

Any one else here spent their war in the lower deck? OK, then ....

I spent my war years in the lower deck, and by wars end I was an ERA 4<sup>th</sup> class, and wore Petty Officers uniform. You will never see me seated with the officers at Battle of the Atlantic or Remembrance Day ceremonies. I march with pride with the Chiefs and Petty Officers Association.

Anyone here a member of Chiefs and PO's?

I graduated from Grade 13, in June, 1942 in Ontario. I joined the RCNVR as Stoker II/c in September at HMCS York in what was and still is the Automotive Building at the CNE Grounds in Toronto. The recruiting Petty Officer told me that they were looking for candidates to undertake ERA Apprentice training and that I would be a Petty Officer in two years. I didn't know what an ERA Apprentice or a Petty Officer was, but I wanted to get in before the war was over. Through no fault of my own, it took me a lot longer than two years. First we had to undergo parade training and become acquainted with rifle drill. The dam gun weighed about half my weight. I was 5 ft 4 inches and weighed 120 pounds. Even during wartime, we spent 18 months undergoing training in machine and fitting shop practice, welding, electricity, sheet metal work, pipe fitting, mathematics and marine engineering, in Galt, Hamilton, and the MTE in Halifax. It wasn't like the real Navy, as we were billeted in private homes, not duty watches, and every weekend off from noon Saturday. But when we arrived in Halifax in December of 1943, there was the REAL navy. We lived in old B block which had been built for the army in WWI. In winter, snow blew in through single pane windows and the toilets froze. At the end of the course, there were written examinations and a trade test. While awaiting drafts, about ten of us went to the old four-piper NIAGARA. We went down to Shelbourne for a docking, and little me was assigned to Shore Patrol! Fortunately, we didn't have to haul any one in.

Anyone here ever served in a 4-stacker?

Well, being ex-American, they had bunks!, the only ships in our Navy so fitted. Of course we had our hammocks and spread them out on the bunks. However, the ship rolled so much at sea that we had to lash ourselves in! We were introduced to Boiler Cleaning Party. No masks, but we tied rags around our noses and spit in them. I was assigned to clean No 1. funnel. Hanging onto the inside ladder, I was just able to sweep my broom around the inside and knock down the soot. After a session of that, we really were members of the Black Gang. Only our eyeballs were white! Incidentally, the CO at that time was Bill Willson, once a member of NOAVI, who lives on Galliano, I believe. We never encountered each other at that time. In her short life of just under 4 years, she had 9 CO's.

Finally a draft came for to Frigate 29, whatever and wherever, by way of HMCS Hochelaga II, across the river from Montreal. I was glad to leave, because a Chief Petty Officer had taken an unnatural liking to me. Our ship was delayed before commissioning, so we spent three useless months, undergoing parade training, anti-aircraft gunnery training (for stokers?), cleaning stations around the spotless barracks, and yard-birding. Finally the great day came, were loaded onto a train and found we were off to Quebec City, to commission HMCS Fort Erie. Sea trials further delayed commissioning.

Meanwhile MAGOG was towed in minus her stern, and Shawinigan was storing for her last voyage. Great for morale.

Finally in October of 1944 we sailed for Halifax, meeting a howling gale, but the ship was a better seaboat than the old NIAGARA. Still mal-de-mer was prevalent. This Stoker never missed a watch or a meal.

In November we sailed for Bermuda with St. Catherines for workups. The highlight was towing St. Catherines aground on the reef. Workups were terminated and Fort Erie sailed for Halifax. Morale was low in the ship. The Captain was RCNR, LCdr Ford, a former China Fleet Merchant Navy and he treated the crew like coolies. The only time I spoke to him when I saw him across his table (as a Requestman) to be awarded my first Good Conduct Badge. He had British Accent (not appreciated in the Lower Deck). For the Bermuda caper, he was soon replaced by LCdr Piper, RCNVR. The first thing he did was to muster the crew on the quarterdeck and introduce himself to us, telling us what he expected of us, and what we could expect from him. Morale bounced skyward, and the ship was a better place.

I promised you a story. As a stoker serving in the Engine Room (feeling bottom ends, operating auxiliary machinery, oiling, making coffee for the ERA's) I often answered the sound powered phone from the bridge, usually a signalman or the bridge messenger. This day I picked up the phone and the voice said "You're making black smoke." Being a smart ass, I responded "Well what colour would you like." There was a pause, and I knew I was in trouble. "Do you know who this is?" "No sir, I do not" "This is the Captain" Oh, sorry, sir, do you know who this is?" "No, I do not" "Thank God for that sir. " I hung up, imagining that there would soon be another phone call. But nothing happened to my great relief. I learned later from a signalman that there had been considerable hilarity on the bridge. That endeared LCdr Piper to my heart forever.