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Sea of Memories, Stan Smith, Spellmount, 1985, 0946771189, 9780946771189, . .

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The Sea of Memories The Story of Mediterranean Strife, Past and Present, by Charles Moran, Charles Moran, 1942, Mediterranean Sea, 320 pages. .

Royal Navy Handbook 1939-1945, David W. Wragg, Nov 30, 2005, , 277 pages. Overstretched from the start of the Second World War in 1939, the Royal Navy acquired First World War surplus destroyers from the United States Navy and embarked on a massive ....

Arctic A Journey Around the Arctic Circle to Explore the Lives of People in a Rapidly Changing World, Bruce Parry, Huw Lewis-Jones, Feb 7, 2012, , 272 pages. It's the last great wilderness--one of the least developed and most endangered regions of our planet. This full-color companion to a BBC2 series takes us on a seven-month ....

Like his uncle, a member of the 11th Hussars who survived the Charge of the Light Brigade, Stan Smith was himself a survivor - and the last survivor of the "Black Hole of Baku". The story of this appalling incident was not given much publicity, but it bears comparison with the worst atrocities endured by prisoners of the Japanese in the Second World War.

Smith was one of 28 volunteers under Commander Bruce Fraser sent to Enzeli, a port on the Caspian Sea, just after the First World War, in an attempt to prevent the advance of the Bolshevik revolution into Georgia. The whole party was captured and incarcerated in two small earth-floored cells. They were forced to witness atrocities beyond the imagination of any but the depraved. Men and women were disembowelled and mutilated in front of the naval party and then shot.

They had been reported "Missing, believed killed"; they were starving, lousy and in rags. There had been death in the cells, where bodies were left to decompose. Eventually, after almost two years, Fraser was able to get a concealed message to the British ambassador, carried out by his Georgian interpreter. Out of the 28 fit volunteers, only 14 survived and two of these died on the hospital boat home.

At the beginning of the war Smith had enrolled as a 15-year-old in the Royal Navy. At the Battle of Jutland in 1916, he was a gun-layer in the destroyer HMS Spitfire when, during a torpedo attack on an enemy battleship, he was the only survivor of his gun's crew: his ship was hit several times, and he was badly wounded himself.

After recovering from a serious leg wound, Smith volunteered to join one of the "Q-ships" - old merchant ships with concealed guns. After fitting out, Q-12, the first Q-ship, left harbour to swing compasses and was promptly torpedoed by one of the U-boats she was intended to combat. Onboard the second Q-ship, Smith and his gun's crew faced a submarine's shelling until it came

close enough to be itself sunk.

Smith's peacetime career saw him join a naval party searching for the lost Colonel Fawcett in the upper Amazon jungle, pirate hunting near Hong Kong, and four years' adventures on the China station, as well as a long commission based in Bermuda. Smith's memoirs, *Sea of Memories* (1985), read like yarns from *Boy's Own*.

Pensioned in 1939, Smith was recalled within a few weeks of his discharge, at the outbreak of the Second World War. With the rank of Chief Petty Officer he found himself second-in-command of the gunnery training ranges at Sheerness; his batteries defended the Thames estuary and he was frequently under direct air-attack. Smith was responsible for the construction of one of the first Commando Training Courses, as Chief Gunnery Instructor. He was retired a second time at the end of hostilities.

Stan Smith maintained correspondence with his former commander, Bruce Fraser. They were the last two survivors of the "Black Hole of Baku". Smith, by then in a wheelchair, was the guest of the Royal Navy in 1990 when the Duke of Edinburgh unveiled a bust of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fraser of North Cape in Portsmouth Dockyard. The Duke accepted a copy of Smith's autobiography and Smith was presented with the Union Flag which had veiled the statue.

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This is a quick and easy read. An interesting, if rather shallow, biography. Contains some history of Royal Navy action mainly of the first world war. Battle of Jutland, Q-ships and imprisonment in the "black hole of Baku" are mentioned. It's a pity that Stan Smith didn't keep a diary which would have enabled him to construct a more detailed and thorough account. This book consists only of memories recalled near the end of his life. Maybe that's why there seem to be inaccuracies such as sailing round the cape to get from Argentina to the Falklands. However, as Stan says, the sailors were there to do a job and didn't think about the whys or wherefores so maybe a sailors account could seldom be very detailed. This book has prompted me to find out about the Baku incident and also the strange story of Para in Brazil. Stan Smith...a brave guy!

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