

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, it sounds like it was probably a pretty terrifying crossing.

Vic Krygowski: Oh, it certainly was, it certainly was. Since I was a late comer on the USS Beaver I asked the Exec, “Where’s my battle station?” And he said, “Well, where do you want to be?” [laughing] I said, “I don’t care.” He said, “Well, go up on the flying bridge and make sure that the lookouts are paying attention and looking for periscopes and submarines rather than to look at anything else that’s going on.”

So I was up on the flying bridge where I had a bird’s eye view of all of this. And as I was watching that tanker that I mentioned that was on our port side – port and starboard, I guess. The tankers are built with an island forward and an island aft and then the rest of it is low lying tanks and they just have catwalks that connect the forward island with the after island. And they had crews that were berthed in the forward part of the ship and crews that were berthed in the after part of the ship including in the bow they had the US Naval armed guard which went on all of those merchant ships at the time. So when the German submarine torpedo hit that ship loaded with aviation gas it was like the biggest fireworks display you could ever see.

It was burning from stem to stern and as I watched I could see the people from the forward island running along these catwalks, running aft and those from aft were running forward. And then when they got to the middle there was no place to go so they jumped overboard.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, boy!

Vic Krygowski: And, on that particular ship they had picked up three people afterwards – this was the escort vessel did this. We only had two British corvettes which were like minesweepers or anyway they were about 60 or 70 feet long. And they were kind of useless, really. They carried depth charges, but they were not a real threat to the German U-boats. But anyway, they picked up a couple of survivors and the Beaver was the only ship in that convoy that had medical doctors on board. We carried two doctors and a dentist and so we were making provision to transfer these people to the Beaver for treatment. And as we started negotiations they said forget it; one of them is dead. And then before we got too much farther along the second one was dead. And then the third one they were already ... [coughing] excuse me ... they had him in a basket, I think, and ... but he succumbed. And so nobody survived that. Zero survival rate.

Janis Kozlowski: So every ... are you talking about of the three guys or on that ship?

Vic Krygowski: Of the three guys.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok.

Vic Krygowski: Well, there was nobody else that was saved from that ship because there was nobody else to pick them up. So...

Janis Kozlowski: Right.

Vic Krygowski: If they didn’t burn to death, they drowned.

Janis Kozlowski: Horrible! So, since you were about ... just about 20 years old, you probably wondered what have I gotten myself into? I volunteered for sub service ... ah, sub duty and then here I am on this ship watching people die and burn and ...

Vic Krygowski: I tell you that's what convinced me that I would rather be on the firing end of those torpedoes than on the receiving end.

But, anyway, I saw the young ... young sailors who were supposed to be lookouts on the bridge, they would actually kneel down and start praying aloud, while they saw this carnage going on around us.

Well, anyway, we got to Scotland and that was rather pleasurable because the Scottish people were awfully nice and very generous. They didn't have too much for themselves but they invited the crew members of the Beaver to come on Sundays to have Sunday dinner with them. And....

Janis Kozlowski: That was very nice.

Vic Krygowski: Yeah, they were very generous. You know, you think of the Scotch people as being miserly but that's not so – not the one's that I knew.

So when we got to Scotland, as usual, they have to have their Officer's Club there. So, Victor Krygowski was named to set up the Officer's Club in Scotland in a place called Rosneath, R O S N E A T H. And that I did. Then I had a number of trips I made to Glasgow by station wagon to stock the bar and other beverages and then also the other odd jobs were like movie officer so I had to arrange for films to be brought to the Beaver to show to the crew on movie nights.

Janis Kozlowski: So that was kind of a fun job.

Vic Krygowski: Yeah, it was alright. It wasn't Navy work, it had nothing to do with torpedoes but I didn't mind it. I had to be there one way or another so I'd just as soon be doing something.