

An account of life during WW2, experienced by Frank Leonard Luxford.



Frank was just 20 years of age when he joined the Royal Navy, his two older brothers, Harold and Tom had joined the Army. It must have been a very worrying time for their Mother and Father, Minnie and George, left at home in East Barnet, not knowing the whereabouts of their young sons in a grown-up hostile environment. If Frank had to be part of this war, and I'm sure it sounded an exciting venture to a 20 year old, he wanted to be a Signaller on board ship with the Royal Navy. The only way to achieve this was to enlist as a Cook, then work his way up to being a Signaller. Frank joined the navy and was based at the Shore Establishment, HMS Royal Arthur, Ingoldmells near Skegness, Lincolnshire. This had previously been a Butlins Holiday Camp, but was commissioned as a training establishment on the 22nd of September 1939. It served during the Second World War, becoming the central reception depot for new naval entries after HMS Raleigh was transferred to the Army in February 1944. Royal Arthur continued in service until being paid off in 1946. Frank was with the Royal Arthur from the 14th of November 1940 to the 20th of November 1940, cooking for the troops, then until the 19th of March 1941 he started his training to be a Signaller. On the 20th of March 1941 he was transferred to HMS Pembroke, Chatham, Kent, another Shore Establishment for more communication training and examinations. Eventually, after passing exams with flying colours, mostly 95% grades, Frank was transferred on the 2nd of May 1941 to his first ocean going cruiser, HMS Nigeria, now having the qualification of Ordinary Signaller under his belt. Before we go to sea, let's make a note of Frank's credentials that have been listed by the navy.

Frank Leonard Luxford who was born on the 15th of July 1920, in Fien Barnet, Middlesex. His father George William Luxford and mother Minnie May Luxford (nee Humphery) live in the family home at 9 Albemarle Road, East Barnet, Hertfordshire. Frank's stature is 5 foot 9 inches, chest measurements is 37 ½ inches, hair is fair, eyes are indigo and has a fresh complexion. The only scar he has on entering the navy is from an appendix operation. His religious denomination is Church of England and Frank's job after leaving school up until he joined the Royal Navy is written down as "Butcher Cutter"

The Port Division is Chatham.

Official Number (I have)now to sea



H.M.S. Nigeria (pennant number 60) was a Crown Colony-class light cruiser of the Royal Navy completed early in World War II and served throughout that conflict. She was named for the (then) British territory of Nigeria. Frank served on board HMS Nigeria from the 2nd of May 1941 to the 31st of January 1943. During this time Frank saw front line action in the home waters and off the Scandinavian coast. Frank served as a Signaller and during his time with

the Nigeria went from being an "Ordinary Signaller" to the next rank up, a "Signaller", passing various exams to achieve this. Some of the action Frank would have seen was on the 28th of June 1941, HMS Nigeria, in company with HMS Bedouin, HMS Tartar and HMS Jupiter, intercepted the German weather ship Lauenburg in thick fog north-east of Jan Mayen Island. The German ship was detected through the use of HF/DF. The crew of the Lauenburg abandoned ship after they were fired upon, allowing the British to board her. Valuable codebooks and parts of the Enigma machine were found aboard and recovered from the German weather ship. This was one of the earliest captures of Enigma materials of the war, and came a few weeks after HMS Bulldog had captured the first complete Enigma machine from the German submarine U-110 on the 9th of May 1941. More action Frank would have been involved in, was in July 1941, HMS Nigeria became the flagship of Force K, commanded by Rear Admiral Philip Vian. During this period, Force K made two expeditions to Spitsbergen (Norwegian Territory), the first to ascertain the situation and the second, in September, to

escort a troopship, Empress of Australia, with Canadian troops and a team of demolition experts (operation Gauntlet). Their task was to evacuate Norwegian and Soviet personnel from the archipelago and destroy coalmines and fuel stocks that might be of use to the enemy. Bear Island was also visited to destroy a German weather station. The two cruisers of the task force, Nigeria and HMS Aurora diverted to intercept a German convoy. During this action Nigeria sank the German training ship Bremse, but suffered serious damage to her bow, possibly having detonated a mine. On return to Britain, she was sent to Newcastle for repairs. The Nigeria was then assigned to operate in the Mediterranean. Frank was to see more action, as he was still serving on the Nigeria when operations started on the 12th of August 1942, where she was participating in "Operation Pedestal", escorting a convoy bound for Malta. She was the flagship of the close escort group, commanded by Admiral Harold Burrough (see photo below).

H.M.S. Nigeria.



