

# HMCS NEW GLASGOW

## A CANADIAN FRIGATE IN WORLD WAR II



John D. Ayre

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IN WORLD WAR II



John D. Ayre  
Guelph, Ontario.



## DEDICATION

For my father Norman Frederick Ayre

1924-2005

Who like thousands of young Canadian men and women in World War II volunteered to serve in the Royal Canadian Navy... because it was the right thing to do.

and

From me and Susie to our grandchildren,

Thomas, Max, McCrae and Arthur,

May you always have a remembrance of things past, so you can live wisely in the future.

*Roll along Wavy Navy, roll along, roll along,*

*Roll along Wavy Navy roll along,*

*If they ask you who we are*

*We're the RCNVR*

*Roll along Wavy Navy Roll along*

From the 1936 music, *Roll Along, Covered Wagon, Roll Along* by British song writer Harry Roy, words by Gunner (later Rear-Admiral) P.D. Budge and Sub-Lieutenant R Pope. *HMCS Saguenay*



## SOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the writing of this Ship's history in World War 2 I had access to both primary and secondary sources. Many photos, although not all are from RCNVR Signaller Norman Ayre's Brownie camera that he took with him to war. Where his photo is used the initials NFA appear. Other photos come from a variety of sources and have hopefully been correctly identified and sourced. N.A.C. of course stands for "National Archives Canada" and "DND" for Department of National Defence.

*"For Posterity's Sake"* is a web site of National importance that collects photos and information of many RCN ships and their crew. Their photos and information were a valuable source and upon completion of this work all that I have by way of photos will be downloaded to the site. I can only hope others do the same.

My father's notes, stories and a few items of paper that probably should not have been removed from the ship even at war's end bear the writings he repeatedly made on them over the years while he tried to regain his memory as his vascular dementia advanced late in his life. It was a final battle he could not and did not win. "U-boat Net" is a useful on line source to cross check dates and locations.

I accessed the National Archives in Ottawa and also exchanged a few e-mails with Michael Whitby the Senior Naval Historian at the Department of National Defence Directorate of History and Heritage. His works are cited in the Bibliography. Ship movement Cards for *New Glasgow* were available from Ottawa.

The British archives at Kew were able to provide the *Report on Proceedings* written for the Admiralty after each of the seven Atlantic Crossings as well as the *Report on the Interrogation of the Survivors from U-1003*

The staff at Admiralty House in Halifax were very helpful with information and access to the material they possessed as was the Naval Museum in Esquimalt, British Columbia. The New Glasgow/Pictou Library in Nova Scotia provided what they had as well. I made specific inquiries of *HMCS Haida* in Hamilton and of *HMCS Sackville* in Halifax, specifically to Chief ERA Devenish of *Sackville* and received very helpful direction and information.

Other sources are referenced in the text or in the Bibliography.

Finally, I recognize the debt I owe to my wife of almost 50 years, Susan without whom any project I undertake would not be possible and wouldn't be half as much fun. In my opinion she is surely a candidate for Sainthood and in the alternative she should at the very least have a ship named after her...preferably a Frigate.

JDA

May 5, 2025.



## CONTENTS

### CHAPTERS

	PAGE
1. ACTION STATIONS	10
2. INTRODUCTION	11
<i>LETTER FROM NORM, 1996</i>	
3. THE WAR BY 1943	17
4. SIGNING UP WITH THE RCNVR	21
<i>LETTER FROM NORM, DECEMBER 31st, 1942</i>	
5. CONCERNING FRIGATES , CORVETTES & DESTROYERS	28
6. SIGNALS, SIGNALMEN & WRENS: ST HYACINTHE QUEBEC	38
7. <i>HMCS NEW GLASGOW</i>	45
8. ESQUIMALT TO HALIFAX	50
<i>LETTER FROM NORM, DECEMBER 1943</i>	
9. CONCERNING SEA, SKY, LOOKOUTS & SIGNALMEN	61
10. THE U-BOATS	66

11. EARLY DAYS IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC	70
LETTER FROM NORM, APRIL 1944	
12. LIFE BELOW DECK	76
LETTER FROM NORM. MAY 1ST, 1944	
13. CONCERNING CONVOYS	84
LETTER FROM NORM, MAY 31ST, 1944	
14. SEVEN ATLANTIC CONVOYS 1944	92
Part I   Convoy HXS 291	
Part II   Convoy ONS 239	
LETTER FROM NORM, JUNE 1944	
Part III   Convoy HXF 296	
Part IV   Convoy ONF 244	
Part V   Convoy HXM 301	
LETTER FROM NORM, AUGUST 1944	
Part VI   Convoy ONM 249	
Part VII   Convoy HX 306	
LETTER FROM NORM, SEPTEMBER 1944	
15. HUNTER KILLER GROUP EG 26 AND THE TORPEDOING OF <i>HMCS CHEBOUGUE</i>	133
LETTER FROM NORM, JANUARY 1945	
16. THE RAMMING OF U-1003	143
17. RETURNING HOME	153

## LETTER FROM NORM, AUGUST 1945

18. THE RESURRECTION OF <i>HMCS NEW GLASGOW</i> , PRESTONIANS, THE PACIFIC AND HOLLYWOOD	156
19. CONCERNING SIGNALMAN NORMAN F AYRE	163
20. ABOUT THE AUTHOR	165
21. APPENDIX ONE: CANADIAN WARSHIP LOSSES 1939-1943	166
22. APPENDIX TWO: CANADIAN WARSHIP LOSSES 1943-1945	170
23. APPENDIX THREE: RCN SHIPS SERVING WITH <i>NEW GLASGOW</i> ON SEVEN ATLANTIC CONVOYS	173
24. APPENDIX FOUR: THE MYSTERY PHOTO OF U-744	174
25. APPENDIX FIVE: POEM 'DISREGARD'	177
26. BIBLIOGRAPHY	179

## CHAPTER 1

### ACTION STATIONS

March 20, 1945  
55° 25'N, 06° 53'W  
2350 GMT  
Irish Sea

It happened late at night. It was very cold with very poor visibility. Initially the Lookout didn't 'see' anything rather he first heard something and shouted '*sound of aircraft approaching*' but how he could tell an aircraft was approaching in the dark when the ship's radar had not reported anything was not considered for the moment. The sound grew louder and changed its tone. The same Lookout shouted '*periscope dead ahead!*' The ship increased speed and turned slightly to the starboard to close with the target and it was moments after Action Stations had been sounded that the Frigate *HMCS New Glasgow K320* struck the German U-boat U-1003 tearing off its snorkel and caving in its hull.

Depth charges were immediately dropped by *New Glasgow* and her companion Escorts. Men died in the U-boat. More men would die over the next hours. The German U-boat Captain would keep his submarine alive for a few more days while being hunted down by other Allied Escort ships. Eventually the U-boat Captain could sit on the bottom of the Irish Sea no longer. He surfaced, scuttled the vessel and his remaining crew made a half hearted and unsuccessful effort to reach the Irish coast. Damaged, *HMCS New Glasgow* slowly returned to Port for repairs. The crew could not know it but their war which had begun in this ship a year and a half before, and had taken them across the Atlantic on numerous convoys was in fact...over.



## CHAPTER 2

### INTRODUCTION

*'The only thing that ever really frightened me during the war...  
was the U-boat peril.'*

Winston Churchill; *The Second World War, Volume 2: Their Finest Hour*. 1949 Chapter 30

His Majesty's Canadian Ship *New Glasgow* K-320. The letter and number was painted on her bow just as on all Canadian and British wartime Corvettes and Frigates sailing on the Atlantic would have the letter 'K' plus their number appearing on their bow. 'K' told the observer what kind of vessel it was and the number '320' identified the ship.

The ship, like the vast majority of Canadian and British ships was crewed largely by volunteers with only the senior officers having limited sea experience if any. Typical for the time was one such crewman on board the *New Glasgow*, Norman Frederick Ayre who had joined the Navy a few days after his 18th birthday in 1942. Thousands of young men thus became part of the RCNVR, the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve. From this pool of men the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) grew from 16 ships and approximately 1200 personnel in 1939 to almost 100,000 men and 400 ships by 1945. To this day no other modern Navy has ever experienced such exponential growth in so short a time. This is partly Norman's story but also that of the ship. Built to accommodate just over 100 men, wartime requirements meant that a Frigate typically would have at least 140 men as crew, and unlike today's navy, no women served on board.

The mathematics suggest that from their introduction in 1942 until the end of the war, with 70 Frigates of the same class as *New Glasgow* serving with the RCN that over time nearly 10,000 men served on such a warship in the service of Canada.

It was called a 'River' Class Frigate, not because it patrolled rivers but because the British Navy decided to name their Frigates after rivers in Britain. The British also had the famous 'Flower' Class Corvettes (*HMS Buttercup* may not have struck terror into the enemy's hearts but it did sink a U-boat!) and later Castle Class Frigates, and Loch Class Frigates, all named accordingly.

Armed with his small Brownie box camera which he took to sea, Norman took photos, lots of them which in later years he kept in a small cardboard box. As a Visual Signaller he was well positioned from his vantage point on the Bridge to take photos when able. When in his Seventies he got the diagnosis of vascular dementia he began writing things down. It was a curious feature of his illness that certain memories came back to him, like a detailed recollection of Morse Code or events at sea.

During the War his letters home were all hand written. Years later in gathering his thoughts and fighting for his memory, he typed the following. In this story it was as I called it the first ...

'Letter from Norm'

1996

*The purpose of this writing was to prepare a record of my personal activity in Canada's navy during World War II and have it concerned with those number of war ships certain people and cities during that period of time and what also played an unforgettable part of my lifetime. Time is passing by (1996) so the purpose of this writing is to review briefly some of the memories I have gathered in my home and to review*

*briefly something of the memories of these ships and people where we lived together in ships and in barracks, the unforgettable experience of navy wartime- as memories of time served in Canada's navy, which might be of interest to our family as the years go by.*

This is not a biography although biographical details will emerge. It is not a Hollywood Script (although Hollywood gets a mention in a later part of this work) where battle is joined with a fearsome enemy every ten minutes. Rather it is a biography of a Canadian Frigate in the North Atlantic through the experiences of a young Signaller, Norman Frederick Ayre of London Ontario.....he was my father.

Some warships saw more action and some less. But all had to deal with the North Atlantic, its storms, its sixty foot waves, its cold and its ice, the hunger, raw fatigue, fear and yes, boredom while all the time there was a terrible enemy in significant numbers lurking in the darkness below waiting to send a torpedo into your ship and to cast you into the freezing ocean if you survived the blast.

Also this not a grand description of Canada's War at Sea. For that no one could improve on the two volume and monumental work by Douglas, Sarty and Whitby (see Bibliography) rather it is an attempt to describe 'what it was like' on one of these three hundred foot long vessels made and manned in Canada, in the context of the global struggle that went on for almost six long and bloody years.

The principal enemy of course were the U-boats of Nazi Germany whose job it was to sink any and all allied shipping that they could. By 1943 the enemy possessed several hundred operational submarines. The other enemy was the sea which occasionally offered protective cover to a Frigate but actually would do so only when it was so violently rough, as with sixty foot waves so that it was impossible for the U-boats to get off an accurate shot.

Other times ocean whitecaps would mask the telltale sign of a periscope or clothe the ship in ice or fog or both so that the ocean was as sinister as the man made war machines hovering just below the surface. Sometimes the Frigates were a sword, sinking a U-boat which was certainly good, but forcing a U-boat to submerge rendered it functionally useless for the moment as with its reduced underwater speed it would never catch up to a Convoy. A U-boat driven underwater from its surface position was largely neutralized in its effectiveness at least in the short term.

The Battle of the Atlantic might be likened to a classical symphony. In 1943 the prelude was long since over....but no one knew that at the time. The principle themes of this Symphony had been played with variations, but the finale was still a long way off and in this piece of music, a tragic piece to be sure, no one knew when the finale would come. The enemy continued killing right up until the end. The men of the Bangor Class Minesweeper *HMCS Esquimalt J272* would experience that fact first hand when their ship was torpedoed and sunk outside Halifax harbour in April of 1945! The Canadian Registered Merchant Vessel *Avondale Park* would be torpedoed and sunk within hours of the final unconditional surrender of the enemy.

It is for that reason that I have occasionally 'punctuated' the text in bold lettering with reference to a notable sinking of a Canadian or occasionally an Allied ship. There were in fact many other Allied vessels both warships and Merchantmen sunk (and many U-boats sunk as well) in addition to those mentioned. (A list of RCN ships sunk during the war is found in Appendix One & Two) and is to serve as a reminder that the 'front' for the Battle of the Atlantic started just outside the entrance to Halifax Harbour, or St John's, Newfoundland or Londonderry, Northern



Ireland. The wolf was always at the door and was quite prepared to deliver a fatal bite until the final surrender in May of 1945.

I have concluded many Chapters with a '*Letter from Norm*' as during the War he had precisely two people that he wrote to, his mother Anne and a young nursing student with whom he had 'an understanding' ... Alice, my mother. Some like his first letter from Panama were entirely in his hand, while others were drafted by the writer and are based on what he told me (like causing the near-abandonment of the ship), his writings in the margins of numerous pages and on the backs of photographs he took, telegrams he sent Alice and other material he left.

A note on style....when referring to a ship I will use the label '*HMCS*' only once when the ship is first mentioned in the text and thereafter by the ships name only. Concerning ships speed and distances, no one in the Navy would refer to a ship travelling at 25 kilometres per hour as a ship's speed was given in KTS or Knots. One Knot is one nautical mile per hour or 6,080 feet/hr. A nautical mile is actually 6,076 feet. To add to the confusion a Nautical mile can be converted to kilometres per hour by multiplying Nautical miles by 1.852. In brief....

1 knot = 1 nautical mile per hour

1 nautical mile = 6076 feet = 1,852 metres = 1.85 kilometres

1 knot = 1.85 km/hr = 1.15 mph (Statute mile of 5,280 feet)

I will not inflict any of this on the reader. Neither miles per hour or knots are in common daily use in Canada (save in flying and the marine environment). Therefore I will describe a ship's speed and distances using all three metrics. This will annoy the purists. Forgive me.

This work is not meant for the expert. Others (Brian Lavery see bibliography) have filled that niche. But to give the narrative meaning some technical references will be given. What was Asdic? What was it used for and what did its limitations mean for an individual ship and for

a Convoy? What did it mean when a Frigate 'let the C.A.T.' out ? The explanations will follow.

Norman's war began in late December of 1942. The war as fought by the *New Glasgow* lasted from it's launch until the end of hostilities in May of 1945 or just over 500 days. Sixty River Class Frigates were built in Canada for the RCN during the War and another ten were acquired from Britain via their building program. The RCN's seventy Frigates were crewed by Canadians. This is the story of one of those Frigates and one of those men. It is a story of courage and resolve. It is an untold story and a true story that needs to be told for the lessons it holds. This is the story of the Canadian Frigate *HMCS New Glasgow K320* in World War II and of one member of her crew, a Signaller, Norman Ayre RCNVR.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE WAR BY 1943

From its beginning in September 1939 until the Commissioning of *New Glasgow* in December 1943 much had happened on the World Scene. Britain was never alone but was always supported by Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Nations (or Colonies) of the future British Commonwealth and was joined by Soviet Russia in the struggle against Nazi Germany in June of 1941 and by the United States later that year. With the benefit of hindsight one might observe that the die was cast and victory ensured. But that is with the benefit of hindsight.

By 1942 with 80% of the German land forces locked in battle on the Eastern Front the soon to be launched invasion of Europe had to succeed. That meant that once undertaken, the Allied invasion of France had to be supplied with...everything. Every bomber and Fighter Wing of every Air Force had to be armed and fuelled, their crews fed and clothed. The Tanker that brought that fuel across the ocean had to have its own fuel and provisions. Every one of the gathering millions of soldiery in Britain had to be sufficiently fed and armed. The United Kingdom produced but a fraction of its own food. The civilians of Britain needed to be fed and meanwhile the struggle continued in Italy between the German Army and the Allied forces, Canadian troops included.

The *Untersee Boots*, the U-boats started out in small numbers (fewer than fifty of them in 1939) increasing to several hundred operational Boats by 1943. By that year they had sunk not hundreds, but well over two thousand Merchant Vessels in the Oceans of the world and they hunted not just in the North Atlantic but also the South Atlantic and even in the Indian Ocean. They hunted in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and sank ships within sight of land. They torpedoed ships at anchor at Bell Island

Newfoundland, mindful that 'our Newfoundland' was then a British possession.

The U-boats had torpedoed and sunk warships of all Allied Nations, including Canadian Warships, from Minesweepers, to Corvettes Destroyers and even a River Class Frigate. (See Appendix Two Canadian Warships Sunk 1943-1945). For a while Italian Submarines had ventured into the North Atlantic but they were withdrawn quite earlier to the Mediterranean and by September 1943 Italy was out of the War.

In Ottawa, Canada's Prime Minister Mackenzie King won a majority Liberal Government in March 1940 and two months later on June 21st the *National Resources Mobilization Act* was passed which required 'persons to place themselves, their services and their property at the disposal of his Majesty in Right of Canada as may be deemed necessary or expedient.' The legislation was much like *Britain's Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1939* which gave His Majesty's government power over all citizens and essentially repeated the same language as the Canadian legislation.

If the government wanted your home or property they could take it, with some compensation. If they wanted to keep you working in a certain protected job the person needed permission to leave under the *National Selective Service Act* of 1942. Farmers were needed where they were! Riveters and shipyard workers were obliged to stay put and build ships.

Conscription for the Canadian Army was a long way off with all of the political turmoil it would cause but conscription was never a factor for the Royal Canadian Air Force or the Royal Canadian Navy as both would always be an all volunteer force. In Britain the Royal Navy was partially made up of conscripts.



Earlier years had seen conflict not only on the waves but within and between services. The Royal Navy simply thought it was superior to anything Canada (or Australia etc) could supply. But when it became apparent that the war at sea would not be a contest between Battleships but one between U-boats and Convoys the fact that a large, small ship Escort Navy was required drew in the Canadians in unprecedented numbers. Firstly came the Corvettes, lots of them as they could be built in Canadian and British yards. But it also became apparent that Corvettes were not fully up to the task of long range ocean escort.

March of 1943 would bring the highest success rate for the U-boats in terms of allied tonnage sunk. Had the numbers of vessels sunk that month continued the course of history may well have been very different. The Frigates, the application of science and the development many other weapons of war in a total mobilization of society made the difference. Today's wars do not permit ships or aircraft to be produced with the speed or in the numbers as they were in 1939-1945. But American and Canadian industry was ramped up, workers were mobilized and young men stepped forward to man the ships.

There was an industrial race underway. German war production was not declining despite the bombing of their cities and industrial centres. German technology was on the brink of unleashing jet fighters and early versions of a Cruise missile, the V-1. The German V-2 was under development and would send a ballistic missile to near orbital altitudes of 100 kilometres falling on London and Antwerp. In the Blöhm and Voss shipyards in Germany a new generation of U-boats, the Type 21 and Type 23 were under development. They revolutionized the design of the Type VII-C which was the principle submarine in use by the Germans. The Type 21 travelled faster under water than it did on the surface. It went faster underwater than the maximum speed of any Corvette and could almost completely negate their usefulness. The Type

21 had increased range and firepower which could have, had it entered service soon enough, won the Battle of the Atlantic...for the Germans!

The race would only end if the German armies were defeated. For the enemy armies to be defeated the Convoys had to get through and for that to happen it was up to the Navy.

## CHAPTER 4

### SIGNING UP WITH THE RCNVR

*Oh, we joined for the chance to go to sea*

*Yes, we joined for the chance to go to sea*

*But the first ten months or more*

*We spent marching on the shore*

*Roll along, Wavy Navy, roll along*

*Verse II Wavy Navy*

There were approximately 10,000 of them. Men who would serve aboard the Frigates of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War. In many ways they were alike or at least shared certain attributes. They were all volunteers. There would be no conscripts in the Royal Canadian Navy. The Canadian Army's need later in the War for conscripts was driven by significant casualties in Italy and North West Europe and the requirement for replacements. The typical sailor of the RCN was probably born between 1920 and 1925. They grew up in the shadow of the First World War when Canada as a nation of only nine million citizens had put one million men in uniform. Of those men 68,000 died in the trenches between 1914 and 1918. That figure represented the number of the Canadian dead in the 'War to end all Wars'. The wounded and those physically scarred outnumbered the deceased several times over. As with Norman, many had Fathers who had served in the trenches with the Canadian Army (CEF) or the British Army between 1914 and 1918.

The sailor volunteer of 1939-1945 would have grown up during the Great Depression and as a child would likely have known a degree of want, an aspect that in an odd way served many well since they would

generally like the food they were given aboard ship although many would only partially digest their food before giving it up to sea sickness.

Medical rejection of men early in the War as 'unfit' was common. The medical examination that all sailors initially went through revealed many undernourished or malnourished men. Medical disqualifications decreased as the War progressed and as the pressure to fill quotas of men increased. Most of the sailors of the RCNVR had never been to sea before. There had been no money for sea travel and those few who had served aboard maritime fishing vessels or their like were appreciated and valued but were vastly outnumbered by citizens of the more populous land lubber provinces.

By 1942 the typical volunteer had left a job to join up. The Great Depression of 1929 only really ended in Canada with the Declaration of War on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1939. Like many others, Norm was still too young to join in 1939 having been born in 1924. By 1942 he would be of enlistment age. Of the enormous numbers of men who did join some had their high school education and likely a job that might pay thirty or forty dollars a week which was very good money for those days. They would trade those jobs for a uniform, the perils of the sea, enemy torpedoes, all for \$1.85 a day. As the song went, *'of the money there was none'*. Once on board ship every sailor could also receive an extra six cents a day on their pay if they chose not to have the daily rum ration that was doled out (The U.S. Navy was 'dry' and had no such tradition) in accordance with the centuries old practice adopted by the Royal Navy. Norman however could not claim the extra six cents since he was not entitled to the daily rum ration. Although he was old enough to go to sea he was not old enough to drink.

Initially, during the dark days of 1939 to 1942 the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) was made up of a small core of Regulars, both men and officers who had largely trained under Royal Navy (RN) auspices. They

carried the traditions of the RN with them. Some of those traditions would prove to be beneficial, others less so. At the War's beginning the RCN and the Royal Canadian Navy Reserve (RCNR) numbered fewer than 3000 men and only 16 ships...with no Frigates or Corvettes among them. Early recruits during those years found themselves often under trained and under appreciated by their Officers. A second group of men, of which Norman was part, started to arrive. Their numbers would swell the Canadian Navy to 100,000 men in approximately 400 ships of all sizes and types save only battleships and submarines, (Canada had neither of those two types of vessels) but even then many RCNVR and RCNR volunteers served in those latter type of vessels in the RN. By 1943 the vast bulk of the Canadian Navy was made up of men who had signed up for the duration of hostilities, the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR).

At only one time in history and in one other Country did a military service ever expand with the speed with which the RCN expanded over the six years of war. That 'other' example was the Royal Navy in the Napoleonic era when it grew from 16,000 men in 1789 to 140,000 men by 1812. And in no way were the operational or technical skills of Jack Tar the equal to the skills needed for a Twentieth Century warship! (Colley. p. 293 See Bibliography)

Everyone had a number. V52189. That was Norman. Officers had numbers. Men had numbers. Ships had numbers. Earlier in 1942, accompanied by his friend Bob Evans, Norman had gone down to the recruitment office known as *HMCS Prevost* in landlocked London Ontario and had, as the law required, pre-registered in anticipation of his 18th birthday. There was no ship in London or in scores of other landlocked cities across Canada but the Navy had created 'Stone Frigates' or depots where men enlisted, received some training and fed the war machine administratively before sending them to sea. *HMCS*

*Cornwallis* in Nova Scotia, *HMCS St Hyacinthe* in Quebec, *HMCS Naden* in Esquimalt B.C. and *HMCS Stadaconna* in Halifax and many other such establishments across Canada were buildings and not ships, but they played an essential part of the Naval War.

Some men joined out of patriotism, others because their brothers or other family member was serving in one of the branches of the Armed Forces. One RCNVR sailor opined that given the choice of the Army, Navy or Airforce he decided to join the Navy because he would rather swim a mile in the Navy, if sunk, as opposed to falling a mile, if shot down in the Air Force. As for the Army he saw it as a pathway to complete dismemberment. (Bessner. *Double Threat*. See bibliography) Norman decided that with one brother in the Canadian Army and another in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) he would round out the equation and join the Navy. Besides his friend Bob was going to join the Navy so they could possibly serve together. In fact, after joining they never saw each other again until after the War was over.

Ultimately, almost every Canadian sailor would be destined to be channeled through Halifax. 'An East Coast Port' was a euphemism for Halifax. For Canada, the war in the Atlantic was operationally run from Halifax and administratively of course from the much less loved Ottawa. Not that Halifax was loved by the typical sailor. As a City it was in no way equipped to handle the massive influx of service men that would appear on its streets and docks. Canadians among them certainly, but also British Nationals and every other Nation that had a merchant ship. With thousands of merchant sailors and ship's workers descending on the City housing was an impossibility. Supplies were short.

