

Lt Cmdr R.J.SYKES  
Service No. 058711

It had been an eventful three years at sea, my father died in May 1963 and we sunk the Voyager in February 1964 with the loss of lives.

The collision with the Voyager was terrible with the loss of 84 young lives. It happened at 2050, that is 8:50pm, and I was a young kid, on watch down the Aft Machinery Space. There are two machinery spaces, forward and aft, and each contained two boilers as well as one set of turbines to drive a propeller shaft, whereas smaller ships have separate engine rooms and boiler rooms. We were traveling at 196 revs ahead which is approximately 85% of full power and we were night flying. Suddenly, we were ordered to full astern and the ship started shaking and vibrating and suddenly lifted up and crashed down again. It was a confined space that was hot and noisy, I was scared out of my wits and was considering bolting up the ladder. The Petty Officer steaming the two boilers panicked and had bolted for it, but I was sort of temporarily rooted to where I was standing by fear and by knowing that I had a job to do. My salvation was the Chief in charge put his arm around me and said, *'young man, I need you to do what you do. I will make sure you get out safely'* After that, I was OK. The Chief was a man by the name of John Way and they called him 'Mum Way'.

I have never forgotten that moment in time and it really set me up for the rest of my time in the navy. A number of guys are 'scared' when 'down below' and the really bad ones are called 'steam shy'. I was lucky, from that moment onwards, I loved it. I always volunteered for the full power trials, once a quarter the machinery is tested through its full range and the throttles are opened wide to see what speed can be achieved. When I was a Chief, I always looked backwards to that moment when dealing with new youngsters. I guess it was one of the defining moments of my life.