

Charles Pope 28th January 1900 - 1980

Royal Navy – Engineering branch (Stoker)

Cowbridge, Cardiff



West Wales Veterans Archive

With thanks to Mr Edward Pope, former Royal Navy, Charles' son.

Description

Charles was born to a hard-working family that lived in Cowbridge, on the outskirts of Cardiff. His father was a Ploughman and Charles appeared destined to follow. However, his ambitions lay further than the fields outside Cardiff. Throughout the Great war, Cardiff docks saw record tonnes of shipping entering and leaving. The main stay of trade at Cardiff docks was Coal. Charles would see ship after ship entering and leaving the docks. Perhaps this is where his wonder lust grew.

In any event, come June 1918 Charles joined the Royal Navy. Described by the induction officer as five feet five inches in height, thirty-five-inch chest, with Hazel eyes, brown hair and a fresh complexion, Charles signed up for an initial twelve years-service.



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There followed an extraordinary career. He would serve in total 27 years, 3 months and 24 days, including final months of the Great war. His draft was the destroyer HMS Shakespeare, which was part of the 10th flotilla force, out of Harwich. In between the wars, Charles forged a career at sea. At the start of the Second world war, he was serving aboard the aircraft carrier HMS Ark Royal. He served throughout the war, surviving numerous battles. He was shot by the enemy and survived a direct hit upon his ship, which killed many colleagues. He was discharged from service on 28th September 1945 and awarded an injury war pension.

Awards and medals

First world war

Great war victory medal 1914 -18

Great war medal 1914 -18

In between wars

Long service and good conduct medal RN

Second world war

1939 – 1945 Campaign Star

Atlantic Star 1939 - 1945

Africa Star 1942-1943

Italy Star 1943 – 1945

The Defence medal 1939 – 1945

The war medal 1939 – 1945

Life at sea

In 1918 Charles was aboard HMS Shakespeare. He was a Stoker in training and would receive instruction on maintaining the ships four Yarrow boilers. The Boiler room was a challenging environment for a young Sailor. However, during the twelve months below decks, he clearly applied himself. Successive Captain's had seen fit to award him a Stoker class two Very Good rating.

Action in the far north

Despite the official end of the great war in 1919, Charles' time aboard HMS Shakespeare would provide him with excitement and experience. The ship sailed to the Gulf of Finland, where it provided support to counter the Bolshevik threat during the Russian revolution. This was a dangerous mission. The ship's Captain had to engage Bolshevik frigates and navigate minefields.



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Meanwhile the (surrendered) German high seas fleet was anchored at Scapa Flow. The ship's commanders had decided to scuttle the vessels. With the threat imminent, HMS Shakespeare was ordered to sail for Scapa Flow at full speed. Young Charles would have been put to the test during this journey. The pressure was on the Stoker's to provide maximum output and strain every last ounce of horsepower from the Brown Curtis turbine engines.

Once the crisis was over, HMS Shakespeare returned north to support Estonian forces in the Baltic Sea. Charles was to hear the guns firing, as the ship laid down a bombardment onto the Bolshevik defences near Sanit Petersburg. However, as history records, the Bolshevik revolution was successful. This in turn led to HMS Shakespeare sailing back to home waters, returning in December 1919. This hailed a second draft for Charles.

- A photograph of HMS Shakespeare can be found in Charles Pope's on-line collection at the West Wales Veterans Archive Peoples collection – Photo 21

Warmer climates

The nature of his next draft is unclear. But it would seem he now entered an extended period of trade trading. The majority of 1921 was spent aboard the aging Dreadnaught class battleship HMS Monarch, which was being used as a training ship. Trade examination passes recorded during this period of service seems to support this assumption. HMS Monarch was a ship with an impressive history, which included action at the Battle of Jutland.

It is quite possible he made return journeys aboard HMS Monarch, to the Mediterranean Sea. It is documented that the ship undertook transportation duties. She embarked troops at Portsmouth and travelled east to Gibraltar. Charles would have found life in the Boiler room of this super Dreadnaught Battleship a step up from HMS Shakespeare. There were 18 Yarrow Boilers to maintain. In turn these powered two sets of Parsons, direct drive Turbines. Mammoths compared to what he'd experienced before.

