My last year at University Toronto Schools was 1942, and of course the war was on since 1939. Everyone I knew (unless they were going into medicine) was counting on joining up. I had been selected to be head boy during my last year. The selection was a partly democratic system. The teachers put up for election four members of the class who they thought were suited. It was partly academic, their popularity, their activity in sports, and other activities. I was one of the four. There was an election from all of the school – the lower school and upper school – and I was elected. As head boy, all my fees were paid by the school. I was also school captain. There were two brothers from the Boxer family at UTS, and their father set up a scholarship for the school captain. I received this scholarship, as well; so, I had two scholarships.

The navy, which was growing very quickly, needed more officers to man the number of ships that they were building. At the time, there were only 10,000 people in the Canadian Navy. They had a Board to review people that might be eligible to come in as probationary officers. Most of the people who applied were at university or graduates. They ranged from 20 to 40 years of age. So there I was – just 18 years-old, but I had some military training. UTS had a cadet corps. I was the colonel of that cadet corps during the time I was head boy. I was also involved in artillery as an extracurricular reserve with Arthur Huycke. His father was a Colonel, and Arthur and I would go down once a week to practice.

So, I went before the Board and was accepted. I was accepted as a midshipman until I turned 19, and then I would become a probationary sub-lieutenant. This was March of 1942. UTS had this wonderful high standard. We completed the full year's course by the time of the Easter break, and the final term quarter of classes was just review for exams. So they let me go early and gave me my senior matriculation without having to do the final exams. In March of 1942, I left school and started my naval training in the Exhibition grounds, in the old automotive building. There were a number of us there. Tidler Laurance, who was UTS school captain two years before me, was also accepted. They were all friends of mine, and because all had military training in the cadet corps, we were given a quick training.

Finally, on July 1st of 1943, we went down to Kings College, Dalhousie University, to take the three-month officers' intensive training course. In my case, graduation day was on Saturday, and I was allocated to a ship that happened to be in Halifax Harbour as a watch-keeping officer. I reported to the ship in mid-afternoon, and we set sail within an hour; they were waiting for me to come! It was an interesting ship – a Flower-Class Corvette, called the *Kenagami*. In those days, they were naming ships after various Canadian towns that might have been involved in shipbuilding. Kenagami was a lumber/mining town in Quebec. I had a very nice captain called Les Percy. The son of Louis Saint Laurent, the Prime Minister at that time (who was a lawyer from Quebec City), was an officer on the ship, and a nice guy called Skinny Hayes was also an officer. Skinny later became a Captain of a ship. He had come from the merchant navy and served as our First Lieutenant.

Our job was to pick up convoys of merchant ships and escort them across the Atlantic. The majority came from the States, with some from Halifax and Sydney. These convoys were made up of about 120 to 160 ships, mostly carrying food and essentials for Great Britain. The ships would be lined up in three rows as a body. They would only go 8 to 12 knots per hour. Accompanying the convoys would be six naval vessels – at the time, all Corvettes, like ours. Two would be out in front going back and forth with their ASDIC anti-submarine sound sweep, two were on each side of the convoy, and two were at the rear. There would be one senior officer for the six ships who would take directions from the British Navy Intelligence.

When I joined the navy in 1942, a lot of ships were being sunk by German U-boats. By the time I went to sea, the British had broken the German code, and they were able to communicate with the allied ships, telling us where to go to avoid the German U-boats. So we were lucky because we didn't see too much action. My ship quickly moved from the Atlantic coastal run to the mid-ocean run. We started from St. John's, Newfoundland, then picked up the convoy from below Newfoundland and took the ships across into the Irish Sea to drop them off in either Liverpool or Glasgow. Then the naval ships would go into Londonderry, Northern Ireland, to be refitted for the return. I did that for a full year – back and forth, back and forth. We had what was called the Flower-Class Corvette, and they were the crudest British design. They were just brutal in the winter. Most people would be sick for a day from the roughness of the sea and then get over it.