Halifax was perceived as being on the 'Front Line' which fact was proven true with U-boats often lurking off shore and the not infrequent laying of mines by enemy submarines off the Harbour entrance. Halifax would be the assembly point for huge Atlantic Convoys (as well as New

York and Boston).The massive flow of sailors and other civilian personnel into and out of Halifax never stopped. But before Halifax came basic training.

Six days after his 18th birthday and in accordance with his early pre Registration Norman went to *Prevost* and presented himself to the recruiting officer on December 27<sup>th</sup> 1942, where the Officer took his name...and now the RCNVR had him. He had hoped that he would have some days at home with his parents and baby sister, perhaps in his words 'wearing a swanky Naval uniform' to impress the young woman in his life, but it was not to be. '*Report later today to HMCS York*' (the RCN naval depot in Toronto) was the Order given. He was handed a voucher for the train and told to get moving! He wasn't going home, he was going to Toronto. He had never been to Toronto. But then he had never been on a ship either. Nor had he ever seen the ocean. Soon all that would change. So like thousands before him and thousands who would yet depart, he left for the War. Firstly to Toronto one hundred and sixty kilometres from his home to a City he had never been to before. He went as a newly minted naval recruit. Number V52189.

Letter from Norm.

December 31st, 1942

Dear Mom;

Well it sure isn't quite what I expected. Back on the 27th when I went into the navy recruiting station Prevost downtown I figured they would do some paper work, give me a uniform and I'd be able to swagger around town for a while and impress Alice. Nope. I'm glad they let me telephone you first and today is the first day I've been allowed time to myself to write you. They got me onto the train for Toronto and I landed in a place called HMCS York, except it's not a ship, it's a building. With a lot of other fellows like me wondering what's going on? Toronto is big compared to London. And you know I've never been here before so there's a lot to figure out. And everyone yells at you, Petty Officers they're called, they yell a lot and all the time! Stand up, line up and God forbid you should ever have your hands in your pockets. I actually did sentry duty nearby at the Automotive Building. It was dark and quiet and although I had a gun I had no ammunition and wouldn't have known what to do if the German Army came marching through the big gates here. Ah well, like the song says' I'll get used to it...

How's Dad?....

And here the letter continued.....





*HMCS YORK*, Toronto, 1942 Recruits Drilling. NAC

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCERNING FRIGATES, CORVETTES

#### &

### DESTROYERS

*(The frigate) looked enormous...she seemed to tower above the jetty, she was over three hundred feet long, a hundred feet longer than a corvette, and she had about her a solid air, a feeling of toughness and strength, to which her formidable armament and immense outfit of depth-charges further testified.*

*From H.M. Frigate Nicholas Monsarrat 1946*

'*Cheap and Nasty*' was how Churchill described the Corvettes. As a concept for a relatively inexpensive Escort vessel their design was taken from that for a Whale Catcher of the type now only seen in archival footage where a whaling ship has a bow mounted harpoon gun designed to chase and kill the unfortunate cetacean. Early ship design concepts for the Royal Navy initially focussed on large vessels, battleships and destroyers and everything in-between. It was only as the outbreak of War approached and the vulnerability from U-boats started to be recognized that the first designs for Corvettes were drawn up by the Smiths Dock Company in England and the plans arrived at the Admiralty in London.

Corvettes were 'cheaper' than destroyers (just over \$500,000 a copy, yet still an enormous sum in 1940) and had the capacity to be 'nasty' towards the enemy, but with limitations. Corvettes were built to 'mercantile' standards which meant fewer water tight compartments, and with other design features absent that would normally be found on a warship which omissions would not have been allowed in less urgent circumstances than the present war. As noted Canadian author Marc

Milner noted '*the design was well suited to whale catching but then whales don't shoot back.*' (Milner: *Sackville*.p.9)



An early photo of *HMCS Sackville* before later modifications. This is the 'classic' view of the first Flower Class Corvettes. Minesweeping gear is visible at the stern, men on the open bridge are visible, there is no radar, and one poor soul (not likely an officer) is just visible in the crow's nest on the foremast

From *For Posterity's Sake*.

As for Destroyers in the Canadian Navy, they were too complex in their construction for Canadian shipyards to build and in fact, none were. *HMCS Haida*, Canada's flagship Tribal Class Destroyer was built in the U.K. like all of Canada's Destroyers in the War. The construction of two Destroyers was commenced in Halifax but they were not completed by War's end. It should be noted that while Destroyers were the preferred vessel of the full time RCN for the post war navy, the legacy of

Corvettes and Frigates dominates the history of naval construction in Canada during the War.

Very early on after the Royal Navy (RN) began its construction program in British shipyards and the RCN followed suit with a building program for over 60 'Flower Class' Corvettes so manned as mentioned earlier, that all British Corvettes would be named after flowers. The Flower Class of Corvettes, although identical to those built in Britain were named after Towns, hence *HMCS Sackville*. These would be the principal investment in Escorts for the first and the worst years of the war at sea. Canada placed its first orders for Corvettes in 1939.

Later, when the Frigate design was created, (again with design leadership by Smith's Docks in Britain) it was identified that the Frigates could not be built at Inland Canadian ship yards on the Great Lakes as their hulls were too long to make the transit of the LaChine Canal on the St. Lawrence River. But there was no such restriction on the Corvettes.

The hulls of the Corvettes were riveted (versus welding) which was suited to the skill set of Canadian ship yards and although Corvettes were built at Quebec they were produced in significant numbers in such places as Thunder Bay, Collingwood and other inland Ports. These inland Canadian yards also produced numerous Minesweepers and other small defence vessels such as Fairmile Motor Launches.

Corvettes were initially designed to be used primarily for coastal defence. That idea didn't last long and out of necessity, as the War progressed, when available they became the principal and indeed heroic mainstay of the North Atlantic Escort Service. But the Corvettes had their human and engineering limitations that would only be met with the Frigates which were designed and purpose built as trans-oceanic anti-submarine vessels.

It was said that sailors on Corvettes deserved submariner's pay (submariners were paid extra) since the Corvettes spent a noticeable

amount of time almost submerged when in heavy seas. U-boats were faster on the surface than Corvettes and the submarine's deck gun was of a heavier caliber than that a Corvette's, although a surface gun duel with any surface ship was dangerous for any U-boat since if damaged far from home and unable to dive, it lost its principal defensive protection.

For those serving on board a Corvette life was in a word, miserable. It was said the ship would 'roll on wet grass.' Food was brought to the crews mess from a kitchen that required the designated man to carry the food from the crew's kitchen to crew's quarters by walking outside with the almost inevitable soaking of man and food. Crew quarters gave new meaning to the word cramped. In the earlier days of the War the Corvettes were not equipped with radar. Also the Corvettes had a somewhat limited number of depth charges (see Chart below). The principle limitation of the Corvettes was their range or lack of it, in addition to their speed. But their success can be measured by the fact that 294 Corvettes would be built in Canada during the course of the War with the RCN manning 123 of them. And they did achieve considerable success in sinking U-boats.

Because sailing in a heavy sea required more fuel than sailing in a calm one (a rare event on the North Atlantic) and because chasing off after a U-boat meant that the ship had to return as quickly as possible to the Convoy screen, it was not uncommon for a Corvette to run very low on fuel necessitating refuelling at sea, if refuelling was available. Occasionally a Corvette at sea would run out of fuel and have to be towed. At the time, refuelling at sea was difficult, dangerous and often impossible due to weather or battle conditions.

By 1942 the mid -Atlantic was the favourite hunting ground for the U- Boats. It was not only the geographic centre of the North Atlantic but for a time there was a 'gap' where no air cover could be provided to a Convoy due to limited aircraft numbers and their limited range. Relying

solely on the increasing numbers of Corvettes was not the answer. To that end, by late 1940 the Admiralty had seen the need for something different. At first the Admiralty referred to the new vessels as 'Twin Screw' Corvettes.' To its eternal credit the RCN unilaterally applied the term 'Frigate' to the new design. The inevitable British pushback did not succeed and eventually the RCN overcame British reluctance to name the design after something that had not existed since Nelson's day and hence 'Frigate' was how they were known.

Twin propellers gave a Frigate speed in excess of a surfaced U-boat and an extra one hundred feet of hull length gave it room for greater fuel capacity and range. The Frigate's two propellers (each almost ten feet in diameter) were powered by its two engines. The engines were of the same type as that of the Corvettes with one of them being 'reverse mounted' so that the controls for both were accessible to the Stokers and Engineers in a central passage way. Like Corvettes, if struck by a torpedo the odds of any of the engine room crew getting out were not good.

The extra one hundred feet of length on the Frigates also gave it a very large depth charge capacity. It must be noted though that the Corvette had a superior turning circle compared to almost any other vessel, Frigates included, due to its single propeller and massive rudder. But turning abeam across the face of a sixty foot wave in a Corvette was a dangerous manoeuvre and losing a man overboard was not an unknown occurrence.

Construction of the first River Class Frigates began in the UK and Canada even before the American entry to the War in December of 1941. In fact the very first two Frigates built in Canada were delivered to the US Navy. All future Canadian orders were for the RCN or the RN. As Corvette production was moved to inland yards on the Great Lakes in Canada the Frigates were built at but a few locations. Canadian Vickers

in Montreal, Davie Shipbuilding in Lauzon Quebec, Morton Engineering in Quebec and as in the case of *New Glasgow*, Yarrow's Yard in Esquimalt British Columbia. Ship Yards in the UK produced 'Rivers' as well. Everything was allocated. The Army and Air Force wanted steel. Both of those services wanted the components for radio and radar. In the end result throughout the war allocation decisions had to be made to permit the construction of anything and everything, be it a Tank, a Bomber or a Frigate.

The first Rivers were equipped with Mine sweeping equipment but that aspect was quickly abandoned. They were the first new long range 'task specific' ships built for the RCN. Their increasing presence in the War can be likened to the building of the P-51 Mustang fighter aircraft which, with its increased range could escort the Allied bombers to their targets over Germany and back, something that was not possible with other fighter types. The acceptance of the Frigate design which would be improved upon during the War by the building and launch of Loch Class, Captain Class and Hunt Class Frigates (really improved River Class designs but built with the River's design at their core). They all were built with strengthened bows in the event the opportunity arose to ram a U-boat as would prove useful for what the future held for *New Glasgow*. The American Navy would create their own design similar to Frigates calling them 'Destroyer Escorts.'

Canada would build eight Rivers that would be transferred to the RN and seven would be built in the UK and transferred to the RCN. This sharing back and forth was done on the basis of hull completion and best utilization of construction space. The British would also transfer six UK built Rivers to the Free French Navy.

In all the Canadian 1942-1943 building program would see Canadian ship yards build thirty-three River Class Frigates (*New Glasgow* was

among this first production run) and a further twenty-seven in the 1943-1944 building program. In addition to the two built for the USN there were the eight built in Canada for the RN, an impressive total of seventy ships in addition to Corvettes and a significant number of freighters. It is a certainty that no such production numbers for modern Frigates would be possible today. Further River Class Frigates were built in the UK and Australia. Ultimately all Canadian Frigates would be scrapped after War's end or converted to more modern versions and then scrapped or sold off. Canada has the last Tribal Class Destroyer in *HMCS Haida* moored in Hamilton, Ontario. Halifax has the Flower Class Corvette *HMCS Sackville K181* in its harbour. Today the only intact surviving River Class Frigate is on display in Brisbane Australia, *HMAS Diamantina*.

The Rivers were supposed to have twin 4" guns forward but the shortage of available guns meant that *New Glasgow* was one of the few that had but a single barrelled 4"gun forward. Other weapon systems are noted later in the text.

Halifax was never used as a principal source for warship construction as it was on or in any event too near to the front line. The Battle of the Atlantic began at the entrance to Halifax Harbour. In January 1942 a Royal Navy Destroyer *HMS Belmont* was torpedoed and sunk off the Nova Scotia shores and the 'near home' sinking of warships and Merchant vessels would continue within sight of the Nova Scotia shoreline with the sinking of *HMCS Esquimalt* in April 1945. Halifax and several of its Nova Scotia coastal neighbours such as Liverpool, Shelburne, and Yarmouth were used throughout the war for repairs and refits for vessels for the hundreds of ships damaged by weather, the enemy and just because the vessel was worn out. Smaller harbours such as Weymouth constructed wooden Fairmile Motor launches for the Navy



which small vessels were used for Coastal Escort in near shore waters and in the St. Lawrence River.

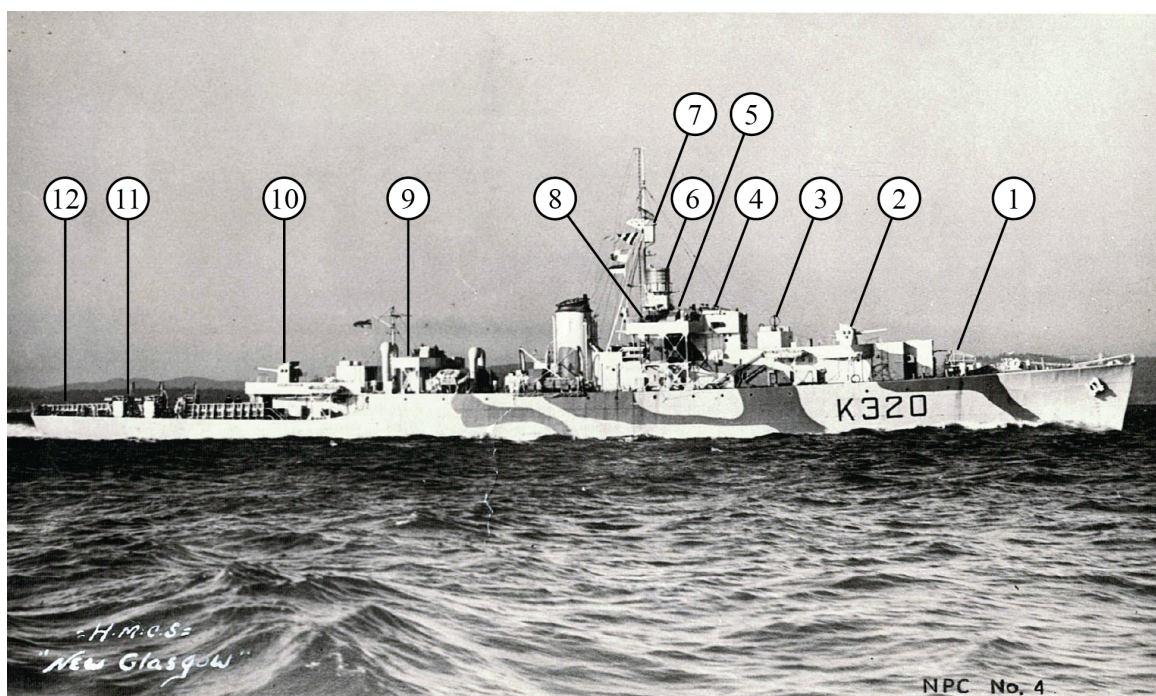
In deploying a Destroyer on Convoy escort it was found that they were in fact too fast and unnecessarily heavily armed for a use against U-boats. Equipped with torpedoes for action against large surface targets, the torpedoes on a Destroyer were useless for Atlantic Convoy work. Their heavy surface armament was unnecessary as a Frigate's weaponry would be quite sufficient. Destroyers were fast, very fast indeed but their increased speed in making contact with a U-boat meant that they gobbled up fuel in prodigious amounts. It might be thought advantageous for the Destroyer to race to the spot of a U-boat sighting but once there the Destroyer had to slow down below sixteen knots, just as a Frigate would, so that its Asdic could function properly. Finally, the cost of a Destroyer far surpassed that of a Frigate as did the highly specialized dockyard construction skills required to build and repair these lethal vessels of war. *Haida* as an example of her type was very expensive and very much more complex to build than Frigates.

Thus the Admiralty and the Canadian Government came to the conclusion that along with ever increasing Air Cover for Convoys, Frigates of all types were the answer to the war against the U-boat.

Comparative Table  
 Corvette *HMCS Sackville* River Class  
 Frigate *HMCS New Glasgow*  
 Tribal Class Destroyer *HMCS Haida*  
 Type VII-C U-boat U-1003

	HMCS Corvette Sackville	HMCS River Class Frigate New Glasgow	HMCS Tribal Class Destroyer Haida	Type VII- C/41 U-boat U-1003
Length	205 ft	301 ft 6"	356 ft	220 ft
Width	33 ft	36 ft 7"	37 ft	20 ft
Draft	11.5 ft	12 ft 11"	9 ft	15 ft
Max. speed	16 kts	20 kts	36.5 kts	17.7 kts surface 7.6 kts submerged
Range	6,482 km at 16 kts	11,500 km at 12 knots	10,600 km At 16 kts	15,700 km at 5.4 kts surfaced
Crew	4 Officers 105 Crew	8 Officers 133 Other Crew	18 Officers 230 Other Crew	4 Officers 52 Other Crew
Depth Charges	40	150 -200	20	n/a
Hedgehog	Yes	Yes	2 squid mortars	N/A

Weapons	1x 4" gun Secondary Armament	2 x 4" gun 2 x 12 pounder AA 4X20mm Mounts AA	4x 4.7" guns Multiple Oerlikons 4 torpedo tubes Numerous secondary guns	14 torpedos bow 5 torpedoes stern 3.46 " deck gun Plus 3 Antiaircraft
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1. Hedgehog 2 Forward 4" gun. 3 HF/DF. 4 Open Bridge. 5 Signal Lamp. 6 Type 271 Radar. 7 Crows nest. 8 Single mount Anti Aircraft Gun. 9 Double Mount Anti Aircraft Gun. 10 Aft 4" Gun. 11 Starboard side launch Depth Charge thrower. 12 Stern Depth Charge rails. The 'dazzle' camouflage paint job would be painted over upon arrival in Halifax and a standard Western Approaches painting scheme applied.

## CHAPTER 6

### SIGNALS, SIGNALMEN AND WRENS ST. HYACINTHE QUEBEC

'Ships that pass in the night, and speak to each other in passing. Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness.'

Tales of a Wayside Inn. Longfellow

After his arrival at *HMCS York*, basic training began for Norm and all other recruits. Some would be found unsuitable for medical reasons and discharged. Some were unsuitable according to the Navy's standards and transferred to the Army as they had already volunteered. But most were inoculated and identified for future useful roles in the Navy.

For four months Norman and his fellow recruits were given a strong dose of Navy discipline and a lot of drill that might have seemed appropriate on a Napoleonic Battlefield. One might wonder what possible use there could be training sailors in marching in ranks and to perform rifle drill when serving on a ship's heaving deck but the purpose that was served was to instil instant obedience to commands and create a sense of identity. Should a sailor should find themselves with their hands in their pockets a rebuke in clear and loud language from a lurking Petty Officer '*Get your hands out of your pockets!*'... usually corrected the posture and wisely so, because when bouncing aboard ship on the North Atlantic however cold one might be, a hand in the pocket meant there would be one less hand for the railing or the stanchion and a broken head or an unexpected swim at sea might result.

As basic training unfolded at *HMCS York*, the streaming process began. Some men were destined for the engine room as stokers, some as ordinary seamen and a few like Norman for the Signals Branch. In addition to good eyesight Norman's High School diploma probably played a large role in his selection since most of the young men of that era had not had the chance to finish High School. Being the youngest of three boys had its advantage when the onset of war work in 1939 had financially rescued his family who at times during the depression years had been one loaf of bread away from having no food in the house.

By April Norm was transferred to *HMCS St. Hyacinthe* Quebec another land based establishment dedicated to signal training. He was to be a Visual Signaller. Opened in 1941 it was to serve as the RCN's Signal School and at its peak, approximately 2600 men and women would attend at any one time. Coders, writers and radio telecommunications were all taught there as well as visual signalling. Five months of intensive learning and training lay ahead.



Spring 1943. Basic training at *HMCS York* finished, a brief leave followed then off to *HMCS St. Hyacinthe*. Leaving home at 16 Connaught Ave. London. Ontario. NFA

The noted British Naval Historian Brian Lavery noted that 'Visual Signalmen were selected at various stages for good education, good handwriting, spelling, memory and in view of the nature of the work for integrity and reliability.' (Lavery. *Hostilities Only* p.101 See bibliography).



Signal School at *St. Hyacinthe*, Quebec, 1944. Sailors and Wrens, on the parade square, preparing to read Morse Code from a handheld Aldis lamp. Image from Canadian Encyclopedia, Memory Project. Photo by WREN Beatrice Mary Geary.

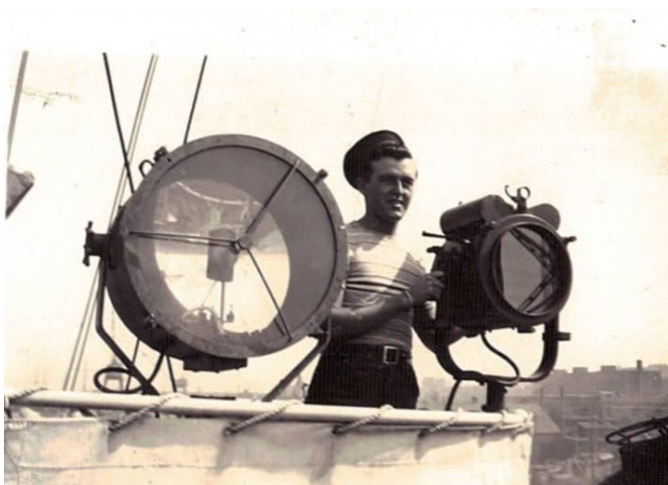
The five months of training at *St. Hyacinthe* (June 1-November 8th) involved classroom instruction, practice indoors and outdoors and always more practice. Practice was done on Morse Code by signal light and semaphore, the latter taking the form of signalling by hand held flags. Semaphore was to be read and sent at twenty-four words per minute and Morse by Aldis lamp (named after its inventor) at fourteen words per minute. Flag signals also involved the rapid deployment of flags conveying preset messages from the masthead for other ships to read. Instituted by the Royal Navy in time for the Battle of Trafalgar in



1805 the RN had had a century and a half to develop and refine flag signalling. Since its creation in 1910 the RCN had followed suit.

At *St. Hyacinthe* practice occurred at night, in the rain, in the fog, in class, followed by tests which were followed by more practice. Speed and accuracy were to the Signalmen what speed and accuracy were to a gunner with the added feature that an incorrectly read signal or a poorly relayed one could result in consequences as fatal as a misdirected shell. Accuracy without speed was useless. Speed without accuracy was dangerous. To quote again from Lavery (Churchill's Navy p 156) a signalling student Candidate reported...

*"We hoisted the International flags, we learnt what to look up in the Confidential Books, we were introduced to the Pendant List, which would be our Bible ...the Vessels Signal Book...we learnt the Code Word Appendix, and the Alarm Signal Table, and the Sector System for aircraft, and anchoring and harbour signals and message prosigns and abbreviated plain language table."*



Qualified Signalman. He noted that when at sea... "*When I wasn't cold I was wet. When I wasn't wet I was cold. Usually I was both cold and wet.*"

NFA

There was much to learn as during a hunt for a U-boat and while at Action Stations the number of signals given and received between ships was in the scores if not the hundreds.

*St. Hyacinthe* Quebec was the training destination for all Signalmen. Some like Norm were visual Signalmen but others also engaged in radio work. The school would graduate hundreds of qualified Signalmen and as revealed in the photo above, Signalwomen, 'Wrens' who would perform essential signal duties in every Port of Canada and in the UK.

Officially they were the WRCNS, 'Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service' except nobody called them that. They were simply known by the same label as their RN counterparts as 'WRENS'. Created as a branch of the Naval Service in 1942 the Wrens, like their female counterparts in the Royal Canadian Airforce and the Canadian Army played a vital role in the war. By 1942 following their initial schooling in Galt Ontario (now Cambridge) women were streaming into *St. Hyacinthe* (and other locations for other roles) and would take on essential administrative roles in logistics and signals. By War's end they would number almost 7000 in over twenty Branches of the Naval Service. They did everything except go to sea.

By 1944 Wrens would operate visual and electronic signals with all the skill any male counterpart could muster. Harbour entrances and the transmission of orders to departing convoys being not the least important. But there was one area of Wren employment that was most important to operational ships at sea and critical to the Battle of the Atlantic. Huff Duff.

Today's movies (ie '*The Imitation Game*') laud Bletchley Park and the cracking of the German Enigma Code machines, but there was another weapon to counter the U-boats available to the Allies of particular importance given the number of times the Germans changed their Codes...and that was HF/DF....or Huff Duff.



Once a day every U-boat was expected to surface and report its position to U-boat Headquarters which was located initially in France and later in Germany. Following that daily transmission the U-boat would receive its orders as to where it should go to find the enemy. At the same time any U-boat sighting a Convoy was expected to surface and immediately transmit essentials, such as Convoy strength, speed and direction so that other U-boats could be vectored to the target.

