

The Men who Missed the Tide

I was not born `till '41 - I wasn't at the fore,
But later on I sailed with men - they told me what they saw,
There never was a `phony war` for the merchant men at sea,
Especially in the early years - with two men lost from three.
Sitting ducks for E-boats and explosives in `bomb ally`,
An easy moving target, from engine room to galley.
They were blown from burning ships - torpedoed by the Hun,
Or victims of atrocity - shot by a Nippon gun.
Plenty perished in lifeboats, many gave sharks a feast,
Still pretty much defenceless, the ships rolled West and East.
They sailed North in Russian convoys - braved the ice and foe,
Lived in hell conditions - and pitching, blind in snow.
Some sailed independent - they steamed South on their own,
Perchance to meet the U-boats - lurking `neath the foam.

Many thousand seamen died, risking life at sea,
It was the brave survivors - told me their history,
The lethal mines would sink them, or the `tinfish` - named by some,
Or possibly a Junkers - on a mortal bombing run.
Crews foundered in the ocean - black or freezing cold,
With mangled steel beneath them, `an pig-iron in the hold.
But if they shunned the enemy, and escaped the heaving slaughter,
Well they just signed on again, and went back to the water.
To the lads that never made it home - to all the men that died,
Wouldn't it be apt to say they never made the tide?

Over forty years I've toiled at sea - aboard all types of craft,
But I doff my cap to those young souls, that went and joined a raft.
I'm mighty proud to march for them, on the 11th of November,
For this very special breed of men - I for one remember.
I haven't any medals - but wear my badge with pride,
As the bugle sounds the `last post`, for the men who missed the tide.

by Joe Earl