His next draft was to a ship with an equally impressive history. HMS Dublin, a fast and light cruiser, had been part of the gun line, supporting the Gallipoli landings in 1915. She'd sunk a German destroyer in the battle of Jutland. However, Charles would see no similar actions. From 21st November 1921 Charles found his ship attached to Africa station, where he was to remain for thirty months. During this draft, he would likely have experienced the voyage along the west African coast. In the summer of 1923, HMS Dublin sailed between Simonstown and Cape town, calling at five ports along the coast in between.

His next draft was a short service posting SPA. In May 1924 he reported to HMS Weymouth. Another survivor of the Great war survivor, this cruiser had sustained severe damage during a Torpedo attack. HMS Weymouth was powered by a Yarrow boiler and Parsons turbine combination. Charles was no doubt becoming familiar with this drive system.

Six months of further training at HMS Victory followed, before on 12th February 1925, Charles returned to sea to spend the next two years aboard the cruiser HMS Carlisle.

HMS Carlisle formed part of China station. This C class cruiser was embarking on an eastern voyage. The draft afforded Charles the opportunity to visit Hong Kong. The ship "crossed the line (Equator) on 21st March 1925. This was to be one of many crossings Charles would make. It is recorded that the ship was at Hong Kong on 26th October 1925. This coincides with an extension of Charles' draft, which is documented as 20th October.



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On 22nd May 1927, Charles was back at HMS Victory for more training. This period ashore, included some time at HMS Excellent on Whale Island, Portsmouth. This was a base where Sailors received instruction in naval gun fire and Firefighting.

An opportunity to see more of the world came with Charles' next draft. On 6th January 1928 he joined the crew of The Wisteria. This ship had recently been recommissioned at Bermuda. It represented change indeed for Charles. It was an Arabia class sweeping sloop. In other words, a Minesweeper. A fighting ship performing a role Charles had not experienced before. However, despite the change of role, by now, he had a lot of experienced of the Boiler room. The ship operated from HMD Bermuda station, patrolling the western Atlantic Ocean and West Indies.

After three years aboard Wisteria, Charles returned to the UK and further stints at HMS Victory. This likely entailed more studying, training and sharing of operational experience. Interestingly in 1931, the Engineering school at HMS Fisguard, Portsmouth was moved to Chatham. Perhaps Charles was now instructing, as well as training. His service record shows that in May 1931, he was made up to Leading Stoker. The moves during this period ashore are documented in his service record throughout 1931. Fisgard used various vessels as training ships. It is possible Charles trained and instructed on HMS Terrible, the Fisguard training ship.

10th June 1931 heralded a return to sea and a Minesweeper. Charles found himself drafted aboard HMS Selkirk. He shared something in common with this ship. Both began service in the Royal Navy in 1918. Having been reduced to special compliment service, HMS Selkirk formed part of the first minesweeping flotilla. Information covering this period in Charles's career is sparse and subsequent postings until 1934 relate to further periods at the shore-based training bases Victory and Excellent.

In May 1934, Charles obtained promotion. He was now an acting Petty Officer. Upon promotion, he was drafted aboard the Admiralty class destroyer HMS Douglas. This ship had been re-commissioned out of the reserve fleet. In the boiler room, he was to be re united with the Yarrow-Parsons combination drive system he'd become expert upon. Ten days after joining HMS Douglas, the ship set sail from Portsmouth, bound for the Mediterranean. She sailed down the Bay of Biscay, calling in at Gibraltar, before reaching Malta on 18th May 1934. Charles was by now familiar with these bastions of British naval power. Few voyages travelled east without calling at these important ports.

On 29th June 1934 Charles was confirmed in the rank of Stoker Petty Officer. This represented a considerable achievement. Fifteen years of operational service in boiler & engine rooms of Destroyers, Cruisers and Minesweepers, coupled with numerous further training courses at RN shore establishments had paid dividends. Charles' career progressed and with promotion came new responsibilities. On 16th July 1934, he was awarded Stoker Hold Charge status, which meant during his watch, he would take charge of the ship's hold housing the Boiler room. This was a position of considerable responsibility, placing all the sailor's working in the boiler room and the machinery under his command.