Essentially HF/Df was a radio receiver that was able to detect the transmission by the U-boat. Quite apart from the text of the message (and that was for the Bletchley people) HF/DF on board a ship revealed that there was a U-boat nearby when it sent a radio message and roughly gave its direction. With two or more ships so equipped triangulation could occur when a signal was detected and the precise range of the enemy could also be pinpointed. By 1944 all RN and RCN ships were so equipped with HF/DF.

Yet there was more. Shore stations or HF/DF listening posts were built ringing the Atlantic coast of Canada and the UK, manned (if you will) by women...the Wrens. Instantaneously shared communication of this vital information allowed for Convoys to be re-routed and this, along with advanced weaponry, increased numbers of Escorts were among the more important defensive tools available to the Allied navies. Whenever there was a contact, visual or radar or HF/DF it was in turn immediately reported to the Submarine Tracking Room in Liverpool U.K. Increasingly the U-boats simply couldn't find the Convoys in the broad expanse of the Atlantic except by chance.

The long lonely and boring hours spent by hundreds of Wrens listening for a U-boat signal faint or strong must have held the same tedium as any sea going watch by a sea going sailor. And the enemy had only the vaguest idea that it was happening. Re-routing of Convoys was a highly

successful defensive measure preventing many U-boats from finding or catching up to a Convoy. Balanced against this was the fact that it is little appreciated that the Germans were also highly successful in reading Allied Coded communications throughout the War. The constant vigilance of the Wrens staffing the HF/DF posts was essential and every Wren who so served deserves recognition.



November, 1943. Twenty weeks of Training at *St. Hyacinthe*, Quebec over and two weeks leave complete, off to the west coast to pick up *New Glasgow*. Saying goodbye to mother Anne, father Arthur a WWI veteran and wee sister Beth. Like thousands of other men departing home they didn't know when or if they would meet again. Initially sent to Halifax after *St. Hyacinthe* he was told to get back on the train and cross Canada to pick up his ship the *New Glasgow* which was soon to Commission in B.C.

NFA

## CHAPTER 7

### HMCS NEW GLASGOW

'Ships have a personality only less vivid than that of the men who fought in them.'

*Life of Nelson*. Capt. A.T. Mahon. 1897

What's in a name? A fair bit actually. Names of ships were selected with care to avoid duplication and to ensure there was no confusion based on similarity of spelling or sound. It is therefore somewhat surprising that *New Glasgow* came away with her name since there was an *HMS Glasgow* in the Royal Navy. The latter however was a very large Cruiser and physically at least quite unlikely to be mistaken for a Frigate. (As of 2025 there is another *HMS Glasgow* but it is a British built 500 foot ultra-modern Type 26 Frigate of which Canada has placed orders for the RCN, at several Billion dollars a copy)

A warship may not often be thought of as a 'machine' but that's what it was ....a great floating complex machine. Home to over 100 men who needed to be fed, housed and kept alive. A machine whose eyes and ears had to be acutely focussed as the threat of instant destruction existed even outside Halifax Harbour and increasingly so when further out at sea. It was a machine that had no 'off' switch until tied up in a safe harbour. It was a sea going machine that ran 24 hours a day with the threat of a fatal torpedo strike and drowning ever present

On May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1943 at Yarrows Ship Yards in Esquimalt BC, Hull number CN-385 was struck, not by a torpedo but more happily by a bottle of champagne as Mrs. W.G. Wilson, formerly of New Glasgow Nova Scotia, swung the bottle against the bow of what was then Canada's newest River Class Frigate. As noted briefly earlier the letters and number combination of K320 was part of a 'Pennant' system put in place by the Admiralty as early as 1910 so that instead of flying a Flag

identifying the ship (something that had been done in previous centuries) the painted letter on the bow served to identify the class of ship ('K' for Corvettes and Frigates, 'J' for Minesweepers, other letters accordingly) and the number immediately identified the specific ship. This would assist the observer when a number of ships of the same class were working together and be an aid and being sure who you were signalling to.

The ship, like most of Canada's warships was 'adopted' by the Town of New Glasgow, Nova Scotia. The Eastern Chronicle Newspaper of New Glasgow N.S. reproduced a letter that *New Glasgow's* Captain Hall sent the Mayor thanking the local citizenry for their donations. And the donations were sizeable for a civilian population who were under partial rationing and who likely did not have a lot of cash to spare.

Among other things the people of New Glasgow sent on for the crews use was a record player, 300 records, decks of playing cards, multiple sets of checkers, boots, socks and writing paper for letters home. Among the gifts and one particularly enjoyed by Norm were baseball gloves and bats for use on shore leave. Like many others across Canada, the people of New Glasgow were very generous to 'their' ship.

Having been blessed by both a Protestant minister and a Catholic Priest, the massive blocks holding the ship were knocked away and the vessel slid down the rails into the water. Once completed, the ship's job was to kill U-boats, and to prevent other ship's crews from being killed by them. She had joined the war.



From Victoria Daily Times. May 1942. Launch of *New Glasgow*.

Once fitted with the tools of war, through early December the soon to be Commissioned ship went through various tests. Her crew had left their shore barracks at *HMCS Naden* and the ship was fully manned but not quite yet a part of the Navy. It would remain that way through mid December as all sorts of trials took place to ensure things worked as they would have to work at sea and in Battle. It was akin to the longest and most thorough test drive of a new vehicle that a modern consumer might engage in. Anchor trials, gun trials, weapons systems, radio trials, full engine power trials until finally the Captain was satisfied and signed off from the builders in the Yarrows Shipyard.

Every man on the Frigate had multiple tasks since, in the event of 'Action Stations' being called (It was declared by the ringing of a Bell, something like a very loud school bell) the ship did not require all its Signalmen on the bridge at one time it meant that off watch Signalmen would be called upon in a surface action to perform other duties. In Norman's case, if not on the Bridge on Watch as a Signalman he would help load the 4 inch main gun. Of course the reference to 4" means the

gun had a bore of 4" firing a shell of over 30 lbs approximately 2 miles. Seven men to a crew were required to load, aim and fire the gun with three of the men being full time gunners, the Gun Captain, the Layer and the Trainer. The latter two essentially pointed and raised the gun. Others like Norm were to retrieve pass on or load the shell. Destroyers had fire control systems meaning radar and an early mechanical computing device which compiled the speed, direction and angle of the target and gave the electronic order to fire. No Frigate had such a sophisticated system. As well, *New Glasgow* did not have automatic loaders. It's 4" gun was meant for close action with a surfaced submarine.

The staged scene in the photo below does not do justice to what Action Stations would look like. It would be night time, the seas would be churning with many of the men sea sick. Everyone would be wet. The deck would be slick and heaving. In addition to the usual cold and depending on their watch some of the men may not have slept in a very long time. In the event that a lesser form of alert known as Defensive Stations was called one simply stayed where they were wet or cold or both as the case may have been. And if, when Action stations was cancelled, it was your turn on watch, you went on watch while others rested.

On December 23<sup>rd</sup> the White Ensign of the Royal Canadian Navy was hoisted and Lieutenant Commander ( Lt.Cdr.) George Stanley Hall RCNR was piped aboard as her first Commanding Officer. Also aboard was Signalman, Norman Ayre of London, Ontario. He had turned 19 years of age the day before.

Profile: George Stanley Hall RCNR took command of *New Glasgow* as a member of the RCNR with the rank of Acting Lieutenant commander. He had previously served since 1941 as Captain of the Corvette *HMCS Trail* in the waters off Newfoundland and the Strait of Belle Isle. *New Glasgow* was his first Frigate command and from which

position he would often be designated as Senior Officer Escorts (S.O.E.). Later, in November 1944 upon leaving *New Glasgow* as Acting Commander he would serve with the rank of Acting Commander and SOE for C-1 aboard *HMCS Hallowell* a newly commissioned River Class Frigate on the North Atlantic. He retired from the Navy at War's end.



*New Glasgow* gun crew 1944. National Archives. Canada.

Each shell weighed over 30 pounds. This idyllic scene of a daylight practice might be contrasted with what reality might entail. The reader should imagine 30' foot seas, at night, with freezing rain hitting one's face and turning the deck into a skating rink all with the prospect of a surfaced U-boat shooting back with its superior deck gun at the tired, wet, hungry and rather alarmed gun crew. Their rate of fire and accuracy may not achieve quite what their Lordships of the Admiralty might hope for in such a case. NFA is in the photo standing closest to the gun holding the shell.



A somewhat more realistic view of a 4" gun crew. N.A.C.

## CHAPTER 8

### ESQUIMALT TO HALIFAX

*Oh we joined for the money and the fun, and the fun,  
Oh we joined for the money and the fun,  
Of the money there is none and the fun has just begun  
Roll along Wavy Navy, roll along.*

And then came the day, His Majesty's Canadian Ship, *HMCS New Glasgow* sailed to war. The First Officer (called 'Number One' by the Captain and the 'Jimmy' by Crew but never within his earshot) would have reported to the Captain that the ship was 'in all respects ready for sea.' Last letters would have been posted. The departure signal would have been made to the Port Admiral and with the final lines slipped off the engine room would have been given the signal to clear harbour 'slow ahead'. The Pacific first and then the battleground of the Atlantic.

Thousands of vessels had been sunk in the Atlantic by this period of the War, principally merchant vessels but many warships both enemy and Allied. The tally of RCN warships lost by this point in the war was as described in Appendix One at the end of this text and those later in the War in Appendix Two.

The principle anti-submarine weapon of the Frigates (and the Corvettes) was made of of two parts. Firstly, the underwater ears of the ship was Asdic. Called Sonar by the Americans, Asdic stood for 'Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee'...except that there never was such a Committee. During the First World War in 1917 Canadian Scientist Robert W Boyle developed the first prototype Asdic. Secondly, the Admiralty adopted both Asdic and the depth charge as the ultimate tools to end the Kaiser's Submarine attacks on Allied shipping in what has been described as the 'First Battle of the Atlantic.' But both Asdic and



depth charges had their limitations in actual battle use which the Admiralty did not fully appreciate.

Asdic had a useful range of about 2 kilometres. This has to be gauged against the fact that U-boat torpedos had a range of almost six kilometres travelling at a speed close to 30 knots! Until quite late in the Second World War Asdic could not provide information on the depth of a target. Layers of water at different temperatures or salinity could blind it. The general principle was that Asdic acted in a way akin to underwater radar. A sound signal was sent from the ship from a structure mounted under the ships hull and a receiver picked up the returned echo from the submarine's metal hull. When attacking, a Frigate or Corvette had to slow down to below 16 knots for Asdic to work and the attacking ship had to cross the track of the U-boat before rolling the depth charges off its stern thus briefly losing the Asdic signal. Yet at the same time the Frigate would have to maintain sufficient speed so that when the depth charges it had dropped exploded the attacking vessel was far enough away that the detonation did not damage the ship.



Stern of *New Glasgow* showing depth charge rails. Parts of depth charge throwers just visible.

NFA

Two or more depth charges were rolled off the stern of the ship from racks and by 1943 all Escorts also had depth charge throwers that fired depth charges from the sides of the ship both Port and Starboard. It is fortunate that *New Glasgow* did not encounter a Japanese Submarine in the Pacific as her depth charge waist throwers were only installed when she reached Panama.

Between the stern depth charges and those fired from the waist an Escort could lay a pattern of approximately ten depth charges at once. With the progress of the War depth charges became more powerful and of different weight so that they sank at different speeds ideally bracketing the U-boat. At approximately three hundred pounds each, even with mechanical assistance manhandling and loading the Charges in a heaving sea was extremely difficult.



NAC images showing stern depth charge railings on a Frigate and a depth charge being launched from a side thrower.

The further limitation was that a depth charge had to explode in relatively close proximity to the U-boat to destroy it or damage it sufficiently so as to force it to surface and be subject to gunfire. Yet when the depth charges exploded it again momentarily 'blinded' the Asdic until the water settled, giving an astute U-boat Captain time to stealthily disengage and dive even to depths of six hundred feet. Such were the limitations of the Frigate's two principle weapons.

The River Class Frigates had one other offensive weapon in addition to her guns and depth charges. It was called 'Hedge Hog.' Developed by the RN's Weapons Section in 1942 it was mounted just ahead of the forward 4" gun. It fired twenty four mortar like shells ahead of the ship which landed in the water forming an oval pattern. Unlike depth charges though, the hedge hog shell only exploded if it made contact with the submarine's hull. A near miss produced no result. The weapon had the advantage however that firing it did not require the ship to slow down.



Loading Hedge Hog. NAC

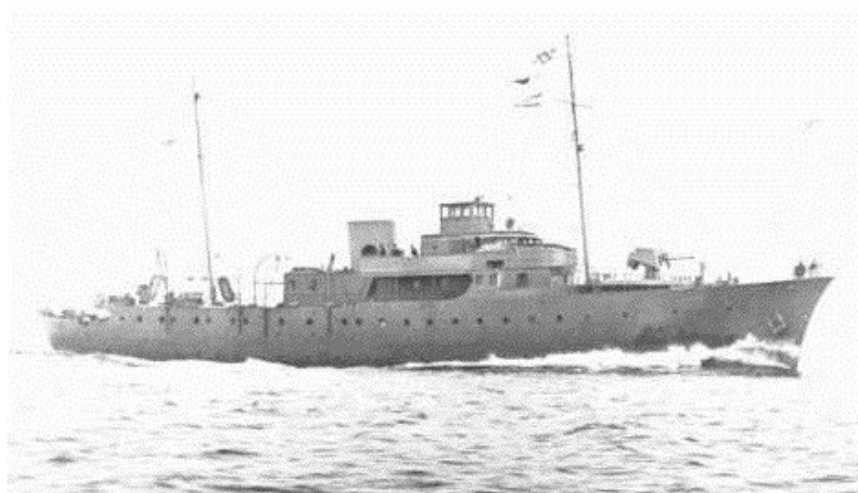
Generally Hedge Hog proved not as successful as depth charges against submarines given its late introduction but it did sink approximately fifty U-boats (out of a wartime total of nearly 800 sunk by other means) or caused them to surface whence they were sunk by gunfire.



Pattern ahead of a Frigate when Hedge Hog fired. Definitely not the North Atlantic. NAC

Ultimately a more powerful and effective form of forward firing projectile weapon arrived in what was called 'Squid' which fired six massive depth charges forward just as Hedge Hog did. The 1960's version currently on *Haida* in Hamilton Harbour, was electronically linked to ship's Asdic and was deadly. Squid's eventual universal adoption led to the end of the use of depth charges after the War.

On January 24th, *New Glasgow* left the straits of Juan de Fuca bound for Halifax via the Panama Canal. The ship was accompanied by the armed yacht '*Sans Peur Z02*' which was heading for the East Coast as a training vessel.



Armed Yacht *HMCS Sans Peur Z02*

From 'For Posterity's Sake'

Originally named and owned as a pleasure craft by the Duke of Sutherland the ship was taken over by the RCN in 1939 and used as a patrol vessel on the west coast of Canada until it accompanied *New Glasgow* to Halifax for use as a training vessel. The trip from Esquimalt to Halifax with *New Glasgow* could not have exceeded 13 knots which was the maximum speed of the vessel.

A new daily rhythm was imposed on all aboard. Watches began and the work of the day became defined by which 'watch' the crewman was on. And as all watches were not equal in duration one's duties might take place at night. The ship's clock and all timed events (such as leaving harbour) were based on Greenwich Mean Time (called then as now 'Z' time) as Atlantic Crossings would take the ship through several time zones and thus local time did not hold a great deal of relevance. Drills followed by more drills were the order of the day. Drills practicing on board fires, man overboard, Action Stations, all with the certain knowledge that more drills would always follow.

Many of the Crew slept on deck as the weather warmed and exotic Panama beckoned. Frigates destined for the North Atlantic were not equipped with air conditioning. Upon the arrival at Balboa, as mentioned the ship's waist throwers for depth charges were finally attached. The heat and the tropical nature of the setting was likely something few if any of the crew, as children of the Great Depression ever thought they would see.



Off duty and en route to Panama. Clearly before entering the North Atlantic.  
NFA on the right. NFA.

As *New Glasgow* finished her transit of the canal on February 8th and took on fuel, the final leg of the journey towards Halifax began with an increasingly uncomfortable change in the weather over the next nine days. By the time the ship was off the New England Coast the ship's upper works were coated in ice. Ice Accretion was a common and potentially very dangerous occurrence as it added tons of weight to the ship and could seriously impair the handling of the ship. Left unattended the side ways roll of the ship could increase so as to bring the roll within the range of capsizing. Thus the crew would attack the ice with axe and shovel, a far cry from the now distant Caribbean.



Ice accretion on *New Glasgow* approaching Halifax, February 1944. NFA

In January 1943 while serving as Rescue ship to an eastbound Convoy and a mere two days out of Halifax, the Rescue ship *SS Sunniva* capsized due to ice accretion and sank with her entire crew. The *Sunniva* was only slightly smaller than a River Class Frigate.

In approaching Halifax, *New Glasgow* had entered the North Atlantic and the active war zone. It was in fact 'The Canadian North West Atlantic War Zone' so described by the Allies since the Washington Conference of April 1943. It was a sizeable Theatre of War that was the sole responsibility of Canada.

Every day as sunset approached the order 'Darken Ship' would be given and precautions would be taken to ensure that no light shone into the night's darkness to inform a lurking U-boat of the ship's presence. Through all of this men on the Frigates were to fight the impossible battle of staying dry and attempting to sleep in their cramped hammocks without giving too much thought to the fact that only a few centimetres of steel in the hull separated them from the depths and that in those depths were men in U-boats whose job it was to kill them. Harbour was reached on February 17th but the ship had a defective

condenser used for producing fresh water for the boilers (drinking water was a distant secondary concern) and repairs would be required before working up trials in Bermuda could commence. As events would prove, there was to be little rest before that took place.



Letter from Norm:

December 1943

Dear Mom & Alice

Hope you like the stamp on this letter. I am mailing it from Panama. We left the base at Esquimalt. If I thought the barracks at Naden were tight being aboard ship shows me how wrong I was. Before we left we had lots of drills and one of them was practicing abandon ship. I guess it's in case we ever run into really bad trouble. We had to put our life jackets on and jump off the ship into the Pacific Ocean ! I thought it might be warm...it wasn't. I saw that some of the fellows were jumping off the bow. Way too high I said to myself so I went aft, that's the back of the ship and jumped from there. Good thing Dad taught all us boys to swim in the Thames as it wasn't so bad for me but some other fellows didn't know how to swim very well even with the life vest on. I am really hoping it's the last time I ever find myself in the water for any reason.

Funny thing about being at sea...its noisy. When I am at my signal station the wind is always blowing. Even when its fairly calm you have to yell on deck to be heard. I guess it's the wind in the wires that can make a screaming sound. And the Bridge on our ship where the Captain and other officers are is wide open ! We are outside. This isn't one of those fancy passenger liners. And another thing, there is no such thing as privacy. Not even the toilets. There are no doors ! At home I could lock my brothers out of

the bathroom but here everything happens in front of the other fellow. You quickly get over it, sort of.

We got to sleep on deck because it was so hot below. When we sleep below deck in our hammocks we sleep head to feet, my head is at the other fellows feet and so on so as to give us a bit more space. You get used to it. Sleeping on deck is kinda fun but the sea picked up and a lot of us were sea sick. So much for my first time at sea !

And here the letter continued...

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCERNING SEA, SKY, LOOKOUTS & SIGNALMEN

*If a man should have a choice between going to prison and going to sea, he should choose prison, for going to sea is very much like going to prison but with the added prospect of drowning.*

Attributed to Samuel Johnson circa 1791

At the risk of stating the obvious it may be timely to note two of the more significant factors in the life of *New Glasgow* and all ships like her in the Battle of the Atlantic. Consider the following...

A calm sea on a clear day meant a Convoy could make best speed for a faster passage. It also meant the U-boats could detect smoke from a careless Freighter from as far as forty kilometres away.

A calm sea on a clear night with a full moon was awful for the Convoy as any light could betray its location and it was the order for U-boats to report a such Convoy discovered in daylight, to follow it and ideally attack with other boats at night on the surface! Asdic was useless against a surfaced U-boat and their low profile made them very hard to see. Radar, when it worked was useful against a surfaced U-boat but training for RCN operators came after that of the RN. Once inside a Convoy's perimeter radar would have difficulty in tracking such a low profile vessel so if such a thing happened the only response was to fire star shell into the sky and essentially turn night into day.

A rough sea meant the U-boats would also have it rough (they were very difficult to handle on the surface in rough seas and their crews would be just as sea sick as anyone on a surface vessel) but a rough sea also meant the Convoy might have to slow down, burning more fuel, delaying its arrival and extending the time exposed to the enemy.



Bow shot of *New Glasgow* from the Bridge. NFA

Night time or bad atmospheric conditions meant air cover would be reduced or rendered impossible. Then there was fog. Like Charles Dickens described in his novel *Bleak House*, there was fog in the Channel, fog at sea and fog at night and fog to freeze the men on deck. Fog that could induce visions of shadows for a fatigued Lookout to ponder as his imagination of what the shadow might be took hold.

Sometimes in fog the only precaution was to put a man on the bow and increase the number of Lookouts to avoid collision with Merchantman or another Escort or icebergs which could persist as a hazard even as late as April. There were practices dictated by the Convoy Commodore which could, on the rarest of occasions include illuminating a very faint

light on the stern of each merchantman or using a 'fog buoy' to be towed behind the Merchantmen so as to give an overtaking ship some awareness there was another ship ahead. The buoy was towed a hundred meters or so behind the ship and kicked up a large wake which was hopefully seen in time by a trailing vessel.

On December 7th, 1941, a day of infamy as President Roosevelt called it, on the other side of the world from Pearl Harbour the RCN Corvette *HMCS Windflower* sank after colliding in dense fog with a Dutch Merchant vessel in the mid Atlantic. Twenty three sailors died. At that time Corvettes were not fitted with radar.

Really bad weather could and did sink many ships during the war both American ships in the Pacific and American and Canadian ships in the Atlantic. The American destroyer *USS Truxtun* DD229 and an accompanying vessel sank during a storm off Newfoundland in 1942 with considerable loss of life mitigated only by the heroic actions of nearby local Newfoundlanders. In 1944 the Destroyer *HMCS Skeena* sank off Iceland in a storm with 50 foot waves. Fifteen of her crew perished. There were many other such sinkings.

Concerning Lookouts and Signalmen. Signalmen were not Lookouts. The only thing Signalmen were to be specifically on the lookout for were other signals from another ship, the Convoy Commodore or the SOE. A Signalman would report the fact of an incoming signal to the Officer of the Watch and another man would write down the text of the message being sent or received. One could not read and record at the same time. Similarly an outgoing signal would be read back to the issuing Officer and sent immediately as the ship's position and weather permitted. As noted previously, speed and accuracy were required at all times. Every signal sent required (eventually) an acknowledgment of its reception. That the receiving ship had received the signal could not simply be assumed. Similarly every received signal had to be

acknowledged. With situations being dynamic, often the signal sent was 'received' or simply 'disregard.'



Signalman on *HMCS Chambly* signalling with a hand held Aldis lamp. NAC

There were two Signalmen on duty on the Bridge at any one time. One on the Port side and the other on the Starboard. *New Glasgow* operated on a 'three watch' system. A sailor would be on duty for four hours and then off for eight. As the day progressed at some point one of the four hour watches would be broken into two separate two hour watches so no one experienced the same duty hours every day. It did mean that no one could ever get more than sleep as they could fit into an eight hour window. During their four hour watch Lookouts were briefly relieved every hour to rest their eyes before returning to duty. Signalmen however stayed at their post for the full four hours. And everyone stayed at Action Stations for however long it took. When having made a U-boat

contact the SOE ordered a 'Hunt to Exhaustion' all hands on the ship stayed at their stations ,in some cases for 24 hours or longer if need be. Their youth served them well.



Signalman and Coder. RCN Destroyer. NAC.

As for Lookouts there was a Naval Science applied to the role long developed since the days of Nelson. Lookouts had to look forward and to the rear of the ship. Each man was assigned a sector to sweep. The on line resource '*Lookout Manual 1943*' although American in origin, best details the work of a Lookout as be it the US Navy, the RN or the RCN the function of being a Lookout was essentially the same in all Navies. The site is...

<https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically//lookout-manual-1943.html>

## CHAPTER 10

### THE U-BOATS

*'The U-boat war (is) hard, widespread and bitter, a war of groping and drowning, a war of ambushade and stratagem, a war of science and seamanship.'*

*Churchill BBC Broadcast 1939 p. 561 'Last Lion'*

They smelled. The U-boats smelled very badly. If ever there was a hell for a seafarer it was to serve in the U-boats of the German Kriegsmarine. Forty five men were crammed into an non air-conditioned hull for periods extending to several months, limited in endurance only by their food and fuel supplies which could be replenished at sea by specially designed U-boats which could re-equip another submarine with everything except torpedos. One salt water toilet (which could not be flushed when submerged) was available for all these men with no washing and with oil, grease and diesel fumes pervading the smell and even the taste of their bland food. Upon arrival back in Port the German dockyard crews had to open all hatches on the submarine before entering until it came habitable.

