



Behn, Roland

Able Seaman

C/JX 318962

H.M.S. Ulster, Royal Navy

who died on

Monday, 4th October 1943. Aged 20 and 8 months

Roland was born at Birch 6th February 1923. As a small boy he lived in the Gables at Langenhoe and attended Langenhoe school. He later attended West Mersea school in his teens. On leaving school, he worked for a printing firm :- Spottiswoode Ballantyne Ltd. at the Hythe, Colchester. At the outbreak of the Second World War, he joined the Peldon Detachment of the Home Guard, as soon as it was formed.

He was the son of Ronald Bernard and Margery Behn, of Langenhoe, Essex.



Mr. Behn Senior as a Special Constable & The "Gables", their home.

Roland's father had served in the Middle East in World War 1 with the Army. His mother served, as a nurse with the Saint John's Ambulance in World War 2. During this war, his father was a Special Constable. Graham, his younger brother, was in the Fleet Air Arm, serving on H.M.S. Glory. His other brother, Bernard, served in the RAF in Rhodesia, as a physical training instructor with the Elementary Flight Training School.



Roland as a schoolboy & in the Royal Navy



His brothers Bernard and Graham

Roland volunteered for the Royal Navy in December 1941 and reported for duty on 12th January 1942. He started his career at H.M.S. Ganges, the shore training establishment in Suffolk. On the 27th March 1942, he joined H.M.S. Pembroke, which was the Chatham shore base. On 11th June 1942, he was transferred to the base ship, H.M.S. Baldur. She converted to a rescue ship in 1943 after Roland had left her. In May 1943 he rejoined H.M.S. Pembroke to await a new ship. This was H.M.S. Ulster. He joined H.M.S. Ulster 21st June 1943.

H.M.S. Ulster was a 1710 ton destroyer built by Messrs. Swan Hunter and completed 30th June 1943. On completion she was allocated to the Home Fleet and proceeded to Scapa Flow to work up. On 27th July, she left Scapa Flow in company with the Battleship H.M.S. Duke of York and other ships for Operation "Governor", a diversionary operation by the Home Fleet, designed to increase the "War of Nerves" against Germany and to pin down forces in Norway, before launching the invasion of Sicily.

On the 16th August 1943, the Ulster left Scapa Flow for Skaalsfjord for Operation "SF" - a routine anti- U-boat patrol between Iceland and the Faeroes.

At the beginning of September, she was temporarily detached to the Plymouth Command. She left Plymouth on the 18th September for the Biscay patrol.

On the 4th October, H.M.S. Ulster was operating, as part of Force "X" along with H.M.S. Wensleydale, Limbourne (with the Senior Officer), Tanatside, and Grenville. On the night of 3rd October "X" Force was engaged in operation "Tunnel" at 270 degrees 10 miles from the island of Triagoz, off the coast of Brittany.

At 0100 hours they obtained radar contact with a force of 4 or 5 Elbing class German destroyers, who were to the South and steaming westerly. Force "X" illuminated with searchlights the German Ships and opened fire at a range of 7500 yards. The Germans promptly turned East and fled for home, splitting into two groups. H.M.S. Grenville & H.M.S. Ulster chased the two Germans steaming in the Northern group and hit both causing fires. H.M.S. Grenville was herself hit and set on fire early in the action and dropped astern to join H.M.S. Limbourne. H.M.S. Ulster continued the chase eastward until she also was hit.



H.M.S. Ulster returned to Plymouth independently, having fired all her torpedoes and in view of electrical damage.

The southern group of enemy, engaged by the Hunts (the other destroyers were Hunt Class Destroyers) outdistanced them and got away, though a number of hits on them were seen. Force "X" then reformed, searched westward for about 15 miles and then returned to Plymouth. There was some evidence that E-boats may also have been present.

Damage and casualties were :_

H.M.S. Ulster had been hit below the water line. The Fore magazine was flooded, as were the stoker's mess and lower power room. There was 1 killed (Roland) and 11 wounded, 3 of them seriously. Roland was serving in the Forward Gun Turret and was killed when the magazine was hit.

H.M.S. Grenville was hit on X gun deck, holed forward and had splinter holes. She also had 1 killed and 7 wounded.

H.M.S. Wensleydale had splinter holes and 2 wounded. While H.M.S. Limbourne and Tanatside only had small splinter holes.

H.M.S. Ulster was awarded the Battle Honour "English Channel 1943" for this action. She was to go on and receive Battle Honours :_ "Adriatic 1944", "Mediterranean 1944", "Normandy 1944" and "Okinawa 1945".



He was entitled to the Defence Medal , the 1939-45 War Medal and the 1939-45 Star.

Roland is commemorated at Plymouth (Weston Mill) Cemetery. Commonwealth War Grave 18050 .



Plymouth Naval Memorial

REFERENCES

Information obtained from The Commonwealth War Graves web site. www.cwgc.org/ Also from H.M.S.Ulster's War Diary and from the family archives. War Diary details were kindly provided by the Naval Historical Branch of the MOD. The picture of HMS Ulster was kindly provided by Navy News. The pictures of the medals were kindly provided by Worcestershire Medal Service Ltd. Obituary Essex County Standard October 15th 1943 page 5.

These pages are dedicated to the memory of the Fallen from the two World Wars, who lived in Abberton & Langenhoe.. Prepared by Saint Andrew's Parochial Church Council. November 11th 2000