

Ozzie Burkholder & the Athabaskan

Submitted by Mary Burkholder

The Athabaskan was a Tribal Class Destroyer and she was big, powerful, and beautiful.

On January 9, 2003, the Toronto Star reported that a diver had located the underwater grave of H.M.C.S. Athabaskan. She was torpedoed by a German Destroyer in the English Channel off Brittany on April 29, 1944.

This news item brought back many memories of that time for a Stayner family. One of their own was reported missing as having been on board as a leading Telegraphist. That person was Oswald (Ozzie) Burkholder.

His part of the story is told in the "Unlucky Lady", a story written and published by Emil Boudoin, (whose brother was a survivor but spent the rest of the war in a POW Camp in Germany), and Len Burrow of the R.C.A.F.(whose younger brother was reported as "missing and presumed dead").

Ozzie's story goes like this - at 2200 hours Ozzie arrived at the Devonport Dockyard to join the Athabaskan Crew at number 5 jetty. He had been on a special course in Northern England and was returning wearily to his ship. He was challenged by the Shore Patrol who wanted to know where he was going. On giving his destination he was told that the ship had just left the dock and he was adrift. As it turned out, he really was "adrift", as all his gear, clothes, and records of all kinds were on board. It took about two weeks for the good news to get back to Stayner that he was alive and well. One Hundred & Twenty-eight of the crew were lost that night of a total complement of 261.

Ozzie's next ship was a Corvette - the Leaside and he had many a stormy Atlantic crossing on convoy duty between St. John's and Londonderry. Ozzie died of a brain aneurism at the age of 60.

(This story first appeared in the Fall 2003 issue of our newsletter.)