By 1942 the men serving in U-boats were conscripts and whatever sympathies one might have for the individual's conditions their cause was in support of the most murderous regime the world had ever known. The submarine ran on its diesel engines while on the surface which time was used to charge its massive batteries. The batteries supplied the electrical power for underwater propulsion but at a much reduced speed when compared to operating on the surface. As one author noted (Len Deighton: see bibliography) a U-boat on the surface travelled at the speed of a fast bicycle and underwater at the speed of a brisk walk !

The U-boats also suffered from the sea. On a calm ocean they could knife through the water faster that any Corvette could travel. But in



anything other than a near calm sea they rolled badly and had a limited visual range as the Bridge/Conning tower was only about 5 metres above the water line. Most of a patrol was spent on the surface but as the War progressed more time submerged was required due to increased Allied air support and an ever increasing number of Allied Escorts. The sudden appearance of an Aircraft which could carry bombs, depth charges or even rockets meant that U-boat crews honed their skills to include the ability to crash dive in as little as thirty seconds.

Building on a Dutch invention that pre-dated the war, by 1943 the Germans were deploying submarines equipped with 'Schnorkel' or in the anglicized version, 'snorkel.' Just as a modern swimmer might use a snorkel, the device allowed the submarine to run submerged but operate on its diesel engines. Calm seas were required as if a wave covered the air intake the air inside the submarine would quickly be depleted or develop a strong negative pressure to the complete surprise and immediate discomfort of the crew. And as the reader shall learn the exhaust pipe of the schnorkel made a great deal of noise when in use.

Even then U-boats were far from defenceless when submerged and under attack. Differences in water salinity and temperature could severely affect Asdic to the point of completely masking the submarine and thus permit its escape. U-boats had a turning circle far smaller than a Destroyer and marginally better than a Frigate or Corvette so whether encountered on the surface (a rare but not unknown occasion) or submerged it could stay inside the turn of the attacking surface vessel and then at the last moment turn away before the Escort could re-establish contact. A variety of technical devices included sonic buoys that mimicked the sound of the submarine's engines as well as canisters that expelled a large balloon's worth of air to deceive the Surface Escort into thinking the U-boat was surfacing when in fact it was diving.

Submerged the U-boat could listen passively even at great distances for the sound of propellor noises revealing the existence of a Convoy.



U-995 Type VIIc Submarine. Kiel, Germany. Present day. The Royal Navy actually had one Type VII C in its use having captured U-570 and renaming is *HMS Graph*.

Finally, when attacked the U-boats had the option of firing a torpedo at their attacker or surfacing and using their powerful surface armament. Concerning the Pendant number assigned to U-boats ( ie U-1003) they were not sequential as such a system would inform the Allies of the number of operative Boats, although the Allies had a good idea of that number anyway.

In short, the U-boats were dangerous to the Allied Convoys but also to their own crews. Approximately 1,162 U-boats of all Types were built by the Germans in the War and over 900 would be commissioned and put out to sea. Of that number 784 would be sunk but not before sinking more than 3000 Allied Merchant vessels and warships. The toll was terrible. In the first half of the War ~ 60 U-boats were destroyed by the

Allies. In the second half over 700 met such a fate. But with highly improved Type 21 U-boats on the verge of mass commissioning, the deployment of these advanced German submarines that could travel faster underwater than a Corvette or Frigate could have resulted in a renewed slaughter of Allied ships. The race to defeat the Nazi War machine depended on winning the War on land. The key to winning the war on land was to win the Battle of the Atlantic.

## CHAPTER 11

### EARLY DAYS IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC

*Oh, when they sent us out at last to sea, to sea,  
Yes, when at last they sent us out at last to sea  
There were several things we saw  
That were not brought up before  
Roll along, Wavy Navy, roll along.*

*From Roll Along Wavy Navy.*

Arrival in Halifax on February 17th brought with it a Report concerning *New Glasgow's* crew. For the most part things were was satisfactory as one might expect with a new crew, but there were some adjustments to be made. Some men needed more training on the radar and Asdic. One man proved himself so incapacitated by sea sickness that he was rendered useless and he was removed from the ship with the recommendation that he only be assigned shore duties thereafter. One man took matters into his own hands and went awol never to be seen again.

Still waiting to have one of her condensers repaired in Halifax (condensers provided fresh water for the boilers primarily and secondarily for the crew) *New Glasgow* was supposed to be readied to head to Bermuda for her 'working up' trials where she would be fully readied for battle. But there was insufficient time for that. On the Ides of March with *New Glasgow* as the Senior Officer Escorts (SOE) she went out to escort the 62 ships of Convoy HX 283 as Western Escort Group W-10. Initially the eight Escorts headed south as the main part of the Convoy, which like most Convoys at this stage of the War had begun in New York (or Boston) a few days earlier and was joined en route by Halifax Merchantmen which had assembled in Halifax's Bedford Basin.

The Escorts with *New Glasgow* for this, her first Convoy duty were the RCN Frigate *Stormont K167* the RCN Corvettes *Trentonian K368*, *Louisburg K143*, *Drumheller K167* and the Minesweeper *Trois Rivières J269*. This was part of the 'Triangle-run' which will be described more fully later as will the full function of being SOE. For the first and only time part of the Escort Group led by *New Glasgow* included a Bangor Class Minesweeper. Western Local Escorts for W10 were in somewhat short supply as many vessels had been pulled from North Atlantic work in anticipation of D-Day and the pending invasion of Europe. This included some Frigates, all destroyers and a few hardy RCN Bangor Class Minesweepers. Minesweepers were not designed for Ocean Escort work but had admirably filled the role since their introduction. Once fully formed the Convoy travelled to a prearranged position near Cape Race Newfoundland where it was handed over to the mid-Ocean escort Group, a group of which *New Glasgow* would soon be a part. But *New Glasgow* was quickly detached from W-10 whose duty it would be to take them to the MOMP, the mid-Ocean meeting point.

Almost immediately upon departure with the Convoy a U-boat was detected 160 kilometres off Halifax by shore based HF/DF and along with *Trentonian*, *New Glasgow* raced off to investigate but found nothing. That there was a U-boat in the vicinity was proven when on March 22nd the Nova Scotia based ore carrier *SS Watuka* was torpedoed only 25 kilometres off Halifax Harbour entrance.

While en route back to Halifax the Minesweeper *HMCS Swift Current J254* sighted a U-boat on the surface but lost contact. Joined by *New Glasgow* and other vessels the contact with the U-boat could not be reestablished. *New Glasgow* was still a very new and untested ship! Still on March 30th the Corvette *HMCS Matapedia K112* attacked a probable U-boat and was joined by *New Glasgow* and the Bangor Class

Minesweeper *HMCS Noranda J265* but again without success. Arriving in Halifax later that day the ship was given 24 hours to refuel and re-provision. Finally on April 1st *New Glasgow* was cleared to sail for Bermuda and her mandatory working up exercises, as if she had not already had them! But there was one more task to perform while en route to Bermuda.

Leaving Halifax with her still defective condenser with the ultimate destination of Bermuda for her 'Working Up' program *New Glasgow* travelled not alone but escorted the British Submarine *HMS Seawolf* to St. Margaret's Bay on the South Shore of Nova Scotia. The Bay was used for training exercises (as well as being the Canadian Merchant Marine Training School at Hubbards) and the *Seawolf* was to be designated to be the 'clockwork mouse' as a friendly submarine was called and was so designated for newly minted Naval vessels to practise detecting and tracking a submerged submarine.



*HMS Seawolf*. NFA

It was well established that a surfaced submarine needed a close surface escort as the sight of any submarine came with the presumption it was a U-boat. The instances of Friendly Fire were numerous on land, sea and air during the War but as examples involving submarines it might be noted that the very first loss of the RN in the War came in September 1939 when the British submarine *HMS Oxley* failed to respond to repeated signal challenges from another British submarine which fired torpedos and sank *Oxley*.

Closer to home waters on July 8th, 1944 the submarine *Perle* of the Free French Navy was sunk by Swordfish aircraft from the Merchant Aircraft Carrier *Empire MacCallum*. A final example demonstrating the importance of Signals and the need to Log them attaches to *HMCS Haida* when in March 1945 when upon beginning a night training exercises with elements of the British Home Fleet, *Haida* spotted a submarine and attacked with depth charges. The submarine dived and upon surfacing later got off a rather angry signal to *Haida*. At this moment a nearby British Cruiser opened fire on both the *Haida* and what was revealed to be *HMS Trusty*. Fortunately no hits were scored *on the submarine*. Earlier upon learning of *Trusty's* presence in the area *Haida's* Signal Officer had failed to Log the Signal in the Signals Logbook or tell the Captain. A subsequent Board of Inquiry into the incident found no fault in the Captain of the *Haida* or the *Trusty* but their Lordships of the Admiralty came to a different conclusion vis a vis the Signals Officer. The story reveals the importance and perils of Signalling at sea.

Returning from Bermuda to Halifax in late April *New Glasgow* finally had her condenser repairs completed. In late April the ship made a brief stop prior to docking at Halifax at Pictou Nova Scotia so the citizenry of the Town of New Glasgow could see their namesake warship. It also didn't hurt that thereafter as was customary, the Town would 'adopt' the

ship in small ways with further parcels for the crew or other items that might fit and be useful in addition to all the items forwarded the previous December upon her Commissioning.

*New Glasgow* did not linger in Halifax nor would she return to Halifax until War's end. Instead she made for St. John's Newfoundland to act as SOE for Convoy mid-ocean group C-1. She was needed because on May 7th a U-boat had torpedoed and sunk the RCN Frigate *HMCS Valleyfield* K329. With the Report of the *Valleyfield's* sinking *New Glasgow* was ordered to 'proceed with utmost dispatch' to St. John's.

As part of C1 (Canadian Escort Groups being labelled C-1, C-2 etc) *Valleyfield* had been escorting a Convoy to St John's when she was hit by a GNAT torpedo 80 kilometres off Cape Race, Newfoundland. This type of acoustic torpedo (of which there is a more fulsome description is given later in the text) homed in on the sound of the ship's engines and exploded under the ship's keel breaking it.

*Valleyfield* sank in less than four minutes. A subsequent Naval Inquiry noted with muted criticism that none of the Escorts, *Valleyfield* included had been zig zagging even though conditions were optimal for a submarine attack. As well criticism was levelled at *Giffard* for dithering in commencing a search for the U-boat and then breaking it off to rescue *Valleyfield's* survivors thereby not fully achieving either objective. One Hundred and Twenty Five men including the Captain died in the attack. Forty-three men were pulled from the water of whom five later died.

For the first time *New Glasgow* entered St. John's crowded harbour. *New Glasgow's* mid-North Atlantic career was about to begin.

**29 APRIL 1944, TRIBAL CLASS DESTROYER *HMCS ATHABASKAN* ( SISTER SHIP TO *HMCS HAIDA* ) TORPEDOED BY A GERMAN E-BOAT OFF COAST OF FRANCE. 28 MEN DEAD. 44 RESCUED. 83 PRISONERS OF WAR**



Letter from Norm:

April 1944

Dear Mom and Alice;

Well we have really been out to sea. There is only so much I can tell you because all of our letters are read by an officer who censors our mail. I don't know how any of my letters or the things I say could ever reach old Adolf but that's the way it is. The warm clothing you knit me comes in handy. It gets really cold out there. The flowers are probably up at home but where I have been we were given axes to knock the ice off the ship. It can be real dangerous walking about but the important thing is that the ice builds up and can affect the ship. Some of the fellows say they heard of a ship that got so much ice it capsized, turning turtle they called it. Won't let that happen to us! Funny how as time goes by you accept things, well most things anyway. When we get to port there are usually several of your letters there for me. I open them all at once, put them in order and then have a good read...

And here the letter continued...

## CHAPTER 12

### LIFE BELOW DECK: THE CREW

*They say that in the Navy, the beds are mighty fine  
But how the hell should I know,  
I've never slept in mine.*

*They say that in the Navy, the coffee's also fine,  
It'd good for cuts and bruises,  
And tastes like turpentine*

*They say that in the Navy, the food is very fine  
A steak fell off the table  
And killed a friend of mine*

\*From the song ' *I don't want no more of Navy Life* ' 1943

It was crowded...very crowded. Over one hundred and forty men crammed into a ship three hundred feet long of which the lion's share of space was occupied by machinery or weaponry. Norm had shared a bedroom with his brothers growing up but there were only two of them to share the bedroom with. In *New Glasgow*, apart from Officers he had upwards of one hundred and thirty 'brothers' to share space with. Historically one might consider what it was like in the 1770's for the Crew of Captain James Cooks crew aboard *HMS Endeavor*, a one hundred foot long sailing ship, with one hundred men aboard and no engine room condensers to supply fresh water! Or worse yet, *HMS Victory* of 1805 Trafalgar fame which housed eight hundred men in its one hundred and ninety foot (albeit three decked) length.

When they worked toilets operated on salt water. Breakdowns were not uncommon due to plugging or ice forming on essential drains. Drinking water was available but only so long as the fickle boiler room condensers worked sufficiently to provide fresh water for the boilers.

Salt water could not be used for the boilers which came first as they gave the ship its propulsion, the Galleys came second for cooking and if there was fresh water left it was for the Crew. If water was in short supply there was usually an abundant supply of Coca Cola which was a poor substitute with which to brush one's teeth, but that was a land based custom most often ignored until Port was reached. Fresh water was rarely a problem on Destroyers which had a different propulsion system than the Corvettes and Frigates. For *New Glasgow* and all of her class laundry was done when in Port, by oneself and in a bucket on deck.

Washing oneself involved at the most being stripped to the waist and having a 'bird bath' as removing ones clothes was a risky thing to do should Action Stations be called. There were two showers on board for the crew but they were salt water showers. No one used them at sea and no one needed to when in Port. In any event washing ones body in salt water merely irritated the skin and one never felt clean. Most didn't bother washing. Salt water was useless for washing clothes and they would have been perpetually damp anyway so no one washed clothes at sea. Shaving did occur when there was hot water but given that the longest stretch at sea was ~ 14 days and given the youth of most of the crew beard growth was not an issue and beards are absent on examining the ship's crew photo.

Unlike today's RCN, it was English only. A bilingual Navy reflective of Canada lay in the distant future. This was also true in terms of any racial diversity. It did not exist. The Navy was Caucasian only, as recruiters rejected all others. Historical wrongs such as these should not be ignored, but noted and accompanied by a resolve never to take a step backwards.

Food was on the 'mess system' which had been in place since the eighteenth century. The mode of procedure would have been known to Nelson's sailors at Trafalgar. The Officers had their meals served to them

by stewards. The rest of the crew would have their own mess since not all sailors worked the same watch. There was no Signalman's watch per se rather each mess likely had at least two Signalman in each. Every mess would have one man go to the kitchen and retrieve the food for the meal in a large pot or tray. Navigating his way back to the mess it was doled out assuming that the sea was not too rough causing him, as happened more than once to spill the contents on the deck due to rough conditions.

Monsarrat (see bibliography) described the forces at play when eating on a Corvette and with only an extra 4 feet of width a Frigate could scarcely have been much different..."*(the sea) never stops or misses a beat, it cannot be escaped anywhere...if you sit down, you fall over...when you drink, the liquid rises toward you and slops over: at meals, the food spills off your plate, the cutlery will not stay in place. Things roll about and then come back and hurt you again.*" (*Three Corvettes*. p.27) In a heavy sea, washing dishes after a meal was not always an option and a good scraping of plates sometimes had to suffice.

Men on Frigates had it much better than those in the early Corvettes who had to go outside with their meals to get from the kitchen to their mess but open hatches and constant wetness made sure that most meals were more lukewarm than hot and often came with a partial dose of seawater as a sauce. Food while in Convoy eastbound was usually better as provisions had been loaded at St. John's and were Canadian or American sourced while additional provisions taken on in Londonderry were sourced from less resourced British suppliers. A larger part of the menu while on a westbound convoy was dehydrated such as dehydrated potatoes, dehydrated cabbages with only water that needed to be added, if there was any.

'Red lead and bacon' was a blend of tomatoes and bacon the latter of which was often undercooked. Irish bread was bread taken on board in

Londonderry which got its name not from the nature of the bread, which was quite unlike anything most Canadians had eaten at home but because after 10 days without refrigeration it turned green which could be somewhat masked when fried with dried eggs. Tea, often mixed with chocolate and then given the name 'Kye' was frequently consumed but the most common image in photos of a seamen's mess is that of the ever present bottle of Coca Cola. Canned tomatoes, occasionally canned milk, corned beef, tinned sardines or tinned herring and canned fruit were usual fare accompanied by dry biscuits when the bread ran out. The entire crew, Officers and men ate the same fare.

Apart from the form of eating the manner of sleeping would also have been familiar to sailors in Nelson's era...it was the hammock or 'mic'. Rolled up tight and stowed when a man was not in it, each man had his own and was given something less than two feet of width when hung, and likely as not one might be sleeping above the mess table while one of the other watches was eating and talking inches below and the third watch was on deck and on duty. As Norm's earlier letter noted, a head to neighbour's feet was the general space saving arrangement. A quiet night's sleep was not something anyone experienced. Christopher Columbus and his men did not know of the hammock nor did Spanish or Portuguese sailors for almost one hundred years after 1492. Hammocks were an invention of the Carib Natives who were slaughtered by Europeans or succumbed to their imported virus. What the Caribs did leave future generations of European sailors was the hammock which kept one off a wet and hard deck and neutralized in some degree the motion of the ship that would have been keenly felt sleeping on a wooden deck.



Ship's Company Photo taken by Petty Officer W.H. Olson  
 NFA is immediately to the right of the letter 'W'.  
 December 1944 U.K.

There is a 1940 National Film Board production (available on the Internet) entitled '*Atlantic Patrol*' narrated by Lorne Greene, later known as the 'Voice of Doom' for his wartime Broadcasts on CBC and later as Pa Cartwright on the TV show '*Bonanza*'. In the spirit of the time the film depicts a happy RCN sailor getting some sleep. More particularly it shows the sailor hopping up into his hammock *wearing pyjamas*! It is almost impossible to imagine the howls of laughter it must have brought to the sailors of the RCN who had allotted to them slightly less than 24 inches width for their hammock and who would never remove their clothing entirely from one end of the Atlantic voyage until the destination was reached. The film's Producer must have thought that perhaps if Action Stations was called the Officers would tolerate a sailor's late arrival in order to change out of pyjamas. It just wasn't so.

When Action Stations was called each man ran as fast as he could to his station....one's life and the lives of your mates depended on it.

As it happened the Producer of the movie, Stuart Legg would go on to win an Academy Award the following year for another documentary in what was known as the '*Canada Carries On*' series.

A sailor going to sleep would crave the moment and at the most change from his wet clothing into clothing that was merely damp, because nothing ever really dried out. And before closing one's eyes it was prudent to check the pipes above your 'mic' for members of the ever present cockroach colonies that inhabited every ship, lest one fall on your face or in your mouth while you slept.

There were few complaints about the food as the men were all children of the depression and during their childhood a wide variety of food was not usual and many would have suffered from lack of food. But there was a monotony to it as Norm found out when for eighteen months the primary sea bound fruit on board *New Glasgow* was tinned Apricots. Even then there could be some culinary excitement as RCNVR rating Harry Barrett noted while serving on RCN Destroyer *HMCS Assiniboine L18*...

*"On this particular evening our main lighting system had failed, which was not an uncommon occurrence, and we were feeling our way about the mess with only...the emergency lights for guidance. ...as we had finished our main (meal) ...I picked up the large metal pan of stewed apricots...as none of us could see our dishes of fruit that clearly everyone was enjoying...until suddenly Mac made a quizzical remark: 'Hey, Do apricots have seeds?' As we pondered this comment someone exploded: Hell no! Apricots have pits! What are we eating? Whatever the seeds are they've got legs too! Doug commented. ...our 'seeds' turned out to be very dead and scaled cockroaches."*

*( From the Navy & Me. Harry Barrett. p. 99 )*

To the end of his life Signalman Norman Ayre detested apricots.

Letter from Norm:

May 19th, 1944

Dear Mom & Alice

I'm afraid I caused a bit of a stir. We had received reports of many U- boats in our area. The weather was awful and the water was cold. When I came off watch it was dark and I figured that if ever we were to be torpedoed tonight was the night. Funny how those things get in your your mind and stay there. Anyway I climbed into my hammock, or mic they call it on board ship and stayed in my clothes even though they were wet and I wore my life jacket. It was so bulky I was kind of wedged into my mic but I guess I was so tired that I fell asleep. There was a card game going on beneath me on the mess table but the fellows didn't complain as I didn't drip on them too much. Anyway, I now know what happened. I woke up to the most tremendous bang I had ever heard. It was automatic on my part. I figured we had been torpedoed! I was out of my mic and up the ladder as fast as I could go. Well with the bang and the sight of me running my watch mates didn't stop to ask questions. We were going to abandon ship before it sank on us. Strange I thought though, because when I was about to go up the second ladder that would have put me on the deck I noticed that the lights weren't flickering and the ventilation fans were still blowing, so I stopped. My messmates didn't and kept running topside. Suddenly there was a voice yelling ' what's this ? I looked down and started counting the stripes on his sleeve. It was the first officer. It seems we hadn't been torpedoed. In the rough weather the anchor had



broken free and swung out slamming into the side of the ship..  
Right beside where we sleep. That was the 'bang' I heard. The officer  
said 'who started this? Someone yelled 'Ayre'. We were quickly  
ordered back to our mess. I didn't fall back to sleep. I took quite a  
ribbing about this. I still am. And now let me ask about everyone  
there, you, Dad and sister Beth.

And here the letter continued...

## CHAPTER 13

### CONCERNING CONVOYS

Over the centuries it has been proved and re-proved that it is impossible to protect a 'sea lane' unless it is very narrow and very short. The aim (of a Convoy) is to protect ships, not bits of water....ships which are proceeding from one port to another. The only area of ocean in which we are really interested is the part in which the ship is physically placed at the time.

From: *Convoy Escort Commander and the Convoy System*. P 156 Gretton See bibliography.



Convoy Conference Admiralty House 1941  
Halifax Naval Museum

As a means of protection, Convoys for Merchantmen had a long and rich history. The Romans engaged in the practice to ensure protection from Mediterranean pirates. The Spanish used Convoys in the late 16th century to protect their treasure ships sailing from the New World as an attempt to protect themselves from those they saw as Pirates such as Sir Francis Drake who the English saw not as a pirate but a patriot.

Britain had come very close to strategic defeat in 1917 during the First World War when the 'First' Battle of the Atlantic took place and the Kaiser's submarine service nearly brought Britain to her knees. The imposition of the Convoy system in June 1917 resulted in the number of sinkings by U-boats to plummet. In the Second War the first Transatlantic Convoy sailed from Halifax in 1939. Protection in that first year and most of the following three years was meagre and partial only. By 1943 sufficient Escorts meant that Convoys had surface protection across the Ocean instead of just part way. Earlier in the War Armed Trawlers and Minesweepers were used to offset the shortage of other Escorts.

There were hundreds of Convoys and thousands if one adds the Convoys from Trinidad (with fuel) to New York, or between Gibraltar and the U.K. plus Convoys in the Mediterranean. There were Convoys from the U.K. to Russia which were particularly hard hit by U-boats, enemy surface ships and aircraft when skirting the Norwegian Coast. By necessity in this work the author addresses only the North Atlantic experience.

For the purpose of this narrative the Convoys would begin in New York or Boston and then pick up other ships sailing out of Halifax, or Sydney or from the St. Lawrence. As circumstances would permit the Convoys operated as nearly as possible as a continuous conveyor belt of all materials and food stuffs. It never happened that an Allied bomber squadron failed to take off because of a lack of fuel. However hungry or deprived some may have felt as a result of strict rationing, no one in Britain starved. All of the increasing number of Allied soldier and Airmen in Britain were housed and fed as well. All this happened because whatever the losses, when attacked the Convoys ploughed on ahead. Some would get through and in the end result, most of the Merchant ships got through, but at a high human cost.



Convoy Conference Room modern day, Admiralty House Halifax

A detailed model of *New Glasgow* on the Conference Table. The previous 1941 Convoy Conference photo shows the room from the opposite direction. Photo by author.

With a Convoy leaving New York/Halifax approximately every eight days and another expected to arrive between departing Convoys the shore side logistics were enormous. But the arrival and departure of ships was at least predictable. Large shore side staffs dealt with the manning and supply of all ships as well as the distribution of cargo among all except the bulk carriers (i.e. one did not load all of the tanks to be delivered on one ship, in case) and this was done without the aide of our modern computers and at a time before containers when all merchantmen were essentially unloaded by hand and crane. Then just before the time for Convoy departure came, the Convoy Conference was held.

