DELTA OPTIMIST

Ladner-born navy vet, remembers war 80 years ago

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Phil Melnychuk/Contributing Writer
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Local veteran Leslie Nelson. | Contributed by Leslie Nelson

At 100 years old, Leslie Nelson will spend Remembrance Day at the Legion in Ladner, remembering the days when he did his part in the effort to save the world from Nazism.

"There's not many of us left now, in the Second World War," he said last week from his home at The Waterford in Tsawwassen.

Nelson was born in October 1922 in Ladner and signed on with the Royal Canadian Navy in Vancouver in June 1941 serving until November 1945.

He served on two British ships, the cruiser *HMS Phoebe* and the minesweeper/sub hunter *HMS Elgin*, as well as the Canadian frigate, the *HMCS Springhill*, built in Esquimalt.

At the time, Canada had the world's third-largest navy, he pointed out.

Wartime duties in the navy were perilous, with tasks such as escorting convoys on the Atlantic to keep them from being blown up by German submarines, as well as hunting the subs.

But Nelson sometimes found it kind of boring.

"It's very repetitious what you do. Just ... try and keep the subs down and if they do come up, you try and get them," he recalled.

Asked if he was scared at the time, Nelson points out he and his shipmates were all between 18 and 20 years old.

"No, I wasn't scared and I don't think we thought of it that way much. It had its moments you know," he shared.

And while it was hair-raising times on the water, they also had shore leave with lots of good times.

"It had its bright side as well," he added.

Nelson was also a ship's diver, which meant working on the docks as ships were repaired.

During D-Day, on June 6, 1944, he was attached to the British navy on submarine patrol off the coast of Norway. His job there was to keep the German subs hemmed in around Norway so they couldn't interfere with the Allied liberation of Europe that started with the D-Day seaborne invasion.

After the war, he joined thousands of war vets and returned home to build the country and recover from the war.

After initially working as a salesman, he then joined Vancouver Fire Rescue Services where he served 32 years before retiring. He got married in 1948 and he and his wife had three children, now has grandchildren and great grand children.

Nelson said he was active his whole life, doing a variety of sports, though maybe not excelling in them.

"Just remember, that war is not a very nice thing to have happen," he said. "The time spent defending the country was well worth it."