Admiral Harold Burrough

Captain Dundas

Nigeria was torpedoed and damaged by the Italian submarine Axum, but managed to make it back to Gibraltar escorted by three destroyers. A story about life on board the Nigeria relating to being torpedoed was told by Frank to me (his son Peter William Luxford) in the 1970's, which was; "I was off duty at the time when we were torpedoed, I was lying on deck getting a bit of shut-eye with another sailor next to me, when all of a sudden we were hit by shrapnel from the torpedo, I suffered burns and minor injuries, whilst the sailor next to me died from his wounds".....There but for the grace of God, go I. !!

The next ship that Frank was posted on was HMS Wolfe on the 1st of February 1943. I can only imagine, as I don't for sure, that this was for more training before being posted to HMS Nairana, the aircraft carrier that saw action in the Russian convoy mission.



HMS Wolfe – Depot Ship. Was an Armed Merchant Cruiser. One of it's operations was the support of passage of Arctic convoys in view of threat of attacks by German surface ships and submarines.

Then on the 11th of April 1943, it was back to the Shore Base HMS Pembroke for more training and exams before joining HMS Nairana on the 26th November 1943

to be part of the support team escorting ships taking much needed supplies to Russia.



HMS Nairana (D05) was the lead ship of the Royal Navy, escorting convoys and doing anti-submarine work in the Atlantic and Arctic "theatres". Frank would have been on watch on the bridge of the Nairana, helping the planes take-off and land safely. Now, after passing more exams Frank had gained the position of being "Act. Ldg. Sig. (Ly). V.S.3.". On the 26th May 1944, Royal Navy sea Hurricanes operating from Nairana claimed the destruction of three Junkers Ju 290s during the defence of a convoy. This represented 10 percent of the total German inventory. The Russian convoy missions, in my opinion, were amongst the worst missions of the war. The conditions the sailors had to endure sailing from England up to Murmansk in the Kola inlet Russia

were indescribable. The mountainous seas throwing water all over the decks and by the time it had landed on deck it was ice. Frank has spoken about sailors losing the skin on their gloveless hands when reaching out for something to hold on to on deck when seas were high. Another story Frank has told me is; "While on watch on the bridge, I would see the returning planes coming in to land and in some cases the plane would clip the bridge with it's wing and spin the plane across the bow of the boat and end up in the drink". He never told me the outcome of the pilots!!!....

While still with the Nairana, and negotiating the arctic waters, Frank earned himself the title he had been wanting to achieve. That of, "Acting Yeoman Signalman, Ly, V.S.2.". On the 21st of May 1945, Frank left the aircraft carrier HMS Nairana, and returned to the Shore Establishment HMS Pembroke, which one would have thought was the end of life at sea, and the war. Yes it was the end of the war, but not the end of life at sea for Frank. His navy records show, from the 12th of August 1945 for only 3 days, Frank was posted to another aircraft carrier, HMS Queen. For what reason I'm not sure, with the war over I can only assume it was to bring our troops back home.



H.M.S. Queen, whether this was true or not, I feel Frank my father was a courageous man throughout his naval time in the Royal Navy, and for being able to cope with everything that was thrown at him during the 2nd World War battles.

After returning to Chatham, he spent 5 months there until being "released from the Royal Navy" on the 14th of March 1946. Ready for a calmer life, where he managed to carry on the family business of creating, making and installing Stained Glass in churches, here and abroad. He married and had three children, one being me, and I idolised my dad so much, he was a great friend as well as a father to me. I really feel his courage and commitment during the war, as with so many other men, should be recognised in written memories.

Here are some photos and memories Frank kept, in an album he made, of life between 1940 and 1945.





“Happy Buntings” and friends.



Frank Luxford and Norman ??



Len ?? and Fred ??



Len, Norman, Fred and Myself (Frank Luxford).

Time spent in America, while HMS Nigeria was there for repairs.

While the crew of the Nigeria were waiting for their ship to be repaired, before going back to face more action in the war, they were billeted with families in Georgia. Frank was with Mr and Mrs J.L.Palmer, in Camilla, Georgia. The photo below

shows Mr & Mrs J.L.Palmer sitting on the bench with their son and his wife standing behind them, which of the ladies is his wife I don't know, but the other lady is Mrs B.M. Archibald, with her daughter Linda in the deckchair holding a doll. The pet dog is lying in front of them. It does say in the album, under the photo, all their names and Judy ? Now whether the dog or linda's doll is Judy.....I'm guessing it's the dog ?!?



This photo was taken in 1942, and obviously frank kept in touch with the various families well after the war, because the photo's below show Linda Archibald growing up in America and visiting England and Frank and his family in 1963. A happier memory of the war years.



Linda at home with mum and Linda in her 20s at frank's home in England.