During summer and autumn 1934, HMS Douglas patrolled the Mediterranean Ocean. She navigated around the Greek coastline, visiting various Greek and Spanish Islands, as well as mainland ports. The ship anchored at Corfu, Spetsai and Navarin. Later HMS Douglas would visit Italy, Spain and France. This voyager included the briefest of visits to Trieste and Venice, before longer stays at Marseilles then Barcelona. At the time, Spain and Italy were both experiencing the



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onset of Fascist power. It must have been an interesting if not concerning time for Charles and the crew, visiting these countries on board a Royal Navy war ship.

The patrols aboard HMS Douglas around the Mediterranean Ocean came to an end in the autumn of 1936. Charles returned to the UK, and more training / instructing at Portsmouth. An extended stay at Portsmouth yielded further promotion. On 8th September he qualified for Chief Stoker status, although it wasn't until March 1944 that his records show a draft where he held this rating.

On 22nd June 1939 Charles received a draft onto the aircraft carrier HMS Ark Royal. In less than three months, Britain would be at war with Germany. In the meantime, his job was to learn the to operate and maintain the system that powered the carrier. The Ark Royal was the first large aircraft carrier commissioned for service in the Royal Navy. She had only been in service for just over six months when Charles arrived onboard. He was to have sixteen months experience, working the six Admiralty three drum boilers, which fed the three geared steam turbine engines.

- Photographs of some of the ships mentioned can be found in Charles Pope's on-line collection at the West Wales Veterans Archive Peoples collection.

World war two

At the outbreak of the war, Ark Royal was tasked to a hunter killer role. Essentially, she was to seek and counter the German U boat threat to the northern approaches of the British Isles. Within hours of the declaration of war the carrier was at sea with her battle group in the north Atlantic Ocean. The carrier was protected by a flotilla of vessels, including several Destroyers.

It took two weeks before Charles and his crew got to confront the infamous German wolf packs. The carrier group answered a distress call from a UK cargo ship, the SS Fanad-Head, a British merchant vessel being stalked by U Boats. HMS Ark Royal steamed towards the merchant ship. The boilers and turbine engines in Charles' hold would be working at full capacity. As the carrier appeared on station, she came under direct attack from two U boats. The submarines fired a salvo of torpedoes, but the Ark's captain successfully steered away from the path of the torpedoes. The Destroyer escorts then intervened. Aided by the Ark Royal's Skua aircraft, the U Boats were attacked. The result was the sinking of U 39. This was the first sinking of a U boat by the Royal Navy in World War two. The Skuas then attacked the other U boat, U30. The submarine was alongside the Fanad-Head and had put a boarding party on her. Unfortunately, two Skua's crashed executing the attack and the RN Observers were killed. The Pilots were rescued by the German U boat crew boarding party.

Following this short exchange of fire, HMS Ark Royal was ordered to return to Loch Ewe, Scotland. Shortly after lowering her anchor, non-other than Winston Churchill himself inspected her crew. This wouldn't be the first time Charles' would meet Winston. It is worth noting this incident was significant and not just for sinking U39. After reviewing the incident, the Admiralty took the view that deploying aircraft carriers in hunter killer groups, to seek out U boats, represented too big a risk. For the German wolf packs were too potent a threat to risk losing an aircraft carrier to a German torpedo. Therefore, this tactic was abandoned.

HMS Ark Royal was redeployed to form Force K, sailing in the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. She was tasked with hunting down the German battleship, Graf Spree. The carrier was somewhat successful in this task. She supported the blockade of the Argentine coast at the Battle of River plate, which led to the scuttling of the Graf Spree in December 1939.



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Interestingly on 2nd December 1939 HMS Ark Royal was sailing off the Cape of Good Hope, when involved in the aftermath of the sinking of a large German liner called the Watussi. At the time, the Watussi was the largest German ship lost by enemy action. The Watussi had been heavily damaged following an air attack by the South African air force. HMS Renown brought her guns to bear on the Watussi and applied the coup de grace.

- In Charles' collection, there is an original photograph of the Watussi in her death throes. (Charles Pope WWVA collection photograph 4).

Norway

HMS Ark Royal was recalled back to the UK. As the expansion of German power moved north-west, the carrier was tasked to sail north and take station off Norway. Here she was to support British operations against the German invasion. Her aircraft launched attacks against German shipping.