*"Each Convoy started with a conference attended by naval officers, the Commodore and the Masters of all the merchant ships involved. ...The Halifax Naval Control Service Officer was in charge of the conference. The Captain of each ship in the convoy, plus the Captain (SOE) of the Ocean Escort, and the Convoy Commodore attended. Each Captain was given a copy of the sailing order, a copy of the Convoy formation ...the Commodore of the Convoy made a few brief remarks. At the end of the Conference each Captain received his sealed envelope containing the secret routing instructions. The conference lasted about 45 minutes and the Convoy sailed about 90 minutes later."*

(Lavery. Churchill's Navy. P 235)

The Senior Officer of Escorts (SOE) would have conducted his own Convoy Conference with the Escort's Captains prior to the conference held for the Merchantmen. The SOE's expectations concerning stations for the Escorts, signals and responses to attack would all be predetermined so that when a submarine contact or attack was made each ship knew exactly what was expected of them. A word about the use of the term Captain. The latter is in fact a very senior rank in both the RCN and the RN. Every Officer in actual command of a Corvette or a Frigate or any ship was referred to as 'the Captain' even if their actual rank was Lieutenant in Command, Lieutenant Commander or even Commander.

Convoys were structured so that they were wider than longer. The ranks were long and the files were somewhat shorter. They resembled more a rectangle moving forward than a perfect square. Typically they would be twice as wide as they were long. The reason for this was that with this structure they could pass a given point faster and therefore if a U-boat was encountered, and as long as it was forced to submerge, the Convoy with its greater speed could travel beyond harm's way. Even a

slow Convoy was faster than a submerged submarine. Thus a submarine detected and driven underwater was rendered if not useless then far less dangerous.

Tankers were positioned in the middle of the Convoy along with ammunition ships. The Commodore was accompanied by his own signalling staff and would routinely be in the front rank middle Merchantman with a Vice Commodore often in the rear middle Merchantman. The Escorts would be positioned as the SOE directed which positions could change if one ship or more had to investigate a U-boat contact but in ideal conditions the Frigates and Corvettes were anywhere from 1000 yards to 3000 yards distant from the Convoy in an attempt to give as complete an Asdic coverage screen as possible for the advancing ships.



Bedford Basin, Halifax Nova Scotia. Enemy U-boats sank ships as close as eight kilometres off the harbour entrance which can be seen at the top of the photograph. There was infinitely more room in Halifax Harbour than St. John's. N.A.C.

When a U-boat was detected the Escorts used prearranged coordinated tactics entitled ‘raspberry, half raspberry, or even artichoke, as designed by the Admiralty to neutralize any attacking submarine. The Merchantmen had no such freedom of action. If the Convoy was attacked they stayed on their course and kept moving ahead. It took nerves of steel.

A word about the Republic of Ireland is desirable. With the surrender of France in 1940 the Germans held the French Atlantic Ports. Their U-boats could sail from the French coast out to the Atlantic to attack shipping off North America and in the Atlantic without the need of sailing from German or Norwegian ports and making the long and dangerous North Sea passage to the Atlantic. With air bases in France the German airforce could also interdict shipping approaching the U.K’s western coast but only should the ships approach from the south via St. George’s Channel instead of rounding the north of Ireland to Londonderry. (see map below) .



Therefore from 1940 and before the invasion of France on D-Day in June of 1944 and for some time thereafter Allied Convoys were routed through the North Channel and into the Irish Sea, thence to British west coast ports. The Royal Navy had previously held several bases in the Republic of Ireland but in the mid 1930's these bases were returned to Ireland (notwithstanding Winston Churchill's fury with the agreement) under British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin. Early negotiations between the British and the new Irish Republic to allow the RN to use the former bases during the war were not successful. During the war the Irish were neutral and fiercely so. Use of the west coast Irish Ports would have allowed a much shorter route and safer haven than Londonderry. Ireland had only recently emerged from a civil war. Releasing the Western Irish ports to the British could well have reignited the conflict.

Many including Norman, believed that the U-boats would seek shelter in Irish Waters or even refueled in Irish Ports. RCNVR sailor and later author Harry Barrett (see bibliography) wrote that believed he saw German sailors ashore while he was on leave and in the South. It never happened.

The Irish had no fuel or food for the Germans and no particular affinity for them either. Allied sailors on leave from Londonderry could visit the south but only in civilian clothes. No U-boat captain would risk his submarine on the rocky coast of Ireland and if they had done so successfully the Irish would have impounded the vessel. The few German airmen who crashed in the Republic were interned. The sailors belief however was widespread and remained fixed even decades later when modern German and Irish sources completely negate it.



Letter from Norm.

Dear Mom and Alice

May 31st, 1944.

The other day I came off watch and wasn't feeling too tired ( for the first time in a long time ) so I asked permission to go and see the engine room. I had never been there before which might surprise you but this is a big ship and everyone is busy about their jobs so it was a rare chance to go deep into the ship and see what goes on there. The regular sailors or ratings down there are called stokers... yikes what a job! Am I ever glad most of my duties are up top. Now even though fellows on the bridge get sea sick we can see the sky, most times. Where the stokers work it is hot, noisy and cramped beyond belief and they can still get sea sick from the rolling of the ship, which never seems to stop. If ever we got hit I don't see how the stokers could ever get out. Nope, I'm happy where I am for sure. How is Dad?....

And here the letter continued...

**7 MAY, 1944 RIVER CLASS FRIGATE *HMCS VALLEYFIELD* TORPEDOED  
AND BY U-548 OFF CAPE RACE NEWFOUNDLAND. *VALLEYFIELD* SINKS IN  
FOUR MINUTES. 128 DEAD. 38 SURVIVORS**

## CHAPTER 14

### SEVEN ATLANTIC CONVOYS 1944

*We'll zig and we'll zag all over the ocean,  
Ride herd on our convoy by night and by day.  
Till we take up our soundings on the shores of old Ireland,  
From Newfy to Derry's a bloody long way.  
Chorus from 'the Maple Leaf Squadron' Traditional tune*

#### Part I

#### CONVOY HXS 291 MAY 15-25 ST. JOHN'S NFLD TO UK

In fact from 'Newfy to Derry' is approximately 3220 kilometres (2001 statute miles/1739 nautical miles) in a roughly straight line, a geometric line of travel no Convoy and no Escort ever took. As the song suggests in the quote above zig zagging did take a ship 'all over the Ocean'.

The effect of zig zagging was to deprive a watching submarine of the chance to make an accurate plot of where its target would be. Only rarely did a submarine shoot directly at a vessel rather it fired its torpedo at where the targeted vessel would be after a pre-calculated period of time based on the distance away from the submarine and the known speed of the torpedo.

The drawback of an order to zig zag was that it delayed arrival in home port and used up fuel that a straight line course would not require. Such an order to zig zag would only be given by the Convoy Commodore in the face of a known or anticipated threat and with the flag signal to zig zag being hoisted it would include the ever present risk of collision as the order was passed down the line between ships. Any such order would include what kind of zig zag pattern was to be used by the Convoy based on the zig zag clock every ship had and the orders

issued in the all important Convoy Conference. It must have been akin to ordering a herd of cattle to turn all at once and expect them to engage in a precisely timed dance. The fact that it was successfully accomplished so frequently, even with the occasional collision is astonishing.

*New Glasgow* was fully ready to go to war and to fulfill the function for which she had been designed and built. She would be part of Escort Group C1 there being as well an Escort Group C2 and a C3. These were primarily Canadian Escort vessels that would sail together as much as operationally possible so as to build a cohesion amongst the ship's operations as the mid-Ocean Escort Group (MOE). Some changes to the C Groups would occur as vessels needed repairs or to be refitted but group cohesion was valued.



*New Glasgow* in St. John's looking astern. Tug behind. NFA

HXS 291 was a slow Convoy as signified by the letter 'S' in HXS. It would not be *New Glasgow's* last slow convoy. Slow Convoys were comprised of Merchant Vessels that could achieve 7.5 knots at a

minimum and a maximum of 8.9 knots. Fast Convoys were those whose ships could travel faster than 9 knots. The Convoy was made up of ninety-nine ships plus 18 escorts. This was a far cry from the earliest days of the war when there might have been a single Escort for a third the number of Merchantmen. In 1939-1940 the early Escorts were in many cases civilian vessels brought into the navy and outfitted with a World War I deck gun, no asdic and no depth charges. Things had changed but so too had the sophistication and number of the enemy. The earliest Convoys in 1939-1940 had only enjoyed Escort protection part way across the Atlantic from Britain before sailing independently. Those days had proven deadly to the Merchantmen and were long since past with continuous sea escort in full practice by 1941 and air cover as weather would permit.



Bridge of *New Glasgow*. In harbour. NFA

The Triangle Run (the Western Local Escort Force/ WLEF) was exhausting, conducted in perilous seas during all weather and with U-boats prowling the Canadian Atlantic coast until the very end of the war.

WLEF handed over HX291 at the Westomp (Western Ocean Meeting Point) .On May 16th to *New Glasgow* which departed from St. John's. *New Glasgow* was the ship of the SOE (Senior Officer Escort) and was Commander A H Thorold RN.

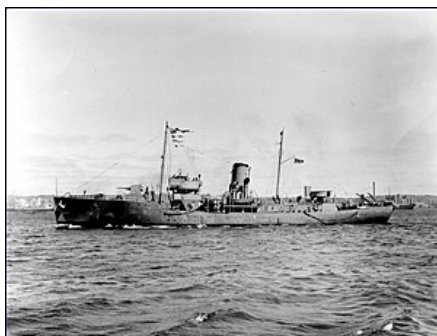
#### PROFILE COMMANDER A H THOROLD RNR

Captain Sir Anthony Thorold, R.N., 15<sup>th</sup> Baronet OBE, DSC & Bar was born in 1903 and received his education at the Royal Naval College. He served in the RN in the First War had a distinguished pre-war career in the Navy and served in the Mediterranean early the Second War and later in the Western Approaches in command of Escort Groups. For this first Atlantic Crossing he was on the *New Glasgow* as SOE (Senior Officer Escorts). The Captain of the *New Glasgow* ran the ship and the SOE commanded the overall actions of the Escorts just as an Admiral would command a small fleet. The Bridge of the *New Glasgow* must have been busy place. Knighted post War and inheriting his father's title in 1965 he continued in the RN and led a life of Public Service including serving as Commodore in charge for Hong Kong 1953-1955 and later as High Sheriff of Lincolnshire. Married with three children he died in 1999.

As a 'slow' Convoy it was fortunate to have a Rescue Ship (*Gothland*) at the stern of the Convoy in case of a torpedo strike and whose job it was to collect survivors, if any. Not all ships in these Convoys were modern by any means. One Merchant vessel of Panamanian registry which was carrying explosives had been built in 1919!

*New Glasgow's* companions for the mid ocean crossing was nearly an all Canadian affair, albeit with an RN Senior Officer with *HMCS Chambly*, *HMS Dominica*, *HMCS Fredericton*, *HMCS Frontenac*, *HMCS Giffard* and *HMCS Halifax* as their company. *New Glasgow* and

*Dominica* were the only two Frigates and the rest were Flower Class Corvettes



*Chambly K 116*



*Dominica K 507*



*Fredericton K 245*



*Frontenac K 335*



*Giffard K 402*



*Halifax K 237*

Travelling in sixteen columns and led by Commodore Frederick Henry Taylor in the *SS Northumberland* positioned in the centre front of the Convoy, the Escorts were primarily positioned ahead and to the sides of the Convoy.

PROFILE : Commodore Frederick Henry Taylor. Commodore Convoy HX 291. Photo below UK Archives.

Commodore Frederick Henry Taylor was born in 1888 and served as a sea going officer in the RN during the First War as a Submarine Captain. Brought out of retirement in 1939 he had been Captain of *HMS Rajputana* a Royal Navy Armed Merchant Cruiser that was torpedoed and sunk in 1941 near Iceland.



Commodore Taylor

With the seven Escorts mentioned, the Convoy also had two MAC ships (Merchant Aircraft Carriers) accompanying it with each MAC ship flying three Swordfish aircraft. *MV Acarus* and *MV Miralda*. Merchant Aircraft Carriers were hybrid Merchant vessels but with a flight deck. In 1942 with increased losses to U-boats the idea had taken hold to use certain types of Merchantmen as Carriers so aircraft could be flown off in protection of a Convoy.



The only Aircraft capable of performing this function was the Fairey Swordfish a biplane known affectionately by its crew as a 'Stringbag'. It is a curious thing that an antiquated design of a biplane should fight in a War that ended with twin engine jet aircraft and V-1 Rockets that achieved sub orbital flight but they were superbly designed for MAC ships. The Swordfish was as close to a short take off and landing aircraft as existed at the time even when loaded with its three crew members and armed with depth charges or rockets. This type of aircraft could not be used on the Convoy runs to Russia, as if intercepted by German fighters based in Norway, there would have been no contest. But there were no German fighters mid Atlantic. The sight of any aircraft approaching was enough to cause a surfaced U-boat to dive as once detected by an Aircraft, its crew would radio surface Escorts as to the last location of the U-boat so as to enable them to get an Asdic contact and attack.



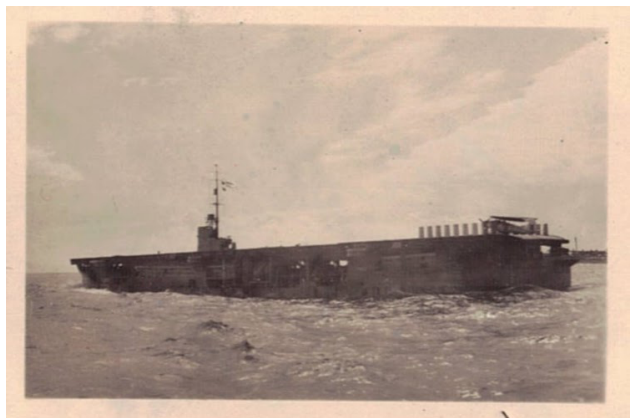
Swordfish aircraft 1943. Public Domain

The MAC ships came in two varieties, being tankers which carried oil and grain carriers. Ordinary Merchantmen were not suitable as a flight deck would preclude the unloading of cargo. During the War fourteen MAC ships would be purpose built for the RN or converted to such.



Although the air element on board was made up of Royal Navy (and Dutch) pilots the MAC's themselves otherwise maintained their civilian command and hence did not have the designation 'HMS'.

It was only the grain carrier MAC ships that came equipped with an elevator so that with the folding of their wings when the aircraft were not in use ,they could be stored below deck.Oil tanker design precluded the installation of an elevator so that the three aircraft carried on a tanker MAC ship had to be stored on deck. Bad weather with rough seas, fog and of course nighttime could preclude any flying but it was observed that when the Captains of Merchantmen learned at a Convoy Conference that a MAC ship would accompany the Convoy oftentimes a cheer would often go up.



Left Photo MAC ship *MV Empire Mackay* with Swordfish on stern

From a June 1944 Convoy. NFA

Right Photo MAC Ship *MV Avacus*. Swordfish shown with rough seas. NFA

*New Glasgow* and her sister ships picked up the Convoy late on the 15th and went to a state of heightened alert as en route to Westomp it had been necessary to break radio silence frequently due to escorting a large Convoy and encountering ice and fog. Refueling at sea by some of the Corvettes was required. On the 21st while doing an early evening search a Swordfish got caught in a rain squall and was not able to return to land until dark. Unfortunately this required, as the official report noted, that *Acavus* turn on its lights which was highly undesirable. Earlier in the day the Convoy had enjoyed air cover from long range Liberator aircraft flying from Iceland.

HF/DF contact with a U-boat was made on the 22nd but triangulation put it a safe distance away. More fog was encountered and then while approaching their destination the British Merchantman *S.S.Scorton*, carrying grain and explosives as her cargo, broke down and lost all steering. *Halifax* and *Chambly* were detailed to stay with the stricken vessel until a large tug could be sent from Londonderry to bring her home. *Scorton* might be forgiven as earlier in the War she accomplished something no other Merchantmen did in the war.

In March of 1943 while in Convoy *Scorton* had rammed and sunk *U-633*. At that time of the war at sea U-boats typically preferred to attack at night and on the surface. Penetrating the columns of a Convoy gave the U-boat a degree of protection while offering multiple targets. But even with Convoy columns spaced about one thousand metres apart and ships trailing each other by approximately eighty meters it was still a crowded space where collisions could and did occur. In the case of the *Scorton* and *U-633* it was the latter who fatally ran out of room. *Scorton* required extensive rudder and other structural repairs before returning to sea as she did for HXS 291. *Scorton* got home after that encounter... *U-633* did not.

*Scorton's* breakdown on this occasion necessitated breaking radio silence again and quite a few transmissions must have alerted U-boat command as to the location and existence of the Convoy. No rescue tug was available and the order came from the Admiralty that the Escorts should provide a tow. *Halifax* secured the tow and made good a towing speed of five knots for one hour before the line parted. *Chambly* then tried and it appeared that *Scorton* would be kept off the rocks near the Hebrides when the tow parted again. With repeated signals to the Commander in Chief Western Approaches and fuel running low for the Escorts, tugs were finally sent. All of this transpired under the watchful eye of the SOE on *New Glasgow*.

On May 25<sup>th</sup> under air cover from ground based aircraft the MAC ships 'flew off' their aircraft to Royal Naval Air Station Maydown (also known as *HMS Shrike*) a small airfield near Londonderry Northern Ireland. Prior to entering a Port all MAC ships would routinely would fly off some or all of their aircraft subject to weather and other requirements, to land bases. Without the forward speed of the ship, once docked, no aircraft could land or takeoff. The Convoy split up with abundant local escort and air cover. On May 27<sup>th</sup>, the ships arrived at Malin Head, the northernmost point of Ireland and turned south east toward the River Foyle. Entering the River estuary the ship's company would have seen the western bank of the neutral Irish Republic on their right and the shoreline of the Northern Irish river bank on their left leading to the crowded anchorage of Londonderry or Derry as many prefer.

But first *New Glasgow* oiled. The ship's engines burned a heavy fuel oil that can be likened to home heating oil still in use today. It was because of the oil that beards were largely unknown on board ship and although permitted, they were discouraged as if one found oneself in the water after being torpedoed, survivors of sinkings related that the oil

would heavily foul one's beard and cause water and oil to be ingested into the lungs.

Most of the Merchant vessels went south through the North Channel and into the Irish Sea to Liverpool, Glasgow, Bristol or other Ports with *New Glasgow* and the Escorts heading to the massive Naval base in Londonderry which was largely reserved for warships.

*New Glasgow* had completed its first transatlantic Convoy. The ship had to be refueled, re-provisioned and ready to go again in nine days. Even though it was a new vessel the RCN lagged in the best equipment. The Americans and the British got the best radar sets and they got them first. As well as the training use them. The RCN often came last when it came to the acquisition and training on new equipment. In his *Report on Proceedings*, a document completed by all SOE's after every convoy addressed to the Commander in Chief Western Approaches, (and available to the writer through British Archives) the SOE Captain Thorold noted that *New Glasgow's* radar was very poor and it needed upgrading to the more modern Type 271Q set. With what she had, the SOE noted that it was "*extremely doubtful if New Glasgow would ever detect a U-boat even at close range.*" A truly dangerous state of affairs that seemed destined to continue.

## Part II

### CONVOY ONS-239 JUNE 4 – JUNE 15 UK TO ST JOHN'S NFLD

*" Strain and tiredness at sea induce a sort of hypnosis: you seem to be moving in a bad dream, pursued not by terrors but by an intolerable routine. You come off watch at midnight, soaked, itching, your eyes raw from the wind and staring at shadows...you are wakened four hours later...and think 'My God, I can't go up there again in the dark and filthy rain and stand for another four hours of it.' But you can of course; it becomes automatic in the end."*

Nicholas Monserrat *Three Corvettes*.

Nine days later her arrival *New Glasgow* set out again, westbound to escort a slow Convoy ONS 239. The controlled chaos of the UK ports can only be imagined on the eve of D-Day which would occur two days after departure. All of the arriving Freighters had to be unloaded and fuelled from tankers that had just brought the fuel across the ocean. Food for the return voyage or at least some of it sourced from the UK had to be loaded. Cans of sardines and potatoes, always potatoes and always boiled when served, from the Republic of Ireland.

Another Convoy Conference with Commodore Thorold dealing with a new crop of Captains, all Convoy signals exchanged, all ships manned. The Merchantmen would leave Liverpool and other Ports at the prearranged moment with no delay for weather or seas permitted. It bears repetition that all of this was achieved without the aid of our modern computers. To suggest it called for continuous and thoughtful planning is an understatement. After all there were other incoming Convoys right behind them heading for the coveted dock space.



Typical Convoy with fair weather spacing of Merchantmen. NAC

All loading and provisioning would have happened previously for the Escorts who would pick up the Merchantmen in the North Channel. Also the Escorts would require re-armament if any depth charges or other ammunition had been expended en route or in practice. As for food, there was always British mutton to be had and loaves of bread that given the absence of sufficient refrigeration would not turn completely mouldy for at least three days.

The Merchantmen of Westbound Convoys were largely empty except for some passengers and prisoners of war on occasion. Great Britain simply had little to export back to Canada or the US. It therefore happened that even though slow, the westbound Convoys tended to be a little faster than heavily laden eastbound ones. Ballast in the form of rocks or sea water pumped in took the place of cargo although in the end

result, as always the Convoy went as slow as the slowest vessel and Convoy rules permitted. As well the westbound and lightly loaded Merchantmen tended to be much more difficult to handle in rough water as they were comparatively light and rode higher in the water.

At one point in the war Merchant vessels arriving at Saint John New Brunswick were discharging their rock ballast at the same location every time before they entered the harbour proper. So much was being discharged that they inadvertently created a dangerous shoal. Changes were made. Parts of their ballast were debris from the German bombing of London, and other cities. For a while the debris of the Blitz was being deposited on the floor of the Bay of Fundy.

*New Glasgow* departed again on June 4<sup>th</sup> joining with ninety seven Merchantmen in fifteen columns heading west bound again with Commander Thorold on board again as SOE. With *New Glasgow* were her companions of the previous crossing *Chambly*, *Fredericton*, *Frontenac*, *Giffard*, minus *Dominica* but with a new companion a Castle Class Corvette *HMCS Orangeville K -91* and *HMCS Chebogue* which had been doing its 'workings up' in Bermuda.



*HMCS Orangeville K 491*

Of the ninety-seven Merchantmen, thirty-eight were American, thirty British, nine Norwegian and the rest were from around the Globe

including ships registered in conquered Poland, neutral Sweden and occupied (by the Allies) Iceland. Two MAC ships accompanied the Convoy *MV Amastra* and *MV Empire MacAndrew* although due to bad weather on this crossing they were only able to fly their aircraft for less than half the usual time. The Rescue ship travelling at the tail end of the Convoy was *HMS Bury*, perhaps not the best name for a rescue ship but proudly so named after a British town.

In charge of this civilian polyglot United Nations-at-Sea was Commodore Aloys Marie Hekking (1889-1977) a former Senior Officer of the Royal Dutch Navy serving with the Royal Navy Reserve.

After three days out at sea all Corvettes were refueled at sea. Refueling for Corvettes was not uncommon but rare for the Frigates which were designed for enhanced range. Refueling at sea was a difficult task that could be accomplished in daylight only and only in relatively calm seas.



Refueling a Corvette in Convoy. N.A.C.



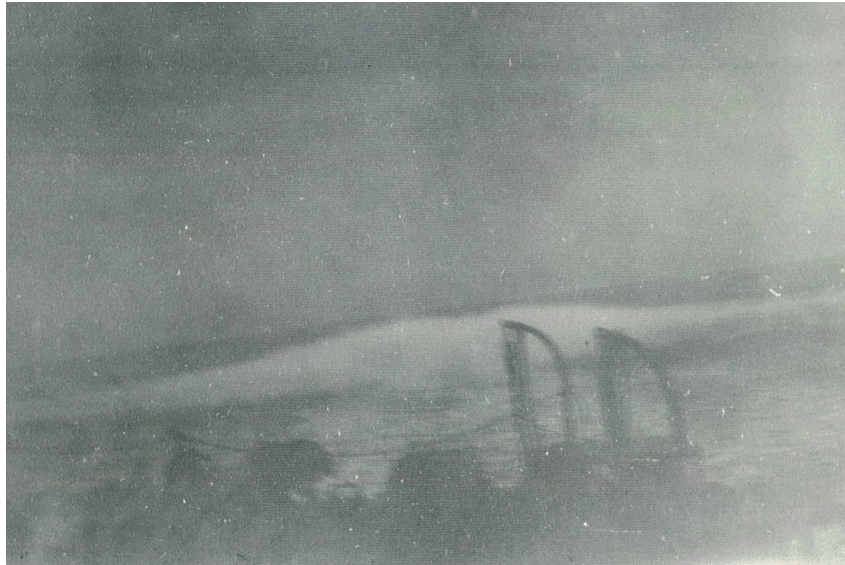
The practice was to station the ship behind a tanker, then retrieve the very heavy hoses deployed behind the tanker and get the job done as fast as possible. The modern side to side refuelling practice was not used and was impractical as between a large tanker and a smaller Corvette. The heavy bunker fuel oil added tremendously to the weight of the hose which could easily part. Only one vessel could be refuelled at a time and the process would take up to an hour even in good conditions thus removing one Escort from the U-boat screen.

