

Vice-Admiral Sir John Martin

Vice-Admiral Sir John Martin, who has died aged 93, was decorated during his incident-packed war and went on to hold several important appointments after the conflict.

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His first scare of the fighting came when he was gun direction officer in the destroyer *Pelican* during the Norwegian campaign. On April 22 1940 the ship was attacked by two Junkers 88 and a bomb set off a huge explosion of *Pelican's* depth charges, blowing away her stern with the loss of many - including the first lieutenant.

The blast was followed by an eerie silence as *Pelican* lost power and wallowed helplessly. After organising fire fighting and the removal of the wounded, Martin stepped in unflinchingly to dispose of the human remains that still littered the decks, and which were having a grim effect on the morale of the surviving crew.

He then took over as second-in-command and split the anchor cable, ready for towing; he was still on watch when *Pelican* reached Lerwick and, two days later, Fleetwood. Only afterwards did he realise that he had been wounded in the neck and right leg.

While on sick leave and, by his own judgement, still "nervous and fearful", Martin heard the news of the evacuation of Dunkirk and hurried to Chatham, where he joined the tug *Sun IV* as naval liaison officer. The vessel was ordered to tow 12 lifeboats across the Channel and, between salvage operations, made several crossings, rescuing a total of 236 soldiers and towing several lifeboats laden with troops. When he arrived home again his mother was "rather appalled by my appearance and utter exhaustion".

John Edward Ludgate Martin was born into an Irish protestant family on May 10 1918; his father was a Dublin-trained surgeon in the Navy who rose to become a Surgeon Rear Admiral. Martin was educated at Miss Yabsley's school in Malta and Sherborne prep, where he earned his King's Scout badge. In 1938 he joined the Duncan term at the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, where he became Chief Cadet Captain and was awarded the King's Dirk.

Pelican returned to convoy work on the East Coast until damaged by another collision, with the trawler *Cape Portland*, and on February 19 1941 she was blown up twice in half an hour by mines.

Martin was injured again, though he remained on the bridge, supporting himself on the chart table, until the ship reached Sheerness for repairs. This time he was hospitalised for several weeks while shrapnel from his earlier injury was removed from his leg.

He next joined the destroyer *Antelope* in March 1941, which was ordered to hunt the Bismarck after the sinking of *Hood*; during the search Martin had a lucky escape when he was swept off his feet in a green sea and only saved himself from being lost overboard by seizing a lifeline.

In late 1942 and early 1943, after specialist training in navigation, he took part in the Allied landings at Algiers, Sicily, and Salerno, and was awarded the DSC for steadfast courage and skill in dangerous and important minesweeping operations.

He saw service in the fast minelayer *Manxman* and the cruiser *Bermuda* in the British Pacific Fleet and in 1945 was at the relief of Shanghai and of Tsingtao, where he found the German-built brewery still fully-functioning.

Martin then suffered a severe attack of tachycardia (which troubled him throughout his life), and returned home as home as a passenger in the carrier *Victorious* sleeping, he wrote, "port side officers, starboard side nurses".

Post-war, Martin proved himself an able staff officer, serving on the directing staff of the Royal Navy Staff College, 1952-53, and on the joint planning staff in Singapore, 1954-55. He was second-in-command of the cruiser *Superb* during the Suez Crisis.

In 1961-62 Martin was the senior naval officer in the West Indies, visiting the islands and the east coast of America, helping quell riots in Guyana, and overseeing independence of Jamaica and of Trinidad and Tobago. He also conducted hurricane relief in Belize and took charge of security for the 1962 meeting in Bermuda of Harold Macmillan and President Kennedy.

After these rigours Britannia Royal Naval College proved a relatively easy appointment, though he had to reconcile the academic ambitions of his undergraduate sub-lieutenants with classrooms still fitted with desks designed for 13-year olds. Martin was Flag Officer Middle East, and later, during the withdrawal from Aden, was Commander British Forces Gulf, based at Bahrain, where he was mentioned in despatches.

His last appointments were as head of the Navy's personnel services and training, 1968-70. On promotion to Vice Admiral in 1970 he became Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic, until 1972, when he was appointed KCB. From 1974-80 he was Lieutenant governor and Commander-in-Chief of Guernsey.

John Martin, who died on May 31, 2011 married Rosemary Deck in 1942; she survived him with their two sons and two daughters.