On 10th April 1939 HMS Ark Royal attacked and sank the German cruiser Konigsberg.

After 30th April 1939, the situation on land became untenable. The Ark Royal's aircraft provided support to the British troops as they evacuated Norway (Operation Dynamo).

She was again committed into action in early June, supporting French forces landing at Narvik. The landings failed and the ship's aircraft again provided cover as evacuations occurred.

Aircraft from the Ark royal also supported a raid on the German Battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, which had been located at Trondheim. The attack took place on 13th June but was a disaster. She lost fifteen aircraft and sustained damage during a collision with two Royal Navy escorts ships in heavy fog. This last action herald a return for Charles and his crew mates to Scapa Flow.

Rest at Scapa Flow was not an option. Just ten days after the unsuccessful attack on the German pocket battleships, HMS Ark Royal was arriving in Gibraltar, escorted by the famous battleship HMS Hood. The ships joined Force H, a task force sent after the French fleet, which was harbouring in Algeria. The French fleet refused to join the Free French forces and was attacked. Aircraft from Ark Royal were directly responsible for neutralizing a French battleship.

Malta

As Force H took on the task of supporting the resupply of the island of Malta, Charles would again find himself in the line of fire. On 8th July 1940, shortly after sailing from Gibraltar, the carrier came under determined attack from Italian bomber aircraft. She withdrew and immediately returned to Gibraltar. Following this the carrier slipped out of Gibraltar and began to support the fleet by providing essential air cover. The carrier also embarked on operations to divert enemy resources away from the re supply convoys. In one such operation, her aircraft successfully attacked mainland Italy, bombing the airfield at Calgiari.

On 30th September 1940 HMS Ark Royal escorted a convoy of reinforcements to the Egyptian port of Alexandria. En route Alexandria, she launched aircraft on another mission to mainland Italy to attack enemy airfields. Once all aircraft were recovered from the raids, the troop ships were delivered to Alexandria.



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HMS Ark Royal then re-deployed to West Africa station, where she supported operations against the Vichy French forces. Yet again, Charles was to experience the loss of allied personnel. On this occasion it was Free French Aviators who had been operating from HMS Ark Royal and failed to return, after attacking mainland enemy installations in enemy occupied North Africa. Following his action HMS Ark Royal returned to the UK for refit and repairs at Liverpool. This is where Charles was to leave the ship. His duty aboard the carrier had been a busy and dangerous time.

HMS Ark Royal was to become a victim of the Wolfpacks herself. On 13th November 1941, she was holed by a Torpedo fired by German Submarine U81 and disappeared beneath the waves the following day.

- A photograph of HMS Ark Royal can be found in Charles Pope's on-line collection at the West Wales Veterans Archive Peoples collection – Photo 23.

Charles was drafted to complete a short service engagement (SSA) aboard HMS Blencathra. This ship was a newly commissioned Hunt class Destroyer. Blencathra needed working up to operational readiness, which was achieved in January 1941. The ship joined the 1st Destroyer flotilla, which sailed out of Portsmouth.

Charles did not sail with the Blencathra. He received another SSA aboard HMS Newark, a Town class Destroyer. This ship had been transferred over from the US Navy as part of the lend/lease agreement. Charles, a Stoker Petty Officer would oversee the ship's power plant being readied for operational deployment, whilst the armament and Radar was refitted to Royal Navy specifications. Unfortunately, ten days after he joined the ship, it sustained damage to the structure whilst at Devonport, when a collision occurred with another Destroyer HMS Volunteer. The Newark then sailed to Belfast, Northern Ireland for repairs, arriving on 18th April. It seemed the ship was somewhat unlucky, as she was again damaged on May 5th. However, on this occasion it was the Luftwaffe who caused the damage during a bombing raid on Belfast docks. The Newark had led a troubled life. She had been damaged during a collision with another friendly ship in Nova Scotia prior to departure and had engine trouble when she set sail for the UK, necessitating a return to port. When he left the vessel at the end of May 1941, Charles may have been relieved to return to HMS Victory unharmed.