Just before noon on June 8<sup>th</sup>, the *SS Elijah Kellogg*, an Armed Merchantman opened fire. Such vessels were known as DEM's and had an RN or RCN gun crew aboard. The Chief Engineer aboard and a number of the crew reported sighting the periscope of a submarine and three of the Escorts began an attack until the contact could no longer be verified and the action was broken off.

Convoy routine began anew but with a tragic interruption two days later. A stoker aboard *Giffard* had become seriously ill. It was not unusual that if there was a Doctor in the Convoy that he was assigned to the SOE's ship. Thus the Medical officer, the Surgeon-Lieutenant aboard *New Glasgow* was transferred by whale boat to *Giffard* but the rating died, it was determined, from a brain hemorrhage. The next day all colours aboard all Escorts were half masted. The Captain of the *Giffard* conducted a brief service on deck and for a moment, but just a very brief moment he ordered engines to stop so the deceased would not suffer the indignity of passing through the ships propellor. Draped in the Canadian Naval Ensign the body of stoker Thomas Lloyd Langton RCNVR was buried at sea.

On June 12<sup>th</sup>, *Fredericton* attacked a submarine contact picked up by *New Glasgow* and three other escorts. Four of the ships fell astern of the convoy and attacked with Hedge Hog, (an explanation of Hedge Hog

follows) depth Charges, and in the case of Orangeville, Squid. The latter was a more powerful and sophisticated form of Hedge Hog, a sea mortar in effect. There was an underwater explosion, some oil and an object floating on the surface but nothing more sufficient to convince their Lordships of the Admiralty that there had been kill. The attack continued until dark when there was no further verifiable contact.



Dropping Depth Charges. North Atlantic. NFA

The next day *Fredericton* took on thirty-four depth charges at sea from the *Empire Heritage* to replenish her stock, a tricky undertaking at the best of times. Finally, on June 15<sup>th</sup> Westomp was reached and handover was made to the Western Escort Group. The Convoy continued on its way and the Escorts one by one filed through the narrows into St. John's harbour berthing the south side of the harbour near the fuel tanks located there.

## Letter from Norm

June 1944

Dear Alice

I got your recent letters. I read about the gas rationing going on back home and I'm glad your Dad has some extra gas because of the farm. I guess they realize it doesn't do a lot of good for crops to grow if you can't get the food into town. Here's a story for you ! We had dropped a marker in the water after dropping depth charges on something suspicious....then we kept sailing and went back to see if we had had any luck. Well I was on duty and like everyone I was looking for the marker buoy. Of course it was on everyone's mind that what we had dropped the depth charges on was a u-boat that was merely damaged and might have its periscope set on us. So when I saw something through the gloom I hollered ' Object, Red 20 'which told the Officer on the Bridge that there was something on our left side just off the bow. Silence. No one else saw it and no one else said anything. So I hollered again ' Object, Red 20 '. By now everyone was either looking ahead at Red 20 or they were looking at me ! We were clipping along and I was starting to sweat wondering if I had been wrong or if it was a u-boat. I was about to really holler again when another Lookout yelled 'Object Red 20' Stationary. Whew...that meant it was our marker buoy. The First Officer looked at me and said ' Well done Signelman, where did you get those eyes ? ' I felt pretty good and so I was the talk of the mess deck later that day. There was the buoy, nothing else and we

went back to work. I am mailing this from St John's. We get ashore for a bit and got some baseball in. First fun Ive had for a while. Now, how are you mom, Dad and sister Dorothy ?...

And here the letter continued...



*New Glasgow* crewmen. A baseball game during turnaround in St. John's.

NFA back row second from left. Baseball equipment courtesy citizens New Glasgow. N.S.  
St. John's was a preferred destination to Halifax due to less crowding and a welcoming populace.  
NFA

PART 3, 4 & 5  
THREE CONVOYS: JUNE 23 -AUGUST 8, 1944  
HXF 296. ONF 244. HXM 301.

*"We would get dog tired. During wheel watch, men would sleep with their eyes open. We called it sleep-watching. Your eyes felt like sandpaper, like they were on fire...there were hallucinations, caused by exhaustion..."*

Hansen, p.81 Bibliography.

Fatigue was omnipresent. The three watch system alone was enough to exhaust any man however young and fit. Norm would relate the story in one of his letters that during one of the Atlantic Crossings a Lookout had committed an unpardonable sin, he had fallen asleep! Removed from the ship upon arrival in Port the individual found themselves under charge. Normally discipline on board could result in a 'Number 11' which meant extra duties or an admonition, cancellation of leave or other disagreeable tasks being assigned such as being named 'Captain of the heads' which involved cleaning the ships toilets. Charge and removal from the ship was the most drastic process yet the chatter amongst Norm's messmates was whether the offender might even be shot! He was not. No Canadian service man was executed during the War save one army Deserter in June of 1945 and that was for murder. Such though were the fears of a young man.

This writer decided to examine *New Glasgow's* next three Atlantic Convoys with a more collective approach as it gives a view as to what was happening in the dozens of Convoys crossing that Ocean at any one time. This Convoy was roughly composed much as all the other Convoys were. Among the Merchantmen members were fifty-two

American Ships, twenty three British, three Panamanian, one Belgian, ten Norwegian, two Dutch and the remainder Swedish.

The inclusion of a ship from Neutral Sweden is not a surprise as at War's outbreak all vessels available to the British were Chartered for Allied Service and other than the American vessels the Country of origin simply reflected the ship's registration. The British Transport Authority dealt with all the contractual niceties. The Merchantman crew hailed from across the planet.

Norwegian vessels deserve a special mention. With the invasion and occupation of Norway the Norwegian government in exile immediately put its entire merchant fleet at the disposal of the British. The Norwegian merchant Marine in 1940 was second in size in the world only to the British. The addition of these ships was crucial to get the Allies through the darkest days of the Battle of the Atlantic. Between service at sea and in the Air, for a Nation with a small population Norway's contribution was outstanding.

A small aside should be made to note that in every Atlantic Convoy that *New Glasgow* escorted there was always one or more Norwegian ships. This likely meant that there were women in the Convoy as alone among the Western allies the Norwegians had women radio operators. They found they were often more skilled than their male counterparts. Women were in a combat situation and the Norwegians were ahead of their time.

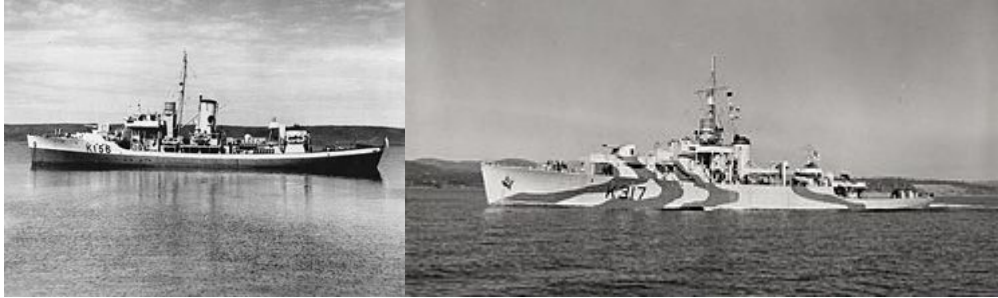
The cargo of these ninety-three ships is known and is an example of what was important to the Allied advance in Europe. Tankers carrying oil and fuel of various types predominated along with general cargo. Several ships carried only explosives while many general cargo ships also had explosives listed. One carried nothing but rations presumably for the advancing ground troops on the Continent. Two Merchantmen carried ~ 200 troops on one ship and ~ 500 troops on another. The

former ship also carried explosives and one wonders if that ship's passengers were informed what the ship held as a torpedo strike would be devastating.

The inclusion of small numbers of troops in the Convoy was curious as most troops were transported to Europe on the largest passenger liners one Division at a time. The large Cruise ships converted to troop transports such as *Queen Mary* could carry 15,000 troops at a time at a speed so fast that they sailed unescorted under the belief that they were too fast for any U-boat to fire upon. Accidents could still occur as in 1942 when having been assigned a fast Navy Cruiser as Escort *HMS Curacao* took an errant turn in front of the *Queen Mary* which cut the Cruiser in half sinking her with a large loss of life.

HX 293 left New York Harbour on June 19th with the majority of ships under the watchful eye of the WLEF in it's latest instalment of the Triangle Run. Two days later they were joined at sea by eighteen Merchantmen sailing from Halifax. The next day the Convoy was joined by five more Merchantmen from Sydney N.S. Finally on June 23rd a further single Merchantman sailed with C1 from St. John's all of whom joined together at Westomp as though they were entering onto a dance floor without missing a step! Rendezvous of this type which happened repeatedly by the stage of the War was a tribute to land based organization and logistical choreography.

Joining C-1 were two ships, the Corvette *HMCS Chicoutimi* K 156 (in the Twenty First Century RCN there is still a *Chicoutimi*, but it is a Victoria Class submarine) and a ship that would have a special place for *New Glasgow* in this unfolding story, the River Class Frigate *HMCS Chebogue* K317. The SOE aboard *New Glasgow* was again Commodore Thorold .



*HMCS Chicoutimi K 156*

*HMCS Chebogue K 317*

A total of ninety-three ships sailed under the watchful eye of Commodore Captain F Ratsey RN in the lead Merchantman *SS Mataroa*. In case something happened to the Commodore on many occasions a Vice Commodore (in this Convoy it was JJE Barclay RNR in *SS Waterland*) would also be named albeit traveling in another vessel than that of the Commodore and usually at the rear of the Convoy.

Profile : Commodore Captain Franklin Ratsey R.N.

Born November 6th 1887 he served as an Officer in the RN during WW1 and retired in 1933 with the rank of Captain. Like other Senior officers he was recalled at War's outbreak and served as Captain in 1940 of the Armed Yacht *HMS Migrante* and until 1943 as Captain of a Minelayer *HMS Agamemnon*. By 1943 he was to serve as Commodore of various Convoys until his final retirement in 1945.

On July 2<sup>nd</sup>, *New Glasgow* docked again in Londonderry to re-provision and prepare to go out to sea again in eight days time.

**2 JULY, 1944 RCN MOTOR TORPEDO BOAT 460 STRIKES A MINE OFF LE HAVRE FRANCE AND SINKS 11 MEN DEAD, 5 WOUNDED, 6 SURVIVORS.**

**JULY 8 1944 RCN MTB 463 STRIKES A MINE IN ENGLISH CHANNEL. 5 WOUNDED 12 SURVIVORS**



## PART 4

### CONVOY ONF 244 10-19 JULY. U.K. TO ST. JOHN'S

The situation in Western Europe was that the Allied Armies including the Canadian First Army were still hemmed in by the Germans in Normandy. Later, after much Canadian blood had been spilt, the Port of Antwerp would be taken and opened for the Allies use but in July 1944 the only way for supplies to reach Eisenhower's armies was across the Atlantic, then across the channel to the D-Day beach head. Keeping the Allied Armies provisioned was, to use the current phrase a supply chain whose principal vital link remained the Atlantic.

On July 10<sup>th</sup>, C1 left Londonderry, this time with the Captain of *New Glasgow*, Acting Commander C S Hall RCNR as the SOE for the mid ocean escort. It may have been that Thorold had been assessing Captain Hall for this role on the previous crossings. With Hall's duties now including those of SOE the First Lieutenant of *New Glasgow* would have found that his duties had increased exponentially. In any event the westbound Convoy of fifty-eight ships in ballast, sailing in eleven columns were under his protection. Commodore Nicholson was the Convoy Commodore in the lead Merchantman.

**PROFILE: COMMODORE CAPTAIN B W L NICHOLSON DSC R.N.** Bertram William Lothian Nicholson was born in 1879. Son of a British General he joined the Victorian Navy in 1896 and served at sea in WW1 including having a ship *HMS Cressy* sunk from under him in 1914, by a German torpedo while serving as it's Executive Officer. With the reductions in the Navy after the First War he took retirement and served for a time in Naval Intelligence, later working in Education and becoming headmaster at several schools. Recalled in July 1939 by 1940 he was SOE for all escorts in the Indian Ocean and then commanded the

Naval Base in the Shetlands. From mid 1943 he served on the Atlantic as Commodore for mid-Ocean Convoys. He died in 1958.

Early in the voyage one Merchantman was unable to keep up and was ordered to return to Ireland, albeit unescorted. Air cover was provided by the Swordfish aircraft from no fewer than three MAC ships. Both *New Glasgow* and *Chebogue* continued to be plagued by intermittent radar breakdowns and hence had to rely on other Escort's radar. Ominously, *Chebogue* was also experiencing difficulty with her ASDIC set.

There is one aspect to all the Convoys referred to that was a factor for all sailors be they on *New Glasgow*, another Escort or a Merchantman... Sea Sickness. It was pervasive and only the lucky long serving sailor ever escaped it completely. Even after months at sea Norman experienced it with all its misery. The solace was that many of his fellow sailors did as well. Sea sickness could be so severe so as to completely incapacitate an individual however experienced at sea.

Briefly described, the three 'motions' that one might experience in an aircraft or ship are roll, pitch and yaw. On a ship as on an aircraft pitch is the nose up and down movement. Roll is from side to side and yaw is a turning motion. But at sea there are three additional motions being heave, sway and surge. These forces are at work even while the other three motions of roll, pitch and yaw are operating. So that the first three motions are experienced while one goes up and down like on an elevator except the elevator is a sixty foot wave. Sway can be likened to falling down the side of a wave. Surge is akin to going up or down or 'surfing' on the wave except that the surf board (the ship) is three hundred feet long and the troughs between the waves are variable.

When the brain senses movement from these six motions but the eye sees none, the signals trigger a nausea and vomiting reflex. It was

suggested that being above deck was better than below as one could fix on the horizon if there was one. Norm would disagree.



*HMCS New Glasgow K320 in a calm sea.*  
 From the collection of Glendon Oliver  
 Courtesy of Keith Oliver from 'For Posterity's Sake'

The Convoy was one of the smallest with fifty-eight vessels from eleven different countries being watched over by C-1. Such a diversity of Merchant crews could often lead to disturbing results when the Commodore's orders were not immediately understood due to language difficulties. Clarity of signals never had a greater worth.

Approaching the North American continent on the 16th a somewhat different event happened when six Merchant ships left the Convoy with permission and proceeded unescorted to take passage for the St .Lawrence via the Strait of Belle Isle. A view of the map of Canada shows just how narrow the Straits are separating the northwest tip of Newfoundland and the Labrador mainland. In fact such a route shaves off a considerable distance when sailing on the great circle route from

the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the U.K. Yet for a significant part of the year the Straits are clogged with ice and it is also a choke point where U-boats could and did sit and wait for a target. These six ships got through. They might have been more cautious if they had known that U-boats were still in the Gulf of St. Lawrence well into the Autumn months of 1944.

Upon arrival in St. John's the Escorts of C-1 entered the always congested harbour and tied up, rafting together on the south shore of the Harbour. Again refuelling was a top priority but so too was ship maintenance.

Painting the ship was a near constant occupation and save for those fortunate few granted leave, Petty Officers never seemed to have trouble finding paint brushes and the heavy lead based paint for Crewmen including Signalmen, to use liberally on a salt water coated ship. It was a task no one looked forward to. Scraping of the three hundred foot vessel preceded painting. Turnaround time would be measured in days before another Westomp rendezvous beckoned. The dance continued.



Painting *New Glasgow* in St. John's. *Chebogue* on the right still in her earlier camouflage. NFA

But there had been an 'incident' with later dramatic events to follow. As *Chebogue* approached St. John's harbour, consistent with practice ships would occasionally fire off their Hedge Hog with a view to replacing them afresh. This practice would be followed if the Captain approved anticipating performance issues with the Hedge Hog due to ice, sea water or just the old age of the bombs. It was recommended that if firing into shallow water that the ship veer slightly so as not to be above the explosion should the Hedge Hog projectile go off. *Chebogue* fired her twenty four charges when in shallow waters outside the harbour and as it proved, there was nothing wrong with their explosive power. Several went off severely shaking and loosening some underwater hull plates and necessitating the ship's repair in dry dock in St. John's. The ship would be out of action for eleven days. The rivets and plating were replaced. So too was the Captain. Lieutenant Commander Maurice F Oliver RCNR took over in command.

**JULY 20TH, OFF THE COAST OF FRANCE RIVER CLASS FRIGATE *HMCS MATANE K-444* IS STRUCK BY A GLIDER BOMB LAUNCHED AND REMOTELY CONTROLLED BY A GERMAN AIRCRAFT. SHE WOULD BE TOWED TO PORT IN THE U.K. WITH THREE DEAD AND MANY WOUNDED. SHE HAD SUNK A U-BOAT ONLY THREE MONTHS BEFORE**

## Part 5

### CONVOY HXM 301 ST. JOHN'S TO UK 30 JULY – 8 AUGUST

The Convoy departed from New York City on July 25<sup>th</sup>. Five days later the WLEF turned its charges over to C-1 at Westomp again this time with one hundred and thirty one ships in seventeen columns . This was a massive Convoy compared to those even two years earlier. (The largest North Atlantic Convoy of the War had preceded this one, Convoy HX 300 being comprised of one hundred and sixty one ships exclusive of Escorts). The American contingent of ships was again the largest with sixty two vessels and in addition eleven LST's (Landing Ship Tank, which vessel's front doors opened to disgorge Armoured vehicles. Ships such as this were designed for inshore work and must have been difficult to handle at sea). In second place were twenty four British registered vessels followed by fifteen Norwegian ships and then an assortment from five other nations plus the Rescue vessel *HMS Dewsbury*. The troops in France had to be supplied and in some cases the ships would continue on to a Gibraltar bound Convoy to also supply the Italian front. The Convoy carried food stuffs, food, weapons explosives, Gliders and even even railway locomotives. As it had been since 1939, the Convoy carried everything for daily life, and for War.

Forming C-1 with *New Glasgow* were *Chambly*, *Chebogue*, *Fredericton*, *Frontenac*, *Giffard* and *Orangeville*. *New Glasgow's* First Lieutenant Hanbury was in command of the ship. Hall, still nominally Captain of *New Glasgow* was SOE but was aboard *Chebogue*. Yet again, *Chebogue*, *New Glasgow* and *Orangeville* all reported repeated problems and defects with their radar. No fewer than four MAC ships gave air cover with their total of 12 Swordfish aircraft. The MAC ship

*MV Gadilla* was one of two Dutch MAC ships staffed with Dutch aircrew. The Commodore was Rear Admiral Sir Cecil Reyne.

**PROFILE: COMMODORE REAR ADMIRAL SIR CECIL N REYNE**  
 Born in 1881 he joined the Victorian Navy in 1895 as a boy sailor. He served during the Boer War following which he was 'presented' to H.M. King Edward VII. An Executive Officer at the Battle of Jutland during the First War by the end of that conflict he was Captain of the Battle ship HMS *Royal Oak*. He continued to serve in the R.N. until the 1930's. As with so many of his contemporaries he was called up to serve as Commodore in 1939 and served in Convoys until war's end. He died in 1958. His earlier command *Royal Oak* was sunk in 1939 by a U-boat in Scapa Flow.

On the final day of the crossing Lookouts on *New Glasgow* spotted numerous Mines in the water. Mines could be laid by U-boats and free floating Mines such as these were discovered at various times off St. John's, Halifax and Londonderry notwithstanding the Mine sweeping that regularly went on. Initial attempts to destroy them by light gunfire failed but were successful later with six out of eight Mines were blown up using the ship's Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns. Any single German Mine was more than sufficient to destroy a passing Escort. They were designed so that a ship did not actually have to come into contact with the mine but the latter could detonate with its massive explosive charge when a ship passed over it or even nearby. In all ninety six ships would be sunk by U-boat laid Mines in the War and many others damaged.

With the detonation of the Mines the Merchantmen dispersed to their specific destinations (Glasgow,Liverpool,Bristol) and the Escorts entered harbour at Londonderry. The latter had been taken on early in the War as a massive US constructed and funded base but by 1943-44 it

was primarily Canadian and British Escorts who were its users. In its last three Convoys 272 Merchantmen had been Escorted by C-1 across the Atlantic. There was more to come.

**8 AUGUST 1944 CORVETTE *HMCS REGINA* K 324 TORPEDOED BY U-667 OFF THE COAST OF CORNWALL U.K. THE SHIP SINKS IN LESS THAN ONE MINUTE. 30 DEAD. 66 SURVIVORS.**

Letter from Norm:

August 1944

Dear Mom and Alice:

You won't believe it ! We got into Port and were told that because of the time we had before setting out again we would get leave, and almost a week of it. So a bunch of us from the ship went off to London. Wow...never seen anything like it. Great things to see. We stayed at a serviceman's hostel. Saw all the sights including a lot of bomb damage and recent damage from the enemy buzz bombs. We had an alarm one day and went to one of the shelters but nothing happened so it must have gone down somewhere else. BUT, that's not the big news. We were at a Canadian Serviceman's club where you can get a meal and a coffee and we heard that the King and Queen were coming by and doing a tour. I figured the place was lousy with Canadian sailors so I said to one of the fellows lets go down the road to an Allied Service Club that we heard they were visiting first. Well we were the only two Canadian sailors there! I had my camera with me. Sure enough the King himself and the



Queen came in and as they came down the line he saw us and said 'Canada, well done'...he spoke to us! That was all he said but who cares? I have bragging rights when we get back to the ship and as they left I got a couple of shots with my camera. When we get back to (and here the name of St. John's was blacked out by the censor) I will drop the film off at the Rexall drug store downtown and send you the picture. Imagine, the King of England spoke to us! Sure paid to stand out a little. Now let me tell you what else we saw in London....

And here the letter continued...

Part VI  
CONVOY ONE 249 17- 27 AUGUST UK TO ST. JOHN'S

*'You'll get used to it,  
 You'll get used to it,  
 The first year is the worst year, then you'll get used to it  
 You can scream and you can shout  
 But they'll never let you out  
 You'll get used to it'*

From the 1940 Song and stage show 'Meet the Navy.'

The sixth convoy for *New Glasgow* did not get off to the best start. The problem was detected two days after the Merchantmen had left Liverpool and met up with *New Glasgow* and accompanying Escorts for the westward passage. Among the one hundred and fifty four Merchant ships was the American registered *SS Reginald Fessenden*. Two of her crew were quite drunk. Regrettably it was the Captain who was inebriated fighting with the equally drunk Chief Engineer.

Having even one ship in a Convoy of this size (sixteen columns) piloted by one under the influence of alcohol and a near mutiny by the *Fessenden's* officers, the Convoy Commodore, the former Rear Admiral Sir Errol Manners 'put it right' which he did by sending an armed party to the ship and ordering the Captain and the Chief Engineer to be placed under Protective Arrest. Other officers aboard continued the voyage.

## PROFILE: COMMODORE (REAR ADMIRAL) SIR ERROL MANNERS.

Born in 1883 he joined the Royal Navy at age 15. It is an interesting observation to note that the man who would lead this convoy was born when no aircraft had flown and there was no radio or radar. His career span would take him to the era of jet aircraft, Asdic and rockets.

Distinguished service at Jutland in World War 1 and between the Wars saw him as the Naval ADC to King George V in 1934. Holding the Rank of Flag Captain. Retiring as a Rear Admiral he served continuously as Convoy Commodore between 1939 and 1945. His daughter served in the Wrens and all three of his sons served in the RN one being taken prisoner of war in 1942 after an Action at sea and one other son serving as a Destroyer Captain and sinking the last U-boat of the War in April 1945. The last mention son, John Errol Manners died in 2020 age 105 having become a world famous cricketer. His father Sir Errol died in 1953.

Mid-afternoon on the same day of the *Fessenden* incident a Swordfish Aircraft launched from the MAC ship *Alexia* crashed at sea ahead of the Convoy. Typically the Swordfish carried a crew of three, the pilot, the Observer (really the Navigator) and the TAG or Telegraphist Air Gunner who would keep in touch with the home vessel. All three crew men survived the crash and were fished out of the water by *New Glasgow* which had the always unnerving task of stopping briefly while at sea presenting an ideal target should a U-boat make contact.

Bad station keeping by the Merchantmen was an ongoing problem resulting in the Convoy sometimes stretching out for fifteen kilometres and to make things more complicated Westomp was reached and was found to be covered in thick fog. Only two ships had lost the Convoy in

the dense fog that lasted for thirty six hours but the two stragglers were lucky and made Port.

