

Recollections of Marine Edward James Holdford- when the Phoebe was torpedoed in 1942 off Ponte Noire

I was just going to the forenoon watch at 8.00. The watch was 8-12, but the watches overlapped to 12.30 to allow the person following to finish their dinner and have their tot of rum.

I had just come out of the marines' mess deck and walked out through the rubber doors and was walking along to the quarterdeck to my watch-keeping station by the key board. I had just come off the forecastle to the waist of the ship when there was a sudden loud explosion.

Someone shouted, "We've hit a mine." Then someone else said, "No it was a torpedo." Action stations were sounded and the ship started to list.

The engineer commander and his crew came to close all watertight doors. Obviously, some crew were the wrong side of these doors.

My station was aft6, by the captain's day cabin, in the marines' turret on the quarterdeck. It was like all hell had let loose. We were close to the coast and were able to get the ship right up to the jetty. We got everything off the ship and were able to make camp ashore.

A lot of boy seamen died. Their mess deck was below the marines' mess deck and took the full force of the explosion. The sail maker seeing to a boy for burial was crying his eyes out. Many were buried at sea. Others were below and their bodies couldn't be got out till later by divers and they were buried on land.

One sergeant, who died, hadn't got a mark on him. The force of the explosion below drove him against the deck head and broke his neck.

Our thanks go to Tony Holdford for this article, which describes his father's recollections of the time the Ponte Noire torpedo hit the cruiser in 1942.