Winston Churchill

A return to northern shores and Scapa Flow followed. On 25th June 1941, Charles was drafted onto aboard HMS Oribi, an O class destroyer. Interestingly this ship was sponsored by the South African government, hence the name Oribi (an Antelope). Shortly after joining the crew, Charles crossed paths once again with Winston Churchill. On 4th August the ship was tasked with conveying the Prime Minister and senior Naval officers from the port of Scrabster in Caithness to Scapa Flow. The short voyage to the Orkney Islands, escorted by two Destroyers, would possibly be one of Charles's most important missions. For upon reaching Scapa Flow, the VIP party were to transfer onto the battleship HMS Prince of Wales. This ship would be undertaking the vital mission of transporting Winston and his naval party across the Atlantic Ocean to attend a historic meeting with President Roosevelt. The meeting was to take place aboard the USS Augusta at Placentia-bay, Newfoundland and was to become known as the Atlantic conference and charter. HMS Oribi joined a potent flotilla of war ships that escorted HMS Prince of Wales out into the mid-Atlantic. Twelve days later, HMS Oribi returned to the mid-Atlantic and rendezvoused with the returning HMS Prince of Wales. The ship joined the heavily armed escort and ensured the Prime Minister was safely delivered back to the UK.



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- Photographs 12, 18 of Winston Churchill aboard the ship can be seen in Charles' collection on the West Wales Veteran's archive.

Charles' time aboard HMS Oribi proved to be a busy and once again place his life in mortal danger. Following repairs, the ship engaged in operations to continue the resupply of the embattled island of Malta. The Oribi was re united with HMS Prince of Wales and on 17th September 1941, left the UK in convoy, destined for the Mediterranean Ocean. Following a brief stop at Gibraltar, HMS Oribi now became part of Force X. This flotilla was tasked with sailing supplies into Malta.

On 27th September, the ship took part in an unsuccessful attempt to salvage a British merchant vessel damaged by air attacks by the Italian air force. The threat from air attack was ever present and Charles' ship briefly sailed under Italian colours to escape marauding enemy aircraft. HMS Oribi was successful in delivering three merchant ships into Malta, before returning to the UK.

Having successfully sailed back to home waters, Oribi arrived at Scapa Flow October 5th 1941. It was not long before she was on task again, protecting the north-western approaches to the British isles. Indeed, on 10th October she set sail for flotilla duties. The Oribi found herself accompanying destroyers, shadowing RN minelayers off the coast of the Faroe isles. There is an interesting incident during this period when HMS Oribi made an unscheduled return to port to repair a manoeuvring steam valve. There is a query over sabotage being the cause of the failing valve. In any event, the ship soon set out into the North-sea again, this time to adopt protection duties for the Russian convoys.

Back to Norway

Charles was soon to hear to the sound of naval gunfire again. However, this time accompanied by a hefty mix of small arms fire.

HMS Oribi and HMS Onslow successfully escorted a merchant convoy to Vayenga (now Severomorsk), Russia. After refuelling on 12th December, the two ships returned to Scapa Flow.

On 23rd December HMS Oribi joined a special task force of ships, which was to undertake an operation in Norway. It was assigned to support a raid by 600 troops from the special services brigade on the Norwegian Island of Vaagso and Maaloy. This raid, codenamed Operation Archery, was to be undertaken by the newly formed British Commando Units and would thereafter occupy a place in the history of the British armed forces. The operation would herald the beginning of combined forces operations and was to be led by no less a Commander than Louis Mountbatten. Winston Churchill himself pushed for the raid. There would be five Commando groups going ashore. Number 5 Commando was aboard HMS Oribi.

The voyage from Scapa flow was an extremely challenging one through heavy seas. Early on 27th December 1941 in pitch darkness, Leading Stoker Charles Pope was aboard HMS Oribi as she sailed past the town of Maaloy into Ulvesund, a narrow stretch of Norwegian fjord. The battle ensigns were unfolded, doors made watertight and all hands at action stations. She following her battle and made for the settlement of South Vaagso. Upon arriving at South Vaagso, 5 Commando group, slipped ashore at a place known as Kapelnos point. The commandos immediately began to execute their orders. Their main task was to prevent German reinforcements moving in from the north. Although taken completely by surprise, the German defenders reacted fast and heavy skirmishing broke out. The ensuing action and outcome of the raid is well documented.



