



Royal Navy Telegraphist R. Colin Craston

Born in Preston in December 1922 Colin volunteered for service in October 1941. As a Wireless Telegraphist he served aboard *HMS Eclipse* on convoys to Murmansk, Russia, from June 1942 until March 1943. Colin's diary of early 1943 is a revealing testament to the extreme conditions faced by those serving in the convoys. After Craston's departure from the *Eclipse* the destroyer headed to the Mediterranean, where it was sunk with tremendous loss of life in October off Leros. Among those lost were the WT department and Colin's replacement.

He also served on *HMS Shah*, an escort carrier which formed part of the East Indies fleet, from January 1944 until the end of the war. This fleet was to escort the planned invasion of Singapore in August 1945, the operation being called off with the cessation of hostilities.

The Centre was delighted when Canon R Colin Craston BA. BD. DD agreed to be tape-recorded in an interview with the Director, [Dr Peter Liddle](#) in October 2000. We are honoured to hold Canon Craston's original diary, together with photographs which clearly illustrate conditions for those involved in the convoys to Russia. He now acts as Chaplain to the North Russia Club which has over 2000 members.



An ice-covered forecastle on Russian Convoy March 1943 on *HMS Eclipse*.



HMS Eclipse entering Scapa Flow. The *Eclipse* was involved in Convoys to North Russia but sunk in the Aegean Sea in October 1943, approximately 6 months after Colin Craston moved to *HMS Shah*. The whole department, including Colin's replacement, were lost.

1943 Diary.

21 Feb Caught up with convoy at night.

22 Feb Joined convoy. Escort consisting of Scylla, 12 fleet destroyers +1 W. Approaches DR corvettes etc. 22 Merchant ships.

23 Feb Sighted by rec. aircraft at 11.30. Reported and subs homed onto convoy

24 Feb Sighted again at 11.30 am. Subs following. Action stations 4 or 5 times. Several contacts on subs.

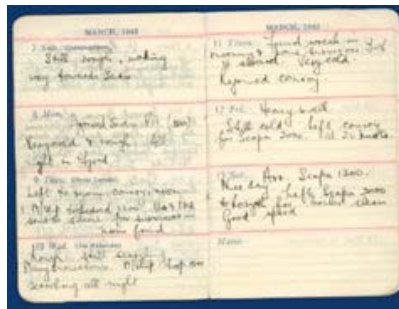
25 Feb Action stations 9 am. 2 formations approaching 11.30. Attacked by 14 J.U.88s at noon. Very good visibility. No hits on convoy. U-boats shadowing convoy all night.

26 Feb 11 JU88s attacked convoy. Several near misses on us. No hits. Subs following at night.

27 Feb AM Kola without loss early AM. Nice day but cold. Attack by single fighter. Bombers on anchored ships.



28 Feb Bright day but cold. German a/c over-dropped few bombs.
1 March Very sunny morning. Left Kola 14.00, joined RA53. Same escort. 30 M/V
2 March Went through piles of pancake ice. Shadowed by U-boats.
3 March Calm. Signs of attacks by Subs. frustrated.
4 March U-boats still threatening. Went through lot of large pieces of ice at night. Had to alter course.
5 March Several German a/c over AM. 1 Merchant ship torpedoed by sub. later sunk by escort. Attack by 14 a/c in afternoon. Terrific barrage drove them off. No hits. Subs still menacing.
6 March Gale blowing all day. Number of stragglers. Detached with 3 other DRs at night. Very rough night.
7 March Still rough, making way towards Seidis.
8 March Arrived Seidis PM (18.00) Very cold and rough. All night in Fjord.
9 March Left to rejoin convoy, noon. 1 M/ship torpedoed 2200. Us and 1 DR sent to search for survivors - none found.
10 March Rough. Still searching. Many snowstorms. M/ship torp. 1800. Searching all night.
11 March Found wreck in morning and some survivors. Took 4 aboard. Very cold. Rejoined convoy.



A page from Colin Craston's diary including an entry for Thursday 11 March 1943, detailing the discovery of a wreck and four survivors.

Transcript of diary entries, 7-14 March 1943:

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11 March Found wreck in morning and some survivors. Took 4 aboard. Very cold. Rejoined convoy.
13 March Heavy swell. Still cold. Left convoy for Scapa 2000. At 26 knots.
14 March Arr. Scapa 1300. Nice day. Left Scapa 2000 to Rosyth for boiler clean. Good speed.



The Second World War Experience Centre
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<http://www.war-experience.org/collections/sea/alliedbrit/craston/default.asp>



Four American survivors after a night in an open boat in bitter blizzard and gale conditions, north of Iceland, on North Russian Convoy, March 1943.



VJ Night in Trincomalee, Ceylon. Fireworks and illuminations 15 August 1945. The East Indies Fleet.

Inventory of the Donation

- 2 negatives
- 8 photographs
- Listing of those lost aboard HMS Eclipse
- Photocopies of two messages regarding the loss of the *Eclipse*
- 3 copies of 'Northern Light', publication of North Russia Club
- Photocopy of Craston's Certificate of Service
- Photocopy of his Wireless History Sheet
- 1943 Diary
- Tape recorded



Transcript of Audio Clip

"I had no experience of the sea, of the sea, apart from going to the Isle of Man and I suppose I must have wondered whether I should be very much subjected to seasickness. In fact, I can tell my wife now who is obviously often - my second wife this is - who is often affected by seasickness and my grandchildren, there were only two occasions that I was seasick in the four and a half years I was in the Navy. The first was the day I joined The Eclipse in Scapa Flow having gone on a ferry from Thurso to Scapa Flow and I was given the dinner, the midday dinner which was as I recall a greasy pork dinner with plenty of fat and that afternoon we went out on exercises and of course, that was my first occasion of seasickness. It was soon over. The only other occasion was my own fault. It was coming down the North Sea in what was called a North Sea chopper and I was on midnight watch, sorry, yes, midnight, 12.00 to 4.00 and of course, I was very fond of the Navy version of cocoa which was kye, which was made from thick blocks, solid blocks of pretty greasy cocoa and I was drinking this stuff and probably unwisely had more than I should have done. I had to put my earphones down, dash out of the office to the heads which fortunately was just across the corridor or the flat as we used to call it, get rid of it, come back and carry on with the watch. So there were only two occasions I was seasick but one of the occasions which I remember vividly was a journey from Scapa Flow to Iceland in September of 1942 which was the worst gale or storm I have ever been in. I mean people do talk about 40 or 50 feet waves and we had them that time and, and the, the frightening thing about it is of course, if you get to the, the crest of a wave, the whole ship shudders and then plunges down and of course, the old ex-World War One individuals would always encourage us by saying 'You do know that in World War One there were two destroyers that went into waves and never came out', so that wasn't encouraging! But of course, the awful thing is that in the mess on occasions like that everything is, is rolling about, the crockery is getting on the floor, the water is on the deck and the only thing you can do is really get in your hammock and lie there or swing there until the next time you are on watch but you are not feeling like eating anything. Those were the worst times I think."