took his place*".

Wounded (16th October 1944)

During fire fights on the *Annan*, tracer bullets went flash-space-space-flash and so on. The spaces were the ones to watch! Shells would land on deck and detonate seconds later.

At a gunner station, there was the gunner and a loader 'loading' the ammunition into the gun. I noticed a shell land near to the loader, so I quickly scooped it up and threw it in the air where the shell exploded, saving his life but badly wounding me – blinding my left eye.



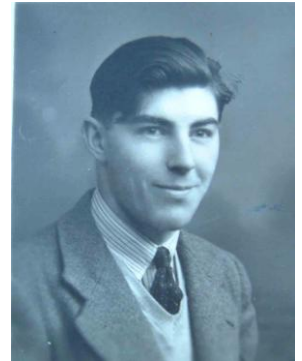
Coming down from Scapa Flow, was taken to hospital in Orkney then transferred to Aberdeen. Whilst being stretchered from the

Annan my friends lined up to wish me well, but didn't expect me to survive. In the sick bay a man in the next bed was given raw penicillin (which was still being developed then) and he used to scream with the pain. That was when you realised that you weren't too badly off. Once out of hospital was sent to Petersfield to recuperate. Had to wear a green eye patch for a while, but got the opportunity to go to London and stayed at the Soldier's and Sailor's Club, visiting Lyon's Corner House, as well as seeing a big star of the time, Ivor Novello, at the Savoy.

On VE day I was at Fort Southwark on anti-rape patrol, so wasn't able to join in any of the festivities.

Finally transferred to Pompeii Barracks, Portsmouth where, following a weekend in Birmingham with a pal, returned late on a Sunday night to find a draft chit on his bunk. This instruction read "*Report to Divisional Office 09:30 [the next morning]*".

At 09:35 I was on the way to Minden, Germany – issued with a knife, fork, cup and hammock. Travel was by train through France and Holland in August 1945. At one station the children track-side were so emaciated that all service personnel on the train threw them whatever food they had.



Whilst in Germany a few of us were invited into a civilian household for tea a four year old boy came into the room and on seeing uniforms saluted and said "*Hiel Hitler*" The women grabbed him and told him "*Nicht, nicht*" – it was just what he'd been encouraged to do previously.

Various further postings followed, including Norway and Sweden.

Demob

First time back home in Darlington, I was walking home under the railway bridge and an express train came overhead – "*I hit the deck with fear, just waiting for the impact*". Felt pretty silly when I got up and dusted myself down.

Eye injury ruled out any return to career as a draughtsman, so started as a telegraphist in Scarborough.

Eventually received medals in a small parcel, long after coming home, and was never officially presented with them.