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HMS Oribi maintained station throughout, firing her four-inch guns alongside the light cruiser HMS Kenya in the Royal Navy gun line, which was laying down accurate fire upon German emplacements. 500 shells were fired by five ships in ten minutes. She also had to fight off attacks from German aircraft as the Luftwaffe arrived overhead and joined the battle.

At some point, it can safely be assumed that Charles sustained a bullet wound to his left ankle. It is documented in his service record. Certainly, there was a heavy volume of small arms fire flying about the battlefield and the Luftwaffe fighters were strafing the ships in the gun line. Much as the Germans were surprised, it seems that there were fifty crack German troops in town, who were "resting" from front line duties. German Snipers accounted for several casualties amongst the Commandos. Following the raid, which was deemed a success, the casualty figures relating to Royal Navy Sailors, counted two dead and four wounded. Charles was one of four crew from HMS Oribi that had been wounded in the action.

The raid accounted for an estimated 150 German dead, 98 Germans and 4 Quislings made prisoner and 71 Norwegians recovered back to the UK. RN Destroyers had sunk 10 German vessels. Four German aircraft were shot down. Secret German code books were captured from the German armed trawler Foehn. The raid ended at 1445hrs on 27th December 1941 and British forces returned at haste to the UK.

Clearly there had to follow a period of treatment, healing and recuperation and shortly after arrival back at Scapa Flow, Charles found himself being conveyed back to Portsmouth.

- A photograph of HMS Oribi can be found in Charles Pope's on-line collection at the West Wales Veterans Archive Peoples collection – Photo 24

Details of what occurred in the five months after his arrival back to HMS Victory are unknown. It can be assumed that he was recuperating. Nevertheless, on 9th May 1942, Charles found himself drafted aboard the Dido class light cruiser HMS Sirius. This ship would be his home for the next 28 months. He was joining a newly commissioned ship, which set sail for work up with the home fleet in Scapa flow.

In short time, HMS Sirius began operating as part of Force X. This was a flotilla of five Destroyers and one Cruiser, tasked with protecting the convoys to Russia. Thus, Charles returned to the cold waters of the North Sea and North Atlantic Ocean.

Back to Malta

It wasn't long before he was heading for warmer waters. On June 20th the ship was detached from the home fleet to form part of Force Z and a return to the Mediterranean. Force Z was to lay down protection for the convoys to Malta. This period was to be known as Operation Pedestal, the relief of the island of Malta. HMS Sirius joined other ships from Force Z and sailed from the river Clyde on 2/3rd Augus 1942.

By 9th August Force Z comprised of two battleships, three aircraft carriers, two cruisers and a heavy screen of destroyers. The force set sail from Gibraltar to provide protection for convoy WS21S, bound for the Sicilian narrows. Specific and reliable accounts of HMS Sirius involvement with Operation pedestal are scarce. The ship did form part of a special convoy including no less than five aircraft carriers. Two of these were sunk and a third HMS Illustrious bombed and damaged. Suffice is to say that the task of escorting supply ships into Malta was both dangerous and at times deadly.



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A historic foot note: On 15th April 1942 King George VI awarded the people of the island of Malta the George Cross for their heroism in resisting German and Italian forces.

Mediterranean Sea

There is material available which provides information on where Charles' manoeuvres, after the Malta convoys. Indeed, there are detailed first-hand accounts available from ship's crew, Mr Peter Deacon, who was a Communications Operator aboard and Mr E Mellor, a Radar Mechanic.

HMS Sirius and her crew of 530 men were under the command of Captain Brooking. Initially she was sent to patrol the Southern Atlantic and Indian Oceans. This was mainly to intercept blockade runners and conduct anti-Submarine patrols. However, with the inception of Operation Torch, the allied landings in North Africa, a return to battle seemed inevitable.

North Africa

HMS Sirius was nominated to support the Allied landings on North Africa. On November 8th 1942, at Algiers, the ship joined a task force that included the battleship HMS Duke of York, five cruisers Renown, Formidable, Victorious, Argonaut and Bermuda. This impressive array of RN firepower joined with other ships to form the 12th cruiser squadron, known as Force Q. This force now began aggressive patrols of approaches to the coast of North Africa.