On clearing the Narrows at St. John's Newfoundland *New Glasgow* tied up again as most other warships did, on the south side of the harbour. Refuel, restock and re-arm were the orders of the day. Departure would happen in just eight days.



*HMCS New Glasgow K320* (lead ship). The ship from which the photograph was taken is also a River Class Frigate but of a newer construction as evidenced by her twin 4" forward gun while the early Rivers like *New Glasgow* had but one.

From the collection of Glendon Oliver/ Posterities Sake

**AUGUST 21, CORVETTE *HMCS ALBERNI K 103* TORPEDOED IN THE ENGLISH CHANNEL. THE SHIP SINKS IN LESS THAN ONE MINUTE. 59 MEN DEAD. 31 CREW RESCUED.**

## Part VII

### CONVOY HX306 ST. JOHN'S TO UK SEPTEMBER 5-17

*New Glasgow* sailed out of the narrows at St. John's to rendezvous with WLEF and assume mid Ocean Escort and escort one hundred and twenty-one ships. There were no fewer than four MAC ships with the Convoy, one of which was the *Empire MacCallum* which had been involved earlier in the year with. The accidental sinking of the French Submarine *Perle*. C-1 had been joined for this crossing by the River Class Frigate *HMCS Joliette K 418*. Further, as *Chebogue* had been detached from C-1 for the moment (due to its self inflicted damage) it's place was taken by *HMS Bahamas K503* the first time a British vessel had joined the group.



*HMCS Joliette K 418*

A later built River Class Frigate with twin four inch guns. Wiki.

*Bahamas* was a 'Colony Class' Frigate built in the USA for Britain. Based on the River Class design with some modifications, only twenty three were built. A factor in their limited construction may have been cost. The Colony Class Frigates were almost twice as expensive as the Rivers. Quite simply one reason was that the American Ship Yard

workers were paid a lot more than their British or Canadian counterparts.

Initially the Convoy was arranged in fifteen columns but as the Coast of Britain and Ireland approached the Commodore gave the order to reform into seventeen Columns, which was no mean feat while at sea. Having completed the manoeuvre the Convoy prepared to do something no other Convoy had done since 1940. The Convoy split into two and thirty five of its members would sail through the southern St. George's Channel to their Ports while the remainder took the North Channel (known in the 18th Century as 'the Irish Channel'). As described in Chapter 13 this which was the route that had been exclusively used over the previous four years. When France was lost in 1940 German Air Cover made Convoy entry to west coast British Ports too hazardous to undertake from the approach south of Ireland. That threat had almost completely vanished by September 1944 as Enemy forces were driven deeper into France.

After twelve days at sea as C-1 took their traditional approach towards Londonderry where more Mines were spotted and dealt with by ship's gunfire. U-boats continued to prowl the Atlantic off Halifax and even enter the Gulf of St. Lawrence as late as the Fall of 1944. Yet the majority of U-boat Forces would now sail out of Norway and concentrate their heaviest presence in British waters.

Upon arrival in Londonderry the usual 'first-thing refueling' took place but with a different docking. After several months of hard steaming *New Glasgow* required her boilers to be cleaned. The distilled water from the ships condensers still held salt and the brine that had to be cleaned out. This happy moment meant some extended leave for most of the Crew. Other cleaning and maintenance of the ships electronics and weaponry took place when a small army of specially trained Wren's came on board and disassembled every imaginable thing they could. The

role of WREN's in keeping the ships at sea has been understated but should not be undervalued.



A unique photo of Captain Hall and First Officer Hanbury taken earlier when the ship was en route to Halifax from the west coast. The two Officers seem somewhat bemused by the 19 year old Signalmen taking their photo. NFA

On arrival in Londonderry new orders awaited...a new Captain had been permanently assigned to *New Glasgow*. Ross Malcolm Hanbury RCNVR the long serving First Officer of *New Glasgow* (the 'Jimmy' as all First Officers were called) would assume command. *New Glasgow* was to be moved from North Atlantic Escort duties and join another formation, Escort Group 26...EG 26 whose task it was not merely to escort Merchant ships in Convoy but to actively seek out and destroy U-boats.

Norm had eagerly deposited his film at the Rexall Drug store in St. John's with his photo of the King. No one could have known, least of all him that they would not be back.

Profile: Ross Malcolm Hanbury RCNVR

Lt. Commander Hanbury was born in Vancouver B.C. in 1913. He served with the RCNVR in Winnipeg as an Acting Lieutenant in 1940. He was appointed to *HMCS Avalon* Signals Staff (St. John's Nfld). Since her commissioning he had been the Executive Officer of *New Glasgow*. An accountant both before and after the War with a National Accounting firm, he continued to serve in the RCNVR until 1960. Married with two sons he died May 17th, 2001.



Dawn in Londonderry showing the Corvettes of C-1 from stern of *New Glasgow*. NFA



## Letter from Norm

September 18, 1944

Dear mom and Alice. Like I said in my last letter I dropped off the roll of film with pictures of the King and Queen and some sites we saw in London. Next time I am back to that particular Port I will pick it up at the Rexall Drug store and mail the photos directly to you. We had some excitement on this crossing but I can't write about it but will tell you when I get home. Leave, we got leave while the ship's boilers were cleaned. Hooray! And best of all I got to see brother Lionel! We had our picture taken in London and I will send it to you. He looks great. Now I have to tell you if he hasn't already that Lionel has volunteered to transfer from the medics in his Regiment to the Lincoln and Welland infantry. He says that after he saw what the enemy did to civilians in Holland he wants to have a crack at them. An officer questioned him if he was sure and he said yes...so that's it and he is going back real soon. Don't worry mom, Lionel knows how to take care of himself.

Sometimes I'm sea sick but mostly homesick. Like the rest of the guys though I will stick it out. The best thing of all is to get your mail. Can you make sure you date your letters because sometimes when we get into port there are a lot of them and sometimes I get mail 'on the other side' that maybe should have reached me 'on the near side' and without a date I have to figure out which letter was written first. Lots of love to Dad and Alice's folks, Tom and Nellie Bearchill. Are both Dad and Tom Bearchill still in the Reserve

*Army? And how is sister Beth doing at school? The food on the ship is ok but I can hardly wait to have a meal at home'.*

And here the letter continued...



Norman and his brother Lionel of the Lincoln and Welland Regiment briefly reunited during leave in the UK. In 1942 Lionel and his roommate Howie Meeker had been signed by the Boston Bruins of the National Hockey League. They had a discussion whether they should join up or play professional hockey. They both decided that signing up was the right thing to do. Lionel was severely wounded in combat in Holland but recovered and lived a long happy life with his family in Stratford Ontario. He never lost his love of hockey.

CHAPTER 15  
HUNTER KILLER GROUP EG 26  
OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1944  
THE TORPEDOING OF *HMCS CHEBOUGUE*, *HMS WHITTAKER* &  
*HMS CAPEL*

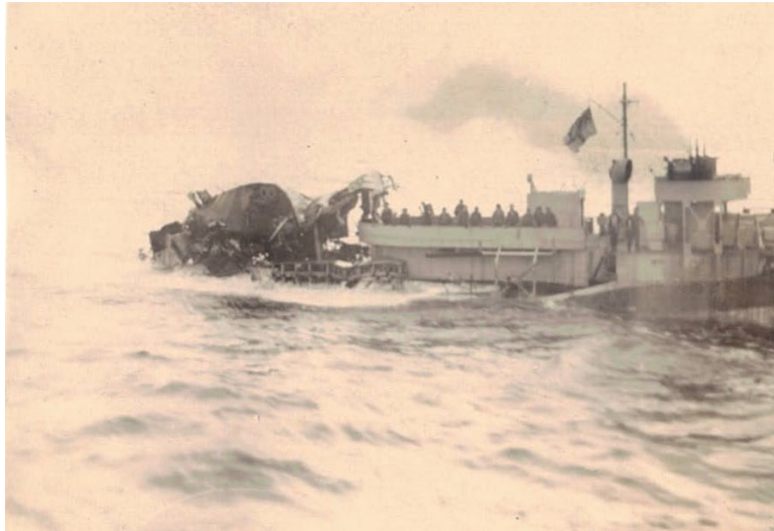
'The issue of the war will clearly depend on our being able to maintain the traffic across the  
Atlantic.'

Telegram from Churchill to Canadian Prime minister Mackenzie King  
Quoted by Deighton. p.122.

The telegram referenced above was sent to the Canadian Prime Minister MacKenzie King at an earlier stage of the War. But its truth was no less relevant as Allied Armies widened their front in Western Europe and required, or rather devoured supplies for themselves and an expanding liberated civilian population. Supplies were still being trucked from the Normandy beachhead. By early September Europe's only deep water Port of Antwerp (excluding Hamburg) was in Allied hands but the River Scheldt Estuary that was essential to gain access to the Port was still in enemy hands and would remain so until late November as the Canadian First Army led the ferocious battle there with its consummate courage and resolve.

EG 26. It meant the 26th Escort Group whose task was to Escort Convoys passing through its designated area but whose other principle task was to hunt down U-boats. Escorts had once been a shield in the War, now they were to be a sword. Yet the Enemy continued to fight. *New Glasgow's* duties as part of EG 26 began on October 5th, 1944. Along with RCN Frigates *HMCS Ribble* and *HMCS Jonquiere* their first task was to come to the aid of RCN River Class Frigate *HMCS*

*Chebogue K317* which had been torpedoed the day previously while sailing with C-1, *New Glasgow's* former group.



River Class Frigate *Chebogue* torpedoed showing starboard stern damage from GNAT torpedo.  
NFA

*Chebogue*...from the Mi'kmaw word for big marshes. The *Chebogue* salt marsh extends alongside the *Chebogue* River in southern Nova Scotia near Yarmouth. The tranquility of the Marshlands for which it was named were in stark contrast to the scene of killing far out in the Atlantic.

In the Autumn of 1943 German Engineers had perfected a new type of torpedo. It was meant to be an 'Escort killer' and so it would prove. It was the 'Zaunkoning' ('Wren' in German) known to the Allies as the GNAT (German Naval acoustic Torpedo). It was a torpedo that once fired homed in on the loudest noise being the engine of a surface Escort. With a range of almost six kilometres and travelling at twenty-four knots this 'fire and forget' weapon meant a U-boat could stand off from a group of Escorts and while remaining silent itself could wait for a detonation.

Experiencing the GNAT in 1943 the Allies had developed a countermeasure. The Canadian design was the simplest and very effective, it was known as the CAT or Canadian Anti-acoustic Torpedo Gear. One might think of a somewhat larger than life wind chime. Three lengths of steel pipe lashed loosely together so they would make a lot clanging noise when towed three hundred feet or so behind the ship made an awful racket that would draw the acoustic torpedo towards it. It could be deployed by one or two men from the ships stern when travelling at less than maximum speed. 'Deploy the CAT 'or 'throw the CAT' out were orders often given on RCN ships by 1944.



Retrieving CAT Gear back aboard *New Glasgow*. NFA

When *Valleyfield* had been torpedoed earlier in 1944 her CAT gear was not deployed as noted by the monthly U-boat Report issuing from Western Approaches Command at Derby House in Liverpool. But there was a weakness to CAT gear. If a GNAT was fired head on directly towards a ship towing CAT it could still explode under the ship when it

encountered the crashing noise of the ships engines. *HMCS Chebogue* had her CAT gear out and yet...

With Lieutenant Commander Hall, formerly of *New Glasgow* acting as SOE with C-1 escorting convoy ONS 33 a GNAT torpedo fired by U-1227 had stuck a fatal blow to *Chebogue* eight hundred miles west of the British Isles. ONS 33 was the first 'Slow' Convoy after their suspension in March as available Escorts were reassigned from the North Atlantic to cover the D-Day invasion of June. The resumption of slow Convoys with ONS 33 was marked with the torpedoing of *HMCS Magog K673* in the St. Lawrence River and ultimately near the end of the Convoy's voyage by the strike on *Chebogue*. These were the waters *New Glasgow* had only recently vacated. Seven men on *Chebogue* were killed and thirty-three feet of her stern was blown off. Norman used his camera and like all aboard saw the damage to the ship.



*Chebogue*, Port Side. NFA.

Taken in tow by *Ribble* while screened by *New Glasgow* and *Jonquiere*, the weather worsened and the tow broke. Finally a deep sea tug took *Chebogue*, still bearing the bodies of her entombed Crewmen to Swansea Bay in the Bristol Channel. Examined by Naval Engineers she





By October 24th EG 26 was back at sea. Patrolling the waters near Northern Ireland and Western Scotland EG-26 acted in concert with the British EG-1 as 'Force 33' with the RN Frigate *HMS Affleck* as SOE. During this time Force 33 acted in support of Convoys escorting no fewer than three Convoys passing through their patrol area.

It was while escorting one of these Convoys off the North Coast of Ireland as part of Force 33 that in the early morning hours of November 1st, RN Frigate *HMS Whitaker K 580* was struck by two *F.A.T.* torpedos off the Port side of *New Glasgow*. At the same moment *HMS Capel K 470*, another Captain Class Frigate sailing with *New Glasgow*, was hit by a third torpedo. *Capel* sank very quickly and 75 men died.

Like all German torpedos these were equipped with electric motors so as to leave no wake, unlike what is often depicted in film. The *F.A.T.* torpedo (*Federapparat* Torpedo) was fired and then wandered back and forth including 180 degree turns until it hit something. It's application was to fire the *F.A.T.* towards a collection of Merchantmen or in this case a screen of Escorts, at a speed of more than twenty-four knots with a range of five kilometres.

Originally constructed for the United States Navy *Whittaker* was the first 'Captain Class' Frigate to enter the RN. A much improved design from the River Class with a top speed of twenty-four knots her speed did not avail her on this occasion. Struck off Malin Head Northern Ireland the explosion and fires killed ninety-one men instantly. Like *Chebogue* she did not sink but was a constructive total loss. An intensive Box Search for the attacking U-boat was conducted by *New Glasgow* with *HMCS Swansea* and *HMS Affleck* which search continued for days, but without result. *Affleck*, having no fewer than four previous U-boat kills to her credit was herself torpedoed later in December.



Force 33 continued its duties patrolling near Northern Ireland but given aircraft sightings it ventured back into the Atlantic in support of four inbound Convoys The hunt for U-boats was briefly suspended on November 17th due to horrendous seas and weather conditions.

By December 1st, EG 26 and *New Glasgow* were detached from Force 33 and given a new Patrol zone encompassing a broad stretch of the English Channel and the French Coast. Mines were again spotted and destroyed by gunfire.



Frigates of EG 26. NFA

L to R: *Beacon Hill*, *New Glasgow*, *Ribble*, *Jonquiere*, *Montreal*.

On the continent the Battle of the Bulge raged as German forces sought to retake Antwerp and divide the Allied Armies as they had in 1940. Christmas 1944 was spent by many in Canada hoping for an end to this war without end. For the crew of *New Glasgow* it was spent at sea and as the image below reveals, spent not by a Christmas tree but penetrating a Minefield. In pursuit of an elusive U-boat contact.

NAVAL MESSAGE					
For use in Signal Department only		<div style="text-align: right;"> 1944  1944  also see 1945  706 </div>			
Originators Instructions: (Indication of Priority, Intercept Group, etc.)				--IMPORTANT-- No. of Groups:	
TO:			FROM:		
C in C Portsmouth			S.O.E.G. 26		
Write Across	Note:				
Your 241520.	Intend sweeping up eastern side of minefield.				5
On Hartland Point bearing 0909	New Glasgow detach and proceed to				10
S.E. corner Lundy Island and carry out search close inshore twice					15
around. On completion New Glasgow carry out patrol on line from					20
Hartland Point to N.E. corner of minefield. Beacon Hill and					25
Jonquiere will sweep through Aircraft reported position then East.					30
search commencing to westward of datum. Intend entering minefield					35
only on radar contact or on sighting.					40
					45
					50
System S.P.	P/L Code or Cypher P.L.	Time of Receipt Despatch 1415		Operator	Date 24-12-44 24 Dec 12 1944

Signal document of December 25th, 1944 cases with the chilling words 'Intend entering minefield only on radar contact or on sighting'. NFA document.

By January the Group was patrolling off the Normandy Coast and Cherbourg, France. The German Naval High Command kept U-boats operating on the shores of Canada but reassigned the bulk of the U-boat forces to waters surrounding the United Kingdom. Contacts of U-boats or suspected U-boats were nearly constant. As the list below reveals, it was a bloody time for the RCN.

**OCTOBER 8, 1944 THE BANGOR CLASS MINESWEEPER *HMCS MULGRAVE J313* STRIKES AN ENEMY MINE WHILE SWEEPING IN THE ENGLISH CHANNEL. THE SHIP DOES NOT SINK BUT IS DECLARED A CONSTRUCTIVE TOTAL LOSS .**

**OCTOBER 14, FRIGATE *HMCS MAGOG K673* TORPEDOED BY U-1223 WHILE ESCORTING CONVOY ONS 33 IN THE GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE. DECLARED A CONSTRUCTIVE TOTAL LOSS. 3 MEN DIE AND 3 ARE SEVERELY WOUNDED.**

**OCTOBER 25 DESTROYER *HMCS SKEENA D59* SINKS NEAR VIOEY ISLAND, ICELAND DURING A VICIOUS ATLANTIC STORM. 15 MEN DROWN.**

**NOVEMBER 24 CORVETTE *HMCS SHAWINIGAN K163* TORPEDOED IN THE CABOT STRAIT GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE. ENTIRE CREW OF 90 MEN LOST.**

**DECEMBER 24. BANGOR CLASS MINESWEEPER *HMCS CLAYOQUOT J 174* TORPEDOED OFF HALIFAX NOVA SCOTIA NEAR SAMBRO LIGHT. 8 MEN KILLED.**

### **1945**

**FEBRUARY 14, FIVE RCN *MOTOR TORPEDO BOATS MTB 459,461,462,465 & 466* DESTROYED IN AN EXPLOSION AND FIRE IN OSTEND BELGIUM. 26 MEN ARE KILLED.**

**FEBRUARY 22 CORVETTE *HMCS TRENTONIAN K368* TORPEDOED IN ENGLISH CHANNEL. 6 MEN KILLED.**

**MARCH 17. BANGOR CLASS MINESWEEPER *HMCS GUYSBOROUGH J 52* TORPEDOED OFF THE COAST OF FRANCE. TWO MEN DIE IN THE EXPLOSION AND ANOTHER 49 MEN DIE IN THE WATER WHILE AWAITING RESCUE.**

Letter from Norm:

JANUARY, 1945

Dear Mom and Alice;

Do I ever miss home. Ive sure seen a lot. Too much I think. Ive seen men in the water. Ive seen ships hit by torpedo. I know you worry about me but I guess we all have to stick through this until its over. And from what the newspapers say it may be later this year that the job is finished. Feeling homesick is worse than feeling seasick but I know both will end and there sure are a lot of guys feeling homesick besides me. There are guys who have been at sea for over 5 years, or in Britain for more than five years, or locked up as a POW for five years ! How do they do it? So I'm the lucky one and promise to get home to you. Things are busy for sure but maybe they will quiet down and we will escape any more action. That Christmas package you sent was the best ever....

And here the letter continued...

## CHAPTER 16

### THE RAMMING OF U-1003

March 20th, 1945

For although it's not admitted,  
We Glory-Seekers be,  
And we want to sink a U-boat,  
Before we leave the Sea!

From the poem 'HMCS Disregard' written at sea March 1st 1945 by Leading Coder Thomson and Signalman NF Ayre *HMCS New Glasgow*. See Appendix 5

In the west, the Rhine had not yet been crossed by Allied armies. That would not happen for another three days. The last of almost 7,000 V-1 German Buzz-bombs and 9,000 V-2 Rockets were still being fired on London and more on Antwerp.

With the loss of the Channel Ports the U-boats sailed from Bergen Norway to sink all that they could on the Channel, the Irish Sea, the Atlantic and even yet off the shores of Nova Scotia. Thus U-1003, a 500 ton Type VII U-boat, being part of the 11th Flotilla of U-boats slipped her moorings in Bergen Norway on February 9th and headed out to sea on its second wartime patrol north of Ireland under the Command of her Captain Oberleutenant-zur-See Werner Strübing of the Kriegsmarine. To this point U-1003 had had no success in finding a target having sighted only one 'Destroyer' in the fog and not being in a position to fire. Most German reports referred to every surface Escort as 'Destroyers' not making any distinction between Frigates/Corvettes or an actual Destroyer.

At first light on March 19th when running on the surface the U-boat came under aerial attack by an RAF Patrol aircraft. The attack was

unsuccessful but the next 24 hours were to prove fateful for the submarine.

Steaming north at 15 knots in line abreast with each ship separated by about 1.5 kilometres, came *Ribble*, *New Glasgow*, *Sussexvale* and *Beacon Hill*. Their CAT gear was out producing a sound described by the U-boat survivors like '*circular saws*' which sound was not reported to the U-boat Captain. U-1003 was running on her diesels courtesy of the schnorkel. It worked well but a feature of the snorkel was that it made a lot of noise.

The German U-boat did not detect the four Escorts. But then none of the four Escorts picked up the U-boat on their radar, something that should have occurred if they had been equipped with the latest centimetric radar, which they were not. Had they been so equipped with the latest centimetric radar, a schnorkel once deployed would have produced an identifiable radar target.

According to the *New Glasgow's* Captain, Lieutenant-Commander Hanbury, "*A lookout reported the sound of what appeared to be a low flying aircraft. A few seconds later he reported it as an object in the water, very close. Then we spotted the schnorkel...He must have seen us and tried to get away but we kept straight on and knew we would collide with him. We hit with a crash.*" (source RCN Press Release.

Londonderry N.I. 1945 see Bibliography.)

With the sighting the U-boat the Officer of the Watch signalled full speed ahead as the Coxswain sounded Action Stations and then U-boat's periscope and schnorkel made contact with the ship's Port side below the Bridge. Too late to dive deeper the submarine slithered down the hull of the Frigate from stem to stern.

In the seamen's mess the impact was so strong it snapped the hammock straps of men who had been sleeping plunging seaman George's Desjardins down to the deck. (Mossery. see Bibliography)

NAVAL MESSAGE					
For use in Signal Department only					
Originators Instructions: (Definition of Priority, Intercept Group, etc.)					No. of Groups:
TO: C in C W.A.					FROM: Beacon Hill
Write Across	New Glasgow Report on U-boat 016° Lough Foyle 11 miles. 5				
	--202395A 10				
	15				
	20				
	25				
	30				
	35				
	40				
	45				
	50				
System 1740 HES	P/L Code or Cypher F.C.	Time of Receipt 2227 H	Operator OH	Date 22-3-45	

Signal sent by *Beacon Hill* with a copy to *New Glasgow* to Commander in Chief Western Approaches. Message recorded by NFA.

According to the Navigating Officer, Lieutenant Jack Macbeth, who was in the Chart House below the Bridge, with the collision the 1500 ton Frigate "*lurched upward and over to starboard, as though some gigantic fist had reached down from the inky sky to pluck her from the sea and fling her aside. An ugly grating grinding noise, like steel on rock, pierced the midnight silence.*" (Ready, Aye Ready. Macbeth p. 98 see Bibliography). *New Glasgow* started to take on water. Norman had been in the mess and anyone asleep was now wide awake. With the Alarm for

Action stations he went to his loading position on the forward 4" gun as star shell was fired to light up the sky.

*New Glasgow's* hull was holed in four separate places and her propellor shaft and one ten foot wide propeller blade were bent.



*New Glasgow* propellor as photographed in dry dock by NFA

With water pouring into the holes, two after compartments of the ship were flooded, but the First Officer Lieutenant Ian Chenowith RCNVR of Montreal, quickly organized a damage control party as well as getting clothing to men who had jumped out of their hammocks when Action Stations was sounded and had gone to their Battle Stations on deck or elsewhere in the ship dressed or undressed as they were. It is worth noting that this officer with all these responsibilities was not much older than Norman. Lieutenant Chenoworth was 23 years old!

Perhaps reflecting the poor quality and rushed training for U-boat crews at this stage of the war the GSR (German search radar) operators



had picked up a strong signal of approaching vessels but failed to report it to their officers. The GSR was a device that allowed the U-boat to know when it had been picked up by enemy radar even up to a distance of ten miles. The operators had picked up a signal strength 4 when a weaker signal should have merited reporting. The German crew had also heard the sound of the towed CAT gear. When struck the U-boat listed wildly out of control. The Captain ordered the diesel engines to be shut down and running on her batteries the submarine bottomed violently.

*New Glasgow* was not finished yet. Along with *Sussexvale* and *Ribble* they "*illuminated the area with star shells and rockets. Nothing was seen and no asdic contact was obtained by any ship.*" (Report on Interrogation of U-1003 Survivors) Temperature layering of the sea waters and an irregular sea floor gave U-1003 a temporary respite. Also with over seven hundred submerged ship wrecks on the ocean floor in Britains coastal waters distinguishing a wreck from a stationary submarine was more than difficult. Repeated searches were conducted and *New Glasgow* stayed engaged until approximately 11 am that day when other vessels joined the search for the enemy. For three days a powerful group of no fewer than fourteen Escorts from EG 26, C-4 and C-25 looked to kill the heavily damaged U-1003. It would prove not to be necessary.

