

Barbara Goodson
English Wartime
Visitor to Halifax
Awatea
August 1942



Here are one or two facts concerning our return from Bermuda, via Halifax, to the U.K. My mother, two sisters, and myself arrived in Halifax in late August, 1942. We were with many others, both naval and dockyard personnel, from Bermuda. There was a scare about small pox and the port authorities wanted us all to be vaccinated. The doctor on board was very concerned that some would react unfavourably and he would have a lot of patients on his hands!

We were in Halifax for a few days or so, awaiting Canadian troops and also U.K. personnel (Air Force, I think) who had been training in Canada. I remember a canoe trip around a point to the south of where Awatea was berthed. Once all the troops were on board and a convoy of all kinds of ships was complete we set sail for the U.K. The first night at about 6 pm in the evening we could hear depth charges. We went to bed at normal times and were awakened by a crash - everyone made their way as quickly as possible to their rescue station (no one went to bed unclothed). Our station was on the starboard side.

We were frightened and a friend of my mother's had told me that we were only going home for my education and that if anything should happen. The passengers on the port side got into the life boats, we did not. I remember the hot mugs of tea provided by the cheerful crew - especially a Scotsman who said, "You'll remember the Scot who gave you cups of tea when the ship was sinking!" The convoy melted into the darkness. The crew went down into the hold and mended the hole in the bow as best they could and we limped back to Halifax (we had been 100 miles out).

I have been unable to find any record of this "incident" in the Public Records Office in London, although I read of the ships battering later in the year. Her sinking was not in the records. I understand that a torpedo had hit an escort which then, rudderless, hit the Awatea and blew up. No details were ever given to us - it is possible the escort vessel was American.

During that night it became foggy and, like stories of mirage in the desert, I also imagined I could see patches of light in the darkness.

There was a big cheer when, the next morning, we saw a plane in the sky, which we imagined had come to protect us.

All the British personnel were sent to Kentville to recuperate and await allocation to other vessels. The naval personnel were kept together and returned six weeks later in the Awatea without incident and alone at 30 knots I believe - a great difference from being in convoy when all ships sailed at the speed of the slower vessel. After this time, the system of zigzagging in convoy was stopped and the convoys themselves were made up in New York, not Halifax. These last two details I gleaned from the Public Records Office.

My husband and I were fortunate enough to visit Kentville two years ago. I had hoped to give the curator of the museum there some details and equally to have seen the register of the hotel to which we were sent but the latter has gone and the rather grand edifice is now offices and flats.