I wanted to take a speciality ASDIC [SONAR] course in anti-submarine warfare. It was taught at a naval base in the Bay of Fundy. My captain recommended me right away. It was a three-month course and was highly intensive. It was the most important speciality course because Canada's role in the navy was protecting convoys. We did the course, and to my great chagrin, I was nominated to teach the course after completing it. I had just turned 20 at the time. I wanted to go back into action, and I complained – but I was told that I was top of the class. Canada was building so many new ships that they needed new captains. When I joined, the Canadian Navy had 10,000 people, and two years later it had grown to about 100,000. So, they needed to train captains for the new ships coming into reserve. I taught a two-week, intensive course in anti-submarine warfare to these older men who were to become captains of the new ships. I taught for a full year.

Finally in the beginning of July of 1944, I was allocated to go to sea again. Because anti-submarine warfare was the prime function of the Canadian Navy, I became the senior staff officer as the specialist in anti-submarine warfare to a commanding officer of a convoy-escort group. For the first time, they had enough trained officers that our ship could have officers just concentrate on their specialized tasks and not have to be bothered by the normal running of the ship. There was my commanding officer, Maclarren, who had been a merchant seaman, myself, and the gunnery, signals, and navigation specialist officers. That was a first time that they had the five specialists. It was quite an avant-garde thing.

Maclarren, my Captain, was frightened of ASDIC. It was like my generation being frightened of computers. He had been a former merchant navy captain and ships navigator, so he would rely on my expertise to a great extent. We did about five crossings in the last year of the war. It would take two weeks to take a convoy across, and then after dropping the ships off, we would go into Londonderry on the Foyle River and refuel and rest up. The technology was changing so quickly that the British Navy had a building in Londonderry where they would simulate a nighttime attack on a convoy. My Captain and I would go each time for at least five hours to practice an attack and be brought up to date on the new technology. Previously, if a ship made contact with a submarine, they would trace it by ASDIC and then drop down a depth charge – which would not explode until after we had passed over the submarine. They had developed the new “hedgehog system” where you would thrust the hedgehog depth charge ahead of you, so you didn’t have to go over the submarine, and you could get behind it. My role was to give instructions to my commander, Maclarren: to the starboard, to the port 10 degrees, 20 degrees, etc. … constantly keeping contact with the submarine. After the hedgehog exploded, we would veer off and wait for the submarine to come to the surface. For a 20 year-old, this was pretty exciting. I didn’t realize it at the time because I was so wrapped up in it.

We made contact with a submarine about three months before the end of the war. I was directing the commander where to go. We did a “hedgehog”, and fortunately they came to the surface and surrendered. We didn’t have enough room for all the prisoners because our ship had been modified to carry the five officers as well as the crew, so we allocated prisoners to other ships. None of the prisoners died. There was usually a Nazi on board each submarine. The prisoners that we took on board kept saying to us that we should be allies fighting the Russians. Their officer was on a different ship and couldn’t control what these men said. I had to write a report, and Maclarren had to write a report (but he got the OBE for it). We used to say in the navy, “Other Buggers’ Efforts” – because it was really myself and the other officers who did the work. That was the one exciting bit of action I had.

I should mention that when I went back to sea in the last year of the war, the naval escort ships on the mid-ocean run were either much-larger hedgehog-equipped Castle Class Corvettes or again much-larger Frigate Destroyer Escorts – fully-equipped vessels like the one carrying our Senior Naval Commander (Maclarren) and our staff.

I was 21 years-old by the time the war was over. I came into Canada from Newfoundland on VE Day (which was about the 8th of June), went on a 90-day leave up to Temagami, and went on a canoe trip. I had volunteered to fight the Japanese. It was a different type of warfare as the Japanese didn’t have many submarines. They had more guns. I reported back to a ship that was being fitted out in Sydney, Nova Scotia. I was named the anti-submarine officer of that ship, but I arrived on VJ Day so things were all over, and the ship didn’t go. It took three months to get out of the navy. When I retired, I was named an acting lieutenant commander. I had moved from being a midshipman initially to lieutenant commander over my three-and-a-half years in the navy.

The Americans called what the British and Canadian navies named “ASDIC”, SONAR – which is now the universal usage term. Today’s technology is immeasurably improved, enabling much superior contact under all water conditions.