

Personal Stories



from World War II



Ronald (Ron) Leonard Walters Royal Navy

In March 1942 a young man, the son of Leonard and Elizabeth Waters, decided to volunteer at the age of 17 for service in the Royal Navy, being posted initially to the shore base near Fareham, HMS Collingwood.

So, what is Ron's family background and wartime environment he experienced in those dark days of WW2?

This was the second world war to have an impact on the Walters family, as his father Leonard had served in the 1st Battalion the Wiltshire Regiment through the Great War, surviving involvement in the great battles of the Somme, Ypres and Passchendaele. Having returned to Winterslow to work as a carter at New Manor Farm Leonard married Elizabeth in 1924 (formally Kimber). By 1933 the family lived in a thatched cottage on the corner of Yarmley Lane and Middleton, and consisted of Ron (1925), Maurice(1927), Lucy(1930) and Gordon(1930), with the head of the household now working at Porton.

Ron's family were committed to All Saints church with his father and uncles Len & Edgar bell ringers, the latter a member of the Parochial Church Council, mother a member of the Mothers Union and Ron in the choir with brother Edgar and uncle Edgar.

Ron kept himself busy outside his church activities, alongside his education at the Village School till he was 14, such as his job on a small holding in Yarmley lane, owned by John & Mildred Witt, which involved milking goats. Further involvement in community activities came around 1940 when as a member of the newly formed scout troop he became a troop leader. He also joined The Home Guard at 16, where his father utilised his military experience from WW1 in the role of Sergeant-Instructor. Having left school, he continued to work for the Witt family until he secured a job with an accountancy firm in Salisbury.

Having completed his basic training and adjusted to military life away from Winterslow Ron was transferred to HMS Excellent, a shore base, to be trained in gunnery and where he was in June when he celebrated his 18th birthday. On 17th August he joined his first ship, the sloop Egret a submarine hunter. The latter was 292 feet long boat built on the Isle of Wight in 1938 and with Starling, Cygnet, Wren, Wild Goose and Woodpecker became the most famous U boat hunters of WW2. These vessels formed part of Winston Churchill's formation of a "special support group of sloops" response to the devastating impact of the success of Hitler's Wolf Pack submarine tactics, which saw on average 3 ships a day sunk whilst bringing much needed supplies across the Atlantic from the USA. These vessels had a roving brief to seek out German U Boats where ever they may be, which meant facing the forces of nature in the form of gales, high seas, ice and freezing fog.



H.M.S. Egret

As a result of effective attacks on U Boats in 1943 by the support Groups tactics, in the Bay of Biscay whilst returning to their submarine pens on the French coast, the Germans decided to return by hugging the coast of north west Spain. As a result of the increased activity by the Support Groups in this area off Spain the Luftwaffe attacked around Midday on the 25th August, but failed to have a major impact on the Navy formations. The Germans returned on 27th August to attack, this time concentrating on First Support Group sailing some 30 miles west of the Spanish port of Vigo, which included the sloop Egret on which Ron had served for a mere 10 days.

Observers on the British vessels noted that the German aircraft did not adopt their normal formations when making their bombing runs. After the engagement it was identified that for the first time the enemy had deployed guided missiles, one of which had inflicted a direct hit on the Egret, resulting in her magazine exploding causing the vessel to roll over and sink. The Egret therefore made history by being the first warship to be sunk by a missile. Only 30 ratings and 5 officers survived, with almost 200 soles losing their lives.

Ron is listed on Winterslow's All Saints memorial for WW2, identifying him as the youngest parishioner from the Parish to die in the two world wars, and on the Naval Memorial on Southsea Common.

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