George Herbert Fox



Rank: - Able seaman

Number: - P/JX 234478

Regiment: - Royal Navy H.M.S. Penelope (Telegraphist)

Died: - 18 February 1944 when HMS Penelope sunk by U-boat (U-410) aged 32 years

Memorial: - Portsmouth Naval Memorial Panel 82 Column 2

Batley News, 11 Mar 1944

Family Details

George Herbert was born in Batley on 13 November 1911 the eldest son of Harry James Hubert and Rachel Elizabeth Fox nee Dorsey. His father was a felt manufacturer and the family lived at Grosvenor Road, Batley. He was educated at Batley Grammar School and worked as a cashier at the Midland Bank, Dewsbury.

He married Mary Watson of Healey in 1938 and they lived at 12, Holyoake Avenue, Healey, Batley. George enlisted in the Navy in 1941 and was drafted as a telegraphist on the ship HMS Penelope.

Service Details

HMS Penelope was an Arethusa-class light cruiser of the Royal Navy.

Having taken part in actions in the North Africa campaign, Sicily, Italy and Aegean they were engaged in the bombardment of enemy positions relating to the beachhead at Anzio. Having bombarded for approximately two weeks they were becoming short of fuel and ammunition. On the 17th February 1944 they left during the late evening and returned to Naples to replenish supplies of the aforementioned. Captain Belben had completed the tour of duty and was expected to give them a well-earned 24-hour rest period, the custom when conditions permitted. At 10pm they received a signal to return to Anzio. Crewmen in the duty port watch toiled late into the night to oil and ammunition under the hazard of air alerts. At 06:00 on 18th February, a Friday, they left Naples bay and increased speed to 26 knots and then steered a NW course to make for Anzio, zigzagging as she went to avoid possible submarine attacks. Early that morning U410 commanded by Lieutenant Arno Fensky, aged 25, had moved into the area. He had already destroyed a 7,000-ton supply ship on the 15th February. At 06:53 the U410 look-out cried out 'enemy ship', the captain of U410 ordered diving stations to periscope level and closed in fast on HMS *Penelope*. At 06:58 a torpedo leapt from its tube to run at a depth of 6 meters towards an unsuspecting *Penelope*, it took just 35 seconds to reach the cruiser. Then there was a thunderous explosion, which sent men crashing to the deck, as the stern lifted out of the water. *Penelope* capsized with a column of water that shot into the air, smoke belching from the after funnel and the boiler

room exploded and flooded. *Penelope* had broken her back, two ends pointed upwards, the bow at an angle of 50 degrees.

The total lost were 418 from a ship's company of 650, including the captain D.G. Belben DSCAM. George was one of the 418 lost.

At this time his wife was a local ambulance driver, one brother, William James Fox was serving with the R.A.F. and a sister, Betty, was in the W.A.A.F.

George Herbert was awarded the 1939-45 War Medal and 1939-45 Star.

He is remembered with Honour at Batley Zion Church, Batley Grammar School and Batley War Memorial.

