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Co. Cork

31 August, 2015

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you to correct your version of the events of 1962 on board the LE Cliona, as detailed in the Irish Examiner, Wednesday 20th August, 2015.

On the 29th May 1962, the LE Cliona sailed on a PR exercise south of Cork harbour. She was fully bunkered; she was going on depth-charge practice. Having arrived in the area I, Maurice Egan, Chief ERA on board, was in the engine room on the main steam control valve. We received a call from the bridge, "we are going to ring full power". I made sure my boilers were topped and my engine was ready and we proceeded to full power on instruction from the telegraph. They first fired the hedgehogs, charges fired over the bow of the ship on to the submarine and which only explode on contact, without the depth of the submarine needing to be known. The next step then was to fire a pattern of depth charges port and starboard, one, two, three, four, and a roll of depth charges off the rails of the afterdeck of the ship. Everyone was on station. However, it is my opinion one of the depth charges went off prematurely because there was a delay in trying to release it into the water. Proof in the photographs shown afterwards: black TNT flying into the sky. There was no pipe broken to cause the fire. The fire was reversed in the No. 2 boiler because the depth charge was too near the stern of the ship. The problem was, the oil tanks are at each side of the boiler rooms; somebody shouted down to me—I don't know who—"No. 2 boiler room is on fire". I looked up to the entrance to the boiler room, the forward end of the engine room, and I saw black smoke. I phoned the bridge and said "I'm leaving the engine room, we have a fire in the No. 2 boiler I must go and investigate", which I did. Having reduced steam first, I had a look at the fire. I then gave instructions to shut down No. 1 boiler completely, and operate whatever steam was left in No. 2 boiler, where the fire was. We proceeded to deliver water into the boiler room via fire hoses. The people involved in that was this young fellow you mentioned in the article, Myers, and Lt. Pat Mahony came down into the boiler room to me, and he said "I'll take my orders from you, chief" which was quite a change of role. Pat Mahony was the Executive Officer of the ship, i.e. No. 2 in command. He had to do that with me because he knew I wouldn't want him down in the engine room. But my boss, a direct entry officer, Lt. Jim Foley from Cobh had failed totally, he fell to pieces, he didn't know what was happening. However we proceeded to fight the fire as best we could. I had much admiration for the stoker, Myers. He was a good young fellow, he had to be ordered away and there was no ordering him away. When the fire started they abandoned the boiler room, which was the right drill. Then we had a major setback, which very few knew about, our general service pump had broken down completely, we couldn't pump water on the fire. So I used the dutton pumps on deck, I organised screws for them. I was very fortunate there was a Lt Phil Devitt up on reserve, who was my former boss. He asked, "How are you doing". "I'm not doing too bad sir," I answered. "Use whatever water you have inside of her now you are so far doing a great job, the fire is technically out." "It is sir, a lot of smoke sir, but no fire", I said. I

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went to go up to the forward boiler room and on my way up I met Commander Kavanagh, head of the Naval Service. There was a sea-going tug beside us holding up the lines to take us in tow. Commander Kavanagh said to me "what's the story here, chief, do we take a tow?" My answer was "Nobody will tow my ship to port", that was the answer I made. "I have conserved steam on No. 1 boiler to steam us home", which Myers knew nothing about in his account. "Are you sure?" he asked. "You've never heard me give a dishonest answer before and not in this situation." I proceeded about my business; I started to raise steam on No. 1 boiler then and keep a full head of steam on her for the engine would be going in on half power. Emergency steering had to be brought in, so I arranged the emergency steering in the steering flats, not Pat Mahony, because the executive officer wouldn't know what to do. So she was steered from the steering flats; nobody saw where we were going, we were only given a compass order to steer by, working from the compass physically before them. The reason the steering broke down was that the fire burst the tubes in the wheelhouse on the gauges; they just exploded from the heat. The steering was controlled, but they didn't use hydraulic oil during war, always water. We duly arrived back to Haulbowline.

That is my account of the fire. I am not looking for a medal; I am long since finished with the Navy. I just think it should be put right. I was the first to learn about medals possibly being offered; I was told at naval headquarters by Commander Kavanagh about medals. And I was shocked to hear that medals were being mentioned, one for me, one for Myers, and one for Mahony. I wasn't a heroic or brave hero, nor was Lt Mahony, or Myers; we were men who merely did our duty. To conclude, the fellow who wrote the book that you copied in composing your article had no idea what was involved in putting out that fire.

Kindest regards,

Maurice Egan

Warrant Officer Engineer (Retd.)
Irish Naval Service