

• SPECIAL REPORT •

TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS OF FIGHTING IN WORLD WAR TWO

WILLIAM MOSS - HMS PRINCE OF WALES

I was in the damage control party; we were sent anywhere to see what had gone wrong. We got hit with torpedoes. When you got hit with a torpedo, it shook the boat, we got bombed as well. This chief mechanic in charge of us said would we have a look at top and see what was going on because all the communication had got knocked out. The phones were no good, all broken down. You're below armored decking, to get up you've got a winch, two of you wind it up and it lifts the door up that's solid iron. Can't lift it by yourself. If that broke you were trapped in.

We lifted it half way so me and this lad could get out. We crawled through and out on the upper deck. We came back and told him what was going on. After a while he said 'would you go up again? I'll see that you get recommended for this' so we went up again on the upper deck and it was terrible. The boat deck looked like a shell had gone through it, wrecked everything on it. And whilst we were up there a seaman ran around shouting 'they're coming again!' I said 'let's get down below again, come on.' He said no, he wouldn't come with me and he went into the hangars. I went down below and these bombs dropped, I think he got the full blast of these.

When I was down below looking down this corridor, it was like all this dust, all black, just came like a cloud at you. Like fog, thick black stuff. I had a little tea towel and I put that around my mouth. It was terrible. Then from no-where all these stokers came all dashing to get to the ladder and I thought I'd go across to the other side. Course it was dark, couldn't see anything but I knew my way across there, so off I went. They had marine's lockers along there and this one

had fallen down, big lockers. I lifted it up, don't know how. Anyway, I lifted it up, got under to the other side. Still couldn't see anything and then I saw light on the other side. What it was, the bombs had split the upper deck and there was a gap like that.

I thought I was at the other side but I wasn't so I kept on. Got to the other side and there are low archways, then I felt this rail. Well, that rail (this was the benefit of when we first went on the ship finding our way around - this is where it came in).

I felt this rail and knew what the rail was on the other side of. The marines put their hammocks in it, so I knew I was on the wrong one, so I feel over and feel the other one and I get through the other side. This ladder going up was broken. It was just swinging and I thought 'how do I get up there?'. The hatch itself was a big hatch. In the centre there's a small one, this was loose. I was pretty fit then, did lots of training, skipping and that. Anyway, I managed to get hold of the ladders and somehow get to the top and I got through. I saw the upper deck split right open where the bombs had dropped. Where the hell Derek was I don't know. Then I saw a lad running across the upper deck. It was just as though got his back like this and peeled it. He was red raw. He was in shock. They were abandoning ship at that point so I went back aft. I never saw Derek again.



Bill Moss with his news article on the sinking of the Prince of Wales

ROBERT DICKENSON - AYRSHIRE YEOMANRY

"I always remember getting off the boat at Algiers and it was pouring with rain. They had us marching from where the boat pulled in up to a camp which was about 5 miles away. We were wet through; anyway when we got there, they gave us a tot of rum. It did help. We stayed there until we were fully trained. I was a gunner with the Ayrshire Yeomanry. After that you were just pitched into battle then, help yourself. I know that we were marching up to the front. We were harassed all the way with planes bombing us and machine gunning. We dashed this way and that way. We did get there eventually. We just dug in then. We were at the front line all the time, more or less. It wasn't as bad as people imagined it would be like. It had its fun days and its bad days. I lost three of my best pals there. They got killed, you took it in your stride and carried on, and there was nothing else you could do.

We lived in a trench. When you got to somewhere and stopped, you dug a trench for two about 4 ft. down, something like that. You piled the soil at the front so it

was like 6ft. when you were looking over it. We never had any bad encounters with the enemy. They used to have a pop at us every now and again with their rifles. We were always going forward. I don't remember them telling us to retreat. It was always forward, forward, forward.