On 8th November 1942 107,000 soldiers forming the allied invasion force landed on beaches at Casablanca, Algiers and Oran. What part the ship took in the landings is not well documented.

On 2nd December 1942 Force Q went into action against enemy troopships and their escorts of three Italian Destroyers, plus Torpedo boats, off the coast of Sicily on December 2nd. Five enemy vessels were sunk in what was known as the battle of Skerki bank. During this battle the Italian Destroyer Camicia Nera, fired off six Torpedoes at Sirius from only 2km away, but failed to hit her or any of the RN ships engaged in the fight. HMS Sirius was described as an absolute protagonist during the battle, so Charles had truly been in the thick of it.

HMS Sirius was operating from a harbour at Bizerte, Tunisia. The Afrika Corps under General Rommel had largely been defeated in Tunisia and Charles would have noted the large number of prisoners housed in makeshift compounds. The Luftwaffe flew regular sorties targeting the harbours where allied ships were at anchor or in docks. As the Eighth Army fought the Afrika Corps out of Algeria, HMS Sirius moved along the coast to Bone and then Algiers.

These were no easy days. Operations continued, with frequent and dangerous raids on enemy occupied islands, fortress Sicily and finally the Italian mainland. The ships' ten 5.25 inch guns fired salvos at a pace and the din must have been terrible, even for the Stokers down in the Boiler room. She also took part in a skirmish with German E boats off the port of Bizerta, in which the RN lost the destroyer HMS Lightening to enemy action.

Italy

Once North Africa had been secured, attention now focused on the Italian mainland and island of Sicily. HMS Sirius joined the 12th Cruiser squadron in support of the invasion of Sicily, Operation Husky. During preparations for the landings, the ship teamed with HMS Dido and the ships sailed



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to Marsala, Sicily, whereupon the Destroyers launched a bombardment of the shoreline (Operation Fracture). These precursor raids continued for several months, until on September 8th, whilst docked at Malta, she embarked troops from the 1st British Airborne division, ready for the invasion proper. Shortly after, the ship's crew learnt their destination was to be the Italian mainland at Taranto. A formidable force assembled for the voyage to Italy.

The flotilla set sail and arrived off Taranto-bay late on 9th September 1943. Tragedy struck, as the RN minelayer HMS Abdiel hit a mine and sank within three minutes. There was heavy loss of life amongst the ships crew and soldiers from the 1st Airborne division who perished in the deep water. Survivors were brought on to the deck of the Sirius, fished out of the water and given hot drinks and blankets. Troops were being landed at the time and the returning craft picked up survivors.

The ship soon weighed anchor and headed for the main invasion site at Salerno. Upon arrival, the Serious brought her guns to bear on targets identified by a Royal Artillery officer aboard. Charles and his team of Stokers would again hear the din of the ship's guns firing off salvos. The landings did not occur unopposed. For example, on 18th September 1943, HMS Sirius herself came under attack from waves of Luftwaffe Bombers, who braved the flak to drop bombs towards the ship. Fortunately, these missed but the Sailors on deck were raked by machine gun fire, causing minor damage.

With the troops establishing and then rapidly breaking out from a bridgehead, the Royal Navy Task force was dispersed. The Sirius required maintenance and repairs, therefore returned to harbour at Alexandria. Charles would have been busy at this point, as the ship undertook a Boiler clean. He may well have taken command of this task.

Aegean Sea

October 7th 1943 and the ship formed part of a small potent flotilla headed towards the Dodacanese islands. The mission was to bombard enemy emplacements. En route the flotilla came across a German convoy, just north of Astapalia. The subsequent battle resulted in the RN sinking nine enemy vessels.

Ten days later and the ship formed part of another Force H. H was tasked to attack the Greek Island of Kos, which had been retaken by a battalion of crack German Paratroopers.

At about 1600hrs, whilst sailing off the island of Karpathos the ship's company were brought to actions stations. Six Junkers 88 German bombers had been sighted approaching Force H. Within seconds the Bombers were overhead and strafing the decks of the RN ships. One Bomber passed over the deck of the Sirius and launched a 250kg bomb. The bomb hit the quarter deck and exploded. Amid a flash and deafening explosion, fourteen Sailors were killed in an instant. A further thirty were wounded. Captain Brookes had been injured and the ship suffered serious damage. The German aircraft pressed home the attack upon other ships nearby but fortunately did not return to apply the coup de grace. The following morning, with the ship stabilized a funeral ceremony was held aboard. The bodies of the deceased Sailors were wrapped in sail cloth, weighted with an Artillery shell and commended to the bottom of the Mediterranean Ocean.

