

Written memoir to aide interview of Mr Ceredig Evans, Royal Navy Veteran

Interview took place at Gerald's home in West Wales on 1st August 2023

The interviewer was Mr Neil Davies of Age Cymru Dyfed Veterans

The film and audio were by Mr Steven Munro, Age Cymru Dyfed Veterans project volunteer

Early years

(Video 2)

Ceredig's story starts with his parents move from Wales to London in the 1920's. His parents were Dairy Farmers and in the 1920's several Welsh Dairy Farmers were moving to the city to start businesses producing milk products for the local population. In 1927 Ceredig was born to the family, where he was destined to support then family business.

Ceredig spent his early childhood attending a local state school in Paddington, west London.

With the onset of war in 1939, Ceredig was twelve years of age. Deciding he would be safer out of the city, his parents reluctantly took the decision to evacuate him back to live with his Welsh relations in Wales. This is where he remained until in early 1942. He enjoyed Wales and revelled in his Welsh heritage. However, back in London his parents had lost labour to the war effort and general call to service. This left them desperately short of labour. He was now fifteen years of age, so Ceredig's parents took the decision to send for him. He promptly returned to London, where he immediately began work at the Dairy. In the mornings Ceredig would deliver milk using a handcart, or on some occasions a bicycle.

At sixteen years of age, Ceredig volunteered for the ARP service. After finishing work , he undertook rescue work, helping the emergency services clear rubble and search for survivors after the air raids. In the video, he recalls abandoning His Milk Cart, when the air raid siren sounded and running to take cover in the nearest air raid shelter. He remembers scenes of devastation and watching the Nazi terror weapons the V1 & V2 rockets, fly overhead and explode as they landed across west London.

Military service in the Royal Navy

(Video 1)

In June 1945, hostilities in Europe came to an end and London breathed a sigh of relief. However, as victory in Europe celebrations continued, on the 18th June Ceredig received his call up papers and he was draughted into the Royal Navy.

There was no time to dwell on victory in Europe for Ceredig. In no time, he found himself on the Train, travelling to Skegness to report for duty. He was ordered to attend the Butlin's holiday camp, but there would be no seaside holiday for him. The Royal Navy had taken over the camp early in the war and had adapted it to accept recruits into the Navy.

Basic Training

Two weeks after arriving in Skegness, Ceredig was sent to HMS Duke near Malvern, Worcestershire. This was the camp where Ceredig was kitted out in Naval uniform, trained in the basics of Seamanship and introduced to the parade square. He entered the camp as a boy, all be it a war time child, but left as a Royal Navy rating. It was during his stay at Malvern that Ceredig remembers taking part in the Victory in Europe parades in nearby Hereford and Malvern. He marched through the towns with a Naval detachment from the recruit training school.

Trade training

Ceredig was to train as a Royal Naval Stoker. The job of Stoker on board ship was an important and highly skilled one. The Stoker's were charged with keeping the ship's engine's running. If the engine's failed, there was no power and the ship became a sitting duck target for the enemy. So, it was off to HMS Devonport, where Ceredig received a crash course in the duties of a Naval Stoker on board a 1940's Diesel ship.

Operations at sea

December 1945 came and Ceredig received his first draught. He reported to Greenock in Scotland, where he was to join the ship's company aboard HMS Meynell, L82, a Hunt class Destroyer.

The ship set sail from Greenock, Scotland, tasked with escorting the aircraft carrier HMS Ocean R68, through the Irish sea and into the Atlantic Ocean, where it was to join the Mediterranean fleet.

Ceredig joined the small team of Stoker's working down in the Boiler room. He describes how important it was to keep the "Injector Jets" clean and free from obstructions. Interestingly, Ceredig tells us that he believed the Boiler room was the best place to work on boards the ship. It wasn't noisy, was warm and dry. When not attending to the engine's, the Stoker's would undertake duties in the Ship's mess. With only one cook servicing 23 Stoker's, Ceredig tells us how the Stoker's would have to peel the Vegetables and often prepare their

own food. The Mess also doubled as sleeping quarters, with Sailor's sleeping and resting in Hammocks. There were other tasks to be completed, not the least of which was the "watch". The ship operated a four hour watch, eight hour off method around the clock.

En route to the Med, the convoy encountered a terrific storm in the Bay of Biscay, a notoriously dangerous stretch of sea. During the storm, two Sailors lost their lives, swept overboard by massive waves and never to be found. This was Ceredig's first encounter with the harsh reality of life at sea and remains a very sad memory. Ceredig can also remember that the ships company were allowed only corned beef sandwiches nearly all the way from Greenock to Gibraltar, as it was too dangerous to cook in the rough seas.

Following the dropping of the two Atom bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the Japanese surrender hailed a welcome end to the war. HMS Meynell continued to escort "the Ocean" and the ship was tasked to patrol the Mediterranean ocean, operating from Malta. Ceredig gives his impressions of Malta and the Maltese people. Evidence of the island's suffering in the war was all about, but he gives a positive description of the local people.

In 1946, whilst patrolling the Med, the aircraft carrier group provided cover for Royal Naval ships who became involved in the infamous Corfu channel incident, off the coast of Albania. This notorious incident resulted in Royal Naval ships receiving fire from Artillery guns, stationed on the coast of Albania. HMS Volage suffered serious damage when it struck a mine. 84 Sailors lost their lives and 42 were injured during this incident. Ceredig himself, has little memory of this confrontation, which is often credited as the start of the period known as the Cold war.

Before the return voyage to England, Ceredig was to experience more drama. The Royal Navy was called to support the evacuation of British subjects from Palestine, where a war had erupted in 1947.

During the spring of 1948 HMS Meynell protected HMS Ocean, as it provided Air cover for the British withdrawal from Palestine. Ceredig remembers seeing the British subjects boarding Royal Navy ships and escorting them back to Cyprus, where they disembarked at Limassol, Cyprus.

Discharge

Ceredig's career in Royal Navy was brief but packed with incident and experiences. HMS Meynell returned to the UK and docked at Harwich. Ceredig vividly remembers over eighty RN ships of all varieties docked in the port, awaiting decommissioning.

After service

In the post war years, Ceredig returned to farming and agriculture. He attended college and gained his farming qualifications. After managing some large farming estates in southern

England, he met his wife to be. This led to his return to Wales, where he settled in Ceredigion. His wife helped him run a large Dairy farm, as well as raising a family. He enjoyed a long and happy marriage with his late wife and now lives near the farm he run for so many years.

His time on board HMS Meynell made a lasting impression on him. He later went onto to become an active member of the Royal Naval Association and was awarded lifetime membership in 2005, for outstanding efforts supporting the Association. He maintains life long friendships with former Sailors, enjoying the bond that those who served at sea recognize and value.

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- Our thanks to the National Library of Wales for assisting in the producing and retention of the film material.