You didn't take things for granted, each day was different. You lost a couple of mates one day, you just shook it off and that was it. I think the civilians lost more than we did with the bombing. Two or three years, we were in the front line, ten months at a time. They'd pull us back for a fortnight for a rest, then back again and this is how it went on. We had a rifle. Do you know, I've never fired a rifle, but I was a gunner see? I had a 25 pound gun. We had a rifle with us but we never needed them. When you had to use a rifle you were too damn close! I didn't mind being a gunner. I was about a mile away".



Ayrshire Yeomanry gunners in action
PHOTOGRAPH SUPPLIED
BY IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM



Harry with his shipmates aboard 'Victorious'

HARRY GALLIMORE - HMS VICTORIOUS

I was seaman but there are a lot of jobs for seaman. I was the Commanders runner for a good while, the Commander would just tell me something and I would have to nip to any part of the ship to carry that message through. There was one occasion when one of the planes had crashed and they were all in the board room and I had to go to the captain on the bridge and ask him for the entry of our final report. "Commander wishes to have the interval recommendation for his final report". The Captain said, "Don't you mean interim report?" "Oh yes sir that was it". Other jobs, well literally we had so many jobs you couldn't really say what your job was on board really.

I was on the guns at sea when Kamikaze bombers hit us; well on one occasion I counted 19 coming down, this was in the Mediterranean on a multi-convoy. I heard 4 bangs and turned my head and the Eagle was sinking and that was

the sort of thing I was up against. I was up there on the guns on one occasion, on an operation convoy to Malta and I counted 19 planes but it was 25 actually coming down but we didn't get the order to fire straight away so I didn't count the others.

We were working with the yanks bombing Tokyo and so on when we got the orders to get the hell out of it. We'd got atom bombs going over and they were going out to Nagasaki and Hiroshima. We were so close to the actual land that you could see this little monument sticking up in the harbour, but then of course these bombers went over carrying the atom bombs to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We were then about 9 or 10 miles across the water from where we were fighting. I got a book in here with all the operations I was on.

When I was in action on the ship, there's a platform and round from there, that's where I used to go when anything was bombing us. A bomb did hit us, it hit a catapult and damaged it but the bomb went down further and exploded. You didn't know the details of these things; you had no time to worry about anything else.

FARRINGTON - ROYAL ARMY SERVICE CORPS

"My brother Jack had been a batman to an officer and through that the officer found out that he'd got this talent for figures. This unit lost the one that was looking after the books and supplies. When the division landed he was killed. So this officer said, "I can get another batman. You go and do that." And he was in a tent on his own doing that job when planes came over and they bombed and machine gunned every single one of them except for Jack, because he was in a tent and they missed him.

He'd gone all through the Forces with a friend he'd made in the Army, a lad with red hair and he come out and found his head blown clean off his body. They got bombed and machine gunned until they'd killed everybody, cos they knew they were the Royal Army Service Corps, they made sure everybody was dead, flying low and machine gunning them after they'd bombed them he said. And he's in this tent petrified and he said He came out and looked round and there wasn't anything left but these boxes that had the gliders in, only, they didn't have gliders in. They were empty boxes. They'd done it to make the Germans think they'd got a division of glider pilots, but they hadn't and they never intended to have any.

Can you imagine him wandering about trying to make sense of what's happened and why there was nothing in these boxes? He was in a daze and upset and didn't know

where he was going and he was the only one left. The officer he knew was dead, there's none of that like they have today where one particular soldier is given all sorts of care. He was just put with another division and moved on again doing the same work, because he was the only one they had that knew how to do stores, you see.

So they went on and they come up near Belgium and it happened again. They all got destroyed again and he was found wandering by a Belgian family and they hid him and four others in a chateau. I've got a little photo of it and there are four men and you can tell by the uniform when you stare at it a long time that they're not all English because the uniforms would be exactly alike and they're not.

They hid them and fed them for months until the British Army caught up with them again, and really by then he should have come home, but when the war was over, he still didn't come home. They sent him Italy because stuff was going on in Italy, troops that weren't needed were sent home and de-mobbed, and the troops that had important jobs were needed, they had to go. He was still clever and he still had a brilliant job but when he came home he was never the same again".



Jack Farrington 4th from left with other soldiers during their stay at the Chateau