

# The 'souvenirs' of war

**H**anging on the wall in one of the bedrooms of our house is a small wooden box with a glass front. A gift from wifey three years ago, the box contains four black and white photos and three tiny medals.

One of the photos is of a ship cutting through the water while another is a snapshot of eight happy young men dressed in naval uniforms.

The man on the right in front is my father.

It wasn't until many years after his death in 1983 that I saw these "souvenirs" from his time in the British Royal Navy. Before her death three years later, my mother passed on these items to me, along with a huge album of photos I had never seen before and various important-looking papers, including my father's service record.

I can only recall one conversation with my father about his war-time activities.

It came in the middle of the night, the day after Good Friday, when I was 14, and about 13 hours after my dad's best friend collapsed from a fatal heart attack.

My father, as was often his weekend custom, had too many beers in his system when he roused me from a sound sleep to bemoan the death of his pal.

With tears rolling down his face he anguished over the fact he could do nothing for his buddy.

"We were walking to the parking lot when he cried out, 'Johnny!'" sobbed my dad. "I caught him before he hit the ground... but he was already gone."

I sat there stunned watching the emotions pour forth from a man who never cried, believed there were no such things as headaches and could stand outside in below-freezing temperatures without a coat and not bat an eye.



Soon, however, as he stared off into space, his alcohol-induced recollections turned from his now-dead pal to horrors of a different kind and a different time.

"The water was on fire and I could hear the pigs screaming... they were burning alive... the damn Germans... the rat-a-tat-tat..." wailed my dad as he mimicked someone firing a machine gun. "The pigs," he muttered, "the pigs."

After several minutes he managed to compose himself, left my room, and stumbled into his own bed, likely to confront his demons once again in his sleep.

The next day, I told my mother what happened the previous night and she told me that my father's ship had been sunk during the war. Many of his shipmates died, while he was "lucky" enough to escape with only hearing loss in one ear.

Being the ship's cook, perhaps the pigs shared space in the galley with my father before they met their grisly death.

For the past three years, as Remembrance Day approaches, I often find myself looking at the items in this box on the wall and thinking of the other war "souvenirs" my father—and I'm sure many others—brought home.

The ones that were too ferrible to put on display.

## LATE DEATH NOTICE

**JONES, Wesley** - Longtime independent cab owner/operator at Pearson Airport. Peacefully on Monday, November 5, 2001 at St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto, age 65. Beloved husband of Lorene. Loving father of Lesley, Lori and Michele. Cherished grandfather of Kristina, Tiffany and Lucy. Visitation 1 p.m. till time of service at 2 p.m. at Ward Funeral Home, 52 Main Street S., Brampton on Wednesday, November 7. Cremation to follow. Donations can be made to the Diabetes Association.

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