Managing leaks in the damaged hull, HMS Sirius limped to the Eritrean port of Massawa for repairs in the floating dry docks, which had been built to maintain the Royal Navy fleet. Eritrea then being a British protectorate.



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What must Charles have made of all this? He was nearing forty-three years of age and had been seen action across the globe and survived being shot. He'd now lost fourteen comrades and witnessed thirty others injured in one incident alone.

Repairs were completed by the end of March 1944. Come April and she was received orders to support the British operations in Northwest Italy. However, in the strictest secrecy, a rather big day was looming on the coast of northern France. HMS Sirius was recalled to the UK. She arrived on the river Clyde on 20th May. One other significant development. Before returning to England, after 26 years-service in the Royal Navy, Charles reached the rank of Chief Stoker. This must have been a proud achievement for him.

- A photograph of HMS Sirius can be found in Charles Pope's on-line collection at the West Wales Veterans Archive Peoples collection – Photo 25

Operation Overlord – D-Day

On the morning of 4th June 1944 HMS Sirius enter the English Channel and linked up with elements of the largest naval fleet in history. Held in reserve, the ship was to offer support to allied forces landing on the beaches to the east. The ship she was brought forward to provide air cover to HMS Frobisher on 7th June, as the cruiser bombarded enemy emplacements threatening operations on Sword beach. The ship survived Overlord without loss or damage.

This was to be Charles final action on board HMS Sirius, but not his final days at sea.

Final days

Charles' service record documents him returning to HMS Victory on 25th July 1944. Four months later he returned to Scotland. He reported to the shore establishment at the Rosyth naval yard, HMS Cochrane (2). In-fact the seven months he remained under this command, would be aboard the re commissioned W class destroyer HMS Wivern. Wivern had spent a considerable amount of time on active duty in the Mediterranean, operating out of Gibraltar. She suffered structural damage during an explosion when the ship running alongside her hit a mine. She had been recovered to Plymouth.

Following her recommissioning in September 1944, Charles draft aboard began in November 1944. The ship was sent to patrol an area of sea at the mouth of the Thomas estuary, known as The Nore. Here, she was attached to a naval force known as the Harwich escort group. This group was tasked with escorting convoys between Rosyth (Wivern was linked to HMS Cochrane 2) and the Thames estuary.

In January 1945 Charles would experience Force 12 gale aboard HMW Wivern in the North Sea. The ship took such a battering that the structure was damaged, necessitating an extended stay at Rosyth for repairs.

The threat from the German Navy remained credible and this was demonstrated on 14th March 1945. HMS Wivern formed part of the escort for a convoy FS 56 sailing between Rosyth and the River Thames. German submarine U714 detected and attacked the convoy. She torpedoed the Danish cargo ship Magne off the Firth of Forth. The attack was a success and HMS Wivern busied herself rescuing survivors the North Sea. The U boat attempted to flee but was depth charged by a modern South African frigate HMSAS Natal and HMS Ascension. Although debris was seen on the surface, HMS Wivern spotted an oil slick ten miles south. Assuming that the U boat had escaped,



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she launched a depth charge attack. However, Wivern was not credited with the assumed destruction of the German submarine.

Following the surrender of Germany, which occurred on 8th May 1945, HMS Wivern sailed to Norway, where she supported the re occupation of the country and aided the transportation of allied personnel. The ship returned to Rosyth and was laid up in reserve. This led to Charles returning to Portsmouth and a final spell at HMS Victory.

On 28th September 1945, Chief Stoker Charles Pope “ was released” from service in the Royal Navy.

His career was long, eventful and at times fraught with danger There is little doubt that his contribution to defending the United Kingdom at home and abroad was both gallant and honourable.

- A photograph of HMS Wivern can be found in Charles Pope’s on-line collection at the West Wales Veterans Archive Peoples collection – Photo 26

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