The collision had rocked the submarine thirty degrees. The U-boat dived on its electric motors until striking the sea floor. After a few minutes they were being depth charged with five exploding in the immediate vicinity, shaking the submarine violently. Another thirty depth charges were dropped but after two hours Strübing quietly proceeded submerged and proceeded very slowly westward on his electric motors, all the time hearing the sound of continuous propellor noises nearby.

**NAVAL MESSAGE**

For use in  
Signal  
Department  
only

Originators Instructions:  
(Indication of Priority,  
Intercept Group, etc.)

~~SECRET~~ ~~EMERGENCY~~

No. of Groups: 1

TO: C in C.W.A.

FROM: New Glasgow

1945

Write Across				
	* Beacon Hill's 202325A.	(U-boat) Schnorkel sighted broad on port bow		5
	close in when steering course 010.	* Sighted periscope and		10
	Schnorkel which passed under bridge from port to starboard.			15
	ultimate course of U-boat 120° speed 2 knots.			20
	(Impact was quite severe and lifted ship out of water).	Do		25
	(not consider U-boat totally damaged)	(No apparent damage)		30
	(suffered by New Glasgow).			35
			--202358A	40
				45
				50

System 1740 ACS	P/L Code or Cypher -A-	Time of Receipt 2 332 Z	Operator SP	Date 20-3-45
--------------------	---------------------------	-------------------------------	----------------	-----------------

Further signal by *New Glasgow*. NFA

U-1003 proceeded this way for over twenty-four hours by which time the submarine's batteries were almost exhausted. After two days of what must have been abject misery for her Crew with the air inside barely breathable, U-1003 surfaced. The Conning Tower hatch had to be forced open. They had no radio and several gauges were useless. Part of the Bridge structure was buckled, the schnorkel was smashed and bent over. The U-boat's attack periscope (which had been deployed at the time of the ramming) was damaged and one of the anti aircraft guns on it's deck had been completely dismounted.

Considerable water had entered the U-boat and its Conning tower started to flood with pumping only to be interrupted by the signal of an approaching Escort. Again the submarine dived taking on three tons of water. They stayed another twenty-four hours on the bottom at a depth of eighty metres. Time and options were running out.

Strübing's initial idea to make for the Irish coast and internment was abandoned after surfacing one more time due to the low batteries when again they detected that an Escort's radar signal had located them. Strübing decided to scuttle his U-boat at once.

Unfortunately for the U-boat crew only two of three of the inflatable rafts would inflate. Some men got in the rafts and some wearing their life jackets got in the water. The submarine's vents were opened and she sank. Sixteen crew men died in the freezing waters. In the early morning of March 23rd, thirty-one men, including Strübing, were picked up by *HMCS Thetford Mines* and taken to Londonderry for Interrogation. The Captain would not be interrogated, expiring from hypothermia before reaching shore.



*New Glasgow* post encounter with U-1003 in a Drydock built for Battleships. Rosyth. Scotland.

NFA

By this stage of the war, crewmen on U-boats were lucky indeed to survive encounters with Escort Groups. The U-boats sank over 3000 ships of all kinds in the Battle of the Atlantic. But in the course of this narrative the writer has highlighted RCN losses and only *Whittaker* and *Affleck* are the only referenced RN losses. Many more Escorts were sunk and many Escorts sank even more U-boats. The complete narrative of Allied and U-boat sinking is beyond the scope of this work. It is worth noting that of the approximately eight hundred and fifty U-boats built and commissioned during the War over 700 would be sunk by Allied vessels and aircraft entombing their crews in the most wretched of coffins. Of forty thousand German U-boat sailors only ten thousand would survive the War.

*New Glasgow* had been damaged but was able to make for the Royal Navy dockyards at Portsmouth where divers examined the ships hull and propellers. The Port Admiral made the decision that repairs would be effected at Rosyth near Edinburgh. So for the first and last time *New Glasgow* made it's way into the North Sea and entered a dry dock that was large enough for a Battleship. There her damage was assessed and repairs begun, that were be completed by the end of May. In the first week of that month, the struggle in Europe ended with the enemy's unconditional surrender.

It was just in time. On May 5th a German Type XXI submarine tracked a British Battle Cruiser at sea. It was one of the new type of submarines that could travel faster underwater than it could on the surface and faster than any Corvette or Frigate. It could stay submerged longer than any earlier version and attack in almost complete silence. The U-boat Commander later reported that the British Warship had no idea they were there. He did not fire. Over one hundred such submarines had been built but only two had been commissioned. The rest lay shattered in the stocks or blasted at their anchorages by air raids. Had the construction race begun earlier history may have unfolded differently.

On May 8th, 1945 U-boats began popping up in the Atlantic, the English Channel and the Irish Sea. Under orders to surface and surrender most Captains complied. Some submarine crews scuttled their vessels. Two U-boats, U-977 and U-530 ran for Argentina where the crews were promptly interned. U-190 which had sunk *Esquimalt* was towed to Bay Bulls Newfoundland. Two years later in 1947 the submarine was sunk by the RCN in a target practice exercise off Halifax at the location where she had torpedoed *Esquimalt*.

On May 8th, while *New Glasgow* was in dry dock, the European War ended but in a final flourish of hatred that same day a U-boat torpedoed

and sank two Merchant ships, the Norwegian *SS Sneland* and the Canadian Registered *Avondale Park*.

**MARCH 29. RIVER CLASS FRIGATE *HMCS Teme* K458 TORPEDOED. FOUR MEN DIE. THE SHIP IS DECLARED A TOTAL LOSS.**

**APRIL 16. MINESWEEPER *HMCS Esquimalt* J 272 TORPEDOED OFF HALIFAX NOVA SCOTIA NEAR CHEBUCTO HEAD. FORTY-FOUR MEN DIE IN THE EXPLOSION AND EXPOSURE IN THE WATER WHILE AWAITING RESCUE.**



*NEW GLASGOW UNOFFICIAL PENNANT*

## CHAPTER 17

### RETURNING HOME

On May 30th the dry dock at Rosyth was flooded and *New Glasgow* returned to sea. Firstly to Londonderry and then they received orders to proceed to Canada via St. John's. It was not to be and Norm was to not return there to collect his film until he arrived as a tourist in the 1980's by which time the Drug Store where he had left it at had closed only a few years earlier.

*New Glasgow* sailed home under the command of a new Commanding officer. As of March 28th Lieutenant Eric Theodore P. Wennberg RCNVR took the ship home and remained in command until her de-commissioning in November of that year. Wennberg had actually been slated to take command in early March upon *New Glasgow's* next return to Londonderry but U-1003 got in the way.

Profile: Lt Commander Erik Theodor P. Wennberg

Born in London, England in 1911 he had moved to Canada by 1926. He served during the War on the Corvettes *Dauphin* and *Frontenac* until his appointment as Commanding Officer of *New Glasgow*. Married with children he retired from Stelco after after 45 years of prewar and post war service. He died in Saint John N.B in 2002.

During its transit of the Atlantic the ship was ordered to proceed to Pictou instead of St. John's and thence New York, then through the Digby Gut to Cornwallis and finally to Halifax in July. It was likely that Halifax Harbour was simply too crowded with returning vessels for *New Glasgow* to berth there. Upon dropping anchor, the Captain would have signalled 'Finished with Engines' and her crew would have descended the gangplank for the last time.

With his service at sea Norm was allowed leave but he was also presented with the option of volunteering for service in the Pacific as the war with Japan still raged. Before any decision could be made Hiroshima and Nagasaki rendered the need to make a decision irrelevant. Like thousands of other members of the RCN and all Canadian Services personnel the discharge process began. Armed with his travel orders he took the train once more to London, Ontario. His parents Arthur, Anne and and the young woman who had waited patiently, Alice, met him at the train station still wearing his uniform. After reporting to *HMCS Prevost* where he had signed up two and a half years earlier he was finally discharged from the Royal Canadian Volunteer Reserve.

It was over.



Letter from Norm:

August 15, 1945

Dear Mom and Alice

You've probably seen the news about the American bombs dropped in Japan. It looks like this thing is going to be over and I won't have to go to the Pacific ! Hooray ! I have sent you a telegram and you will of course get it before this letter but I should be home sooner than later. They sent me here to St. Hyacinthe to do documentation before I am discharged.

I have to tell you a story though. They gave everybody a thorough medical check teeth, eyes the whole thing. After I did the vision check the Doctor looked at me and said ' how did you ever get in the Navy with that bad vision? ' Yikes...I guess the salt and cold had something to do with it. I didn't say anything to him, he was an officer but I figure being home will fix me up pretty soon. I don't need glasses just not yet.

Can't wait to be home.

Love

Norm

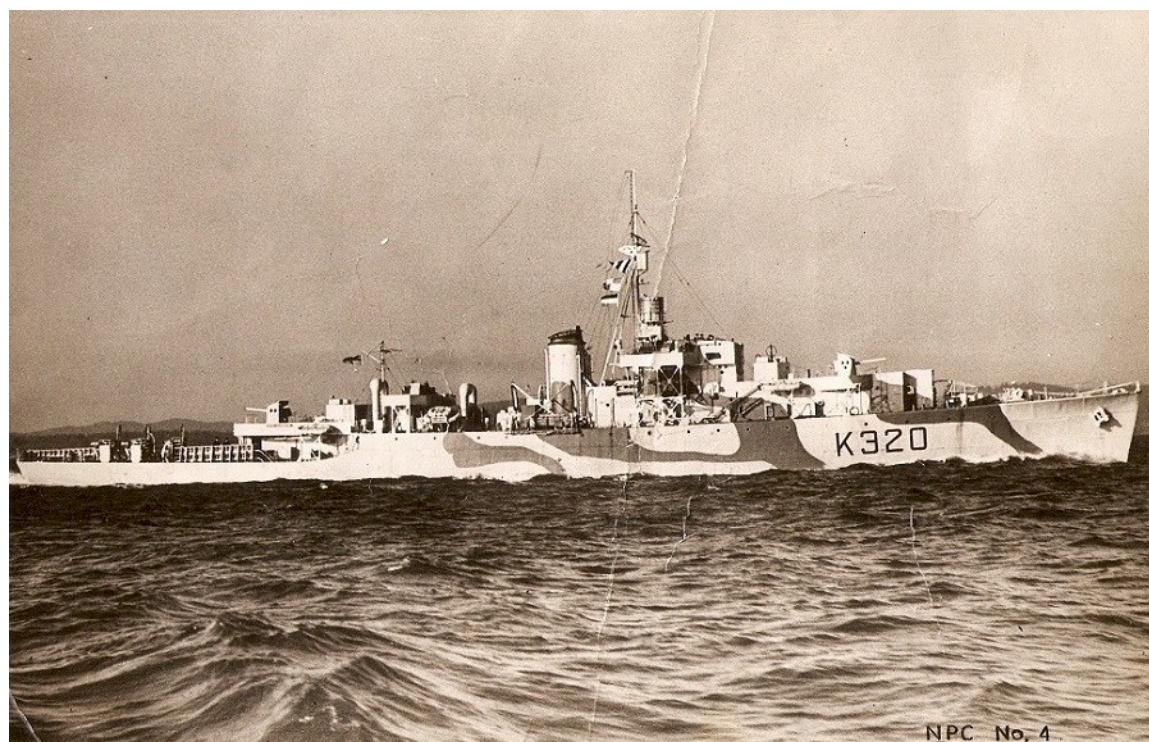
## CHAPTER 18

### THE RESURRECTION OF THE NEW GLASGOW, PRESTONIANS, THE PACIFIC AND HOLLYWOOD

Having been laid up after the War the *New Glasgow* escaped the fate of all but one Corvette (*Sackville*) most of which were sold or scrapped. However successful in their original wartime role it was not a surprise that the Corvettes had outlived their usefulness. *Sackville* escaped and ironically lived on because she had been so worn out from fighting the Atlantic that she had been identified for conversion to a peace time role even before hostilities ended.

As for the River Class Frigates they faced a different collective fate. Some had of course been sunk or like *Chebogue* damaged beyond repair. Others were scrapped or sold to other Nations but a few were paid off and mothballed, like *New Glasgow* and were anchored at Sorel Quebec in late 1945 only later to be resurrected in a new and, for the time, improved form of anti-submarine warship. They lost their old classification as River Class Frigates and once converted at the Canadian Vickers Ltd yard in Montreal they and several other survivors of the Battle of the Atlantic became known as 'Prestonians'.

What was a Prestonian? The Prestonian was simply the name of the first such ship of twenty one to be Commissioned in its class and all others that followed bore that 'class' designation. As a former River Class Frigate (as all Prestonians were) she had originally been commissioned during the war as *HMCS Prestonian* K662, and was named after the town of Preston, Ontario.



*New Glasgow* as a River Class 1943. DND



*New Glasgow* as a Prestonian 1950's. DND

Modernization included anti-submarine squid mortars linked to the Asdic, a cafeteria for the crew to eat in instead of a mess table under suspended hammocks as well as bunks to replace the use of hammocks. Creature comforts such as refrigeration and air-conditioning were introduced as well as many electronic warfare systems. The old *New Glasgow* was completely transformed.

On January 30<sup>th</sup> 1954 the RCN brought the *New Glasgow* back into Commission and she sailed from Halifax in February of that year. Prior to departure the Captain received a silver tray from the citizens of New Glasgow N.S. presented by Mayor Roy Bennett of that city and Alistair Fraser Lieutenant Governor of the Province who was himself a native of New Glasgow. Crossing westbound through the Panama Canal she sailed for the place of her birth, Esquimalt where she joined the Pacific Command and training ensued. The year 1954 involved trips along the American coast as far south as Los Angeles. Something happened in Los Angeles because, although scheduled to return to Esquimalt with the Canadian aircraft carrier *HMCS Magnificent*, engine repairs kept her in harbour and *Magnificent* sailed home alone.

A movie Director by the name of John Farrow was filming a movie entitled '*The Sea Chase*' starring actors John Wayne and Lana Turner. Farrow asked if he could enlist the services of *New Glasgow* for three or four days assuming all costs such as fuel and docking. Clearly he had a healthy budget. So it was that *New Glasgow* starred in a Hollywood movie.



John Wayne front row centre with crewman from New Glasgow.  
Photo from Esquimalt Museum by L Bergman.

An Australian by birth Farrow had left the United States in 1939 to join the Canadian Navy. He served in a number of land based positions but was medically discharged in 1942 after becoming very sick while serving in Trinidad. He returned to Hollywood.



The author is in no way an expert film critic, but having obtained a copy of the film not even the presence of Lana Turner saves the movie. John Wayne played the role of a German Sea Captain! Lana of course is

the femme fatale and the *New Glasgow* is supposedly a British Destroyer. But part of the crew of the *New Glasgow* had their photo taken with John Wayne and had a story to tell their children. Farrow would win an Oscar in 1957, but it was for '*Around the World in Eighty Days*' not for '*Sea Chase*'.

The year 1955 saw a cruise to Pearl Harbour Hawaii all the while the ship's schedule was filled with training and exercises. The Cold War was on and both Russia and China were potential enemies. In 1956 she passed again through the Panama Canal to take part in exercises in the Caribbean and by April she had returned again, for the final time to the Pacific. It was that year that *New Glasgow* participated in a very lengthy scientific voyage on Project Norpac to the Kodiak islands. The year 1957 saw continuous training between refits in the waters off Comox and the Queen Charlotte Islands (Haida G'waii). Later that year, *New Glasgow* was paid off and entered into Reserve. But it was not quite over. One reason for the paying off was a shortage of manpower and thus she was put into a civilian yard for refit.

Recommissioned again in 1958 her duties were those typical of ships in peacetime. In August 1959 with one of her crewmen quite ill a helicopter transfer happened off San Diego, a far cry from the use of the whaleboat in 1944. 1960 brought a cruise to Japan where the locals were described as being embarrassingly helpful. Departure from Japan took the ship to Midway and then Pearl Harbour. Often accompanied by other American and Canadian vessels, from time to time she would sail with old companions, such as *Beacon Hill* also converted into Prestonian Class. Hawaii was not the final stop when for the first time the ship crossed the equator and docked in New Zealand. Various stops at Dunedin and Auckland and Wellington were made. Then came a voyage to Australia and the entry to Sydney harbour. By April of 1961 and she was headed back home but not without having had a collision with



*Beacon Hill* during manoeuvring exercises. A watertight patch at Pearl Harbour was the answer. The amount of paper work to explain a peace time collision to Naval Headquarters is unimaginable.

In April 1963 while serving out of Esquimalt, the West German frigates *Hipper* and *Graf Spee* (both were namesakes of German Capital ships of in the War) were visiting and *New Glasgow* was the host ship for the occasion. The War was well and truly over.

*New Glasgow* would serve in many capacities, primarily as a warship but also on scientific duties in 1956 as a survey ship in the North Pacific sailing as far north as the most westerly Alaskan islands. Finally though, after other extensive voyages to Hawaii and up and down the BC Coast, she had simply grown old.

Service on the *New Glasgow* would claim a life long after she was sold and scrapped. A man named Harvey Friesen who had served on the *New Glasgow* contracted lung cancer likely, his doctors said from his service on the ship in the 1960's. It appears that in her converted Prestonian version the ship's pipes had been sprayed, wrapped and insulated in asbestos which caused his illness. This well intentioned but horribly misguided application of asbestos based on the knowledge of the time was meant to act as fire suppression in case the ship was hit. A National Union took on the issue on behalf of shipyard workers who had worked with and applied the asbestos. Sadly, Saskatchewan born Harry Friesen died of cancer in 2007, age 73 having served his country aboard the *New Glasgow*.

The end came when the *New Glasgow*, along with *HMCS Ste. Therese*, *HMCS Sussexvale* and *HMCS Antigonish* were sold to a Vancouver based Japanese consortium in early 1967 for the total price of \$168,000. She was broken up in a Japanese shipyard later that year.

*HMCS Hallowell K666* is the sole World War II Canadian River Class Frigate to survive in naval service although in a highly modified form having been sold post war to the Israeli Navy and thence to the Royal Ceylon Navy (as it was then called) where it remains a training vessel in Trincomalee. A similar fate awaited *HMS Fal* a British River Class Frigate that was sold post war to the Burmese (Myanmar) Government where she is preserved as a museum ship.

There is but one remaining River Class Frigate in the world today, still in her Navy configuration, being *HMAS Diamantina K377* located at the Queensland Maritime Museum in Brisbane Australia. See...

[maritimemuseum.com.au](http://maritimemuseum.com.au) Commissioned in April 1945 the ship saw action in the Pacific and was modernized in her later years but she remains a true copy in many respects of *New Glasgow* and others of her class. Finally there is one other partial floating example of a River Class Frigate. *HMCS Stormont K327* which served in the North Atlantic and at Normandy. On first being Commissioned in 1943 she was commanded by a prewar Merchant Captain who had served as an alternate Captain for the iconic Canadian Schooner *Bluenose*. After doing her work ups in St. Margaret's Bay Nova Scotia she went to war. At war's end the ship was sold to a Greek shipping concern and ultimately ended in the hands of a very rich man named Aristotle Onassis who spent millions reconfiguring the once proud warship into a floating palace of conspicuous consumption. Named *Christina* after his daughter the ship is still afloat for those rich enough to engage her services. As a River Class Frigate during the War *Stormont* (now *Christina*) even escorted a Convoy on the Murmansk run to Russia. From the freezing waters of the Barents Sea to a retirement in the somewhat warmer Mediterranean is a happy retirement for any ship.



## CHAPTER 19

### CONCERNING SIGNALMAN NORMAN F AYRE

'The battles of the sea bear of course, no physical trace of the events that transpired in those places; wind and water wipe the debris from the surface in a few days, even hours, and the depths engulf the ships and the men that fell victim to the action. Land battles are marked more lastingly.'

John Keegan. *Price of Admiralty*.

Keegan could have made the observation that the all too numerous Cemeteries of Commonwealth War Graves Commission can be frequently found in Western European Countries. Thousands of soldier's and airmen's graves with only a few sailors interred therein stand in mute but compelling testimony to Canadian lives lost. No such markers exist at sea for the thousands of Merchant mariners and naval personnel who died on the Atlantic and elsewhere.

Signalman Norman F Ayre returned home to London Ontario and to Alice with whom he had an '*understanding*' since his departure in 1942. The 'understanding' was formalized in December 1946 when they wed and lived happily until Norm's passing.

He would teach his daughter Joan and her brother to play cribbage and to sing '*Roll Along Wavy-Navy*' and occasionally he would talk about his wartime experiences. Every Christmas his son (this writer) would see that the very last gift for him under the Christmas tree was a can of stewed apricots. He laughed every year even as he passed the gift back.



Before leaving for the War he had worked for a company that was owned by a man named Roy Hill. Upon his return Mr. Hill met him and noted that even at his young age, Norm was a veteran and immediately offered him a job with his newly named company Hilroy School Supplies. And there Norm worked until his retirement.

As his memory failed from vascular dementia the Nurses in Parkwood Veterans Hospital in London Ontario made sure that beside the bed of each patient/veteran was a photo of the elderly men, whom they affectionately called 'their boys' in their wartime uniforms. When visiting I could sing to him 'Roll Along Wavy Navy' and occasionally evoke a smile. Even as his recent memories slowly vanished, in his last months his recollection of the Morse Code he had learned so many years before actually returned. He died in Alice's arms on May 5th, 2005 in London, Ontario, almost sixty years to the day from the end of the Battle of the Atlantic.



NFA on leave, Edinburgh Castle. Scotland. 1945. NFA

### About the Author:

Born in Toronto in 1953, a retired career Crown Attorney with the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General, the writer and Susie happily make their home in Guelph, Ontario.



## APPENDIX 1

### Canadian Warship Losses

#### 1939-1943

Below is a list of losses due to Battle or accident that befell the RCN in the years indicated. It does not include the loss of many Canadians serving in the RN or those who died by ship board accident or injury, illness, or were swept overboard at sea. By war's end the RCN had deployed over 400 ships with 2,024 killed and several hundred wounded.

1940, May 12 *HMCS Ypres* is accidentally rammed and sunk by the British Battleship *HMS Revenge* while serving as Gate Vessel in Halifax. There was no loss of life.

1940, June 25th. RCN River Class Destroyer *HMCS Fraser H48* sunk off the coast of France following a collision with the RN Cruiser *HMS Calcutta D82* while participating in the military evacuation of France. 47 men killed from a crew of 181.

1940 October 19th. RCN Auxiliary Minesweeper *HMCS Bras d'Or* sinks at an unknown location with all hands in bad weather in the Gulf of St. Lawrence while searching the Gulf waters for Mines believed to have been laid by the enemy in. 30 men dead.

1940, October 22nd. RCN Destroyer *HMCS Margaree H49* while escorting a westbound convoy heading to Canada collides in rough seas with a Merchant vessel west of Ireland. 140 men lost from a crew of 171. Ironically the *Margaree* was transferred to the RCN from the RN to replace *Fraser* also lost in collision four months earlier.

1940, December 1. *HMCS Saguenay D79* is torpedoed by the Italian Submarine *Argo* off Ireland. 21 dead. Later repairs and returned to service in November 1942 she was accidentally rammed by a Panamanian Merchantman while in Convoy causing her stern depth charges to explode. Repaired again she was used as a training vessel at *HMCS Cornwallis* in Nova Scotia thereafter.

1941, March 26th. Having been employed as a local Convoy Escort and while at sea off Halifax awaiting rendezvous with a British Submarine, the Armed Yacht *HMCS Otter* suffered a catastrophic fire and explosion killing 19 men with 16 survivors.

1941, September 20th. RCN Corvette *HMCS Levis K115* torpedoed and sunk mid-Atlantic by a U-boat while escorting a slow Convoy. 18 men killed and 91 rescued.

1941, December 7th. RCN Corvette *HMCS Windflower K155* sinks while on Convoy escort mid-Atlantic following a collision with a Merchant vessel. The Merchant vessel struck the Corvette in dense fog and drove in her side. When the cold sea water contacted the ship's boilers they exploded. 23 men killed. 44 rescued.

1941, December 20. *HMCS Adversus J17* a former RCMP Patrol vessel founders in heavy seas but manages to run herself aground near Shelburne Nova Scotia. Entire crew rescued.

1942, February 11th. RCN Corvette *HMCS Spikenard K198* torpedoed at night while escorting an eastbound Convoy. Her Captain had been serving as SOE of the Convoy. Struck by a torpedo at almost the same moment as another torpedo hit a Norwegian merchantman none of the other Escorts realized she had been hit thus delaying the search for survivors until the next day. 57 dead. 8 survivors.

1942, September 7th. RCN Armed Yacht *HMCS Racoon S14* torpedoed by a U-boat while escorting a Convoy in the St. Lawrence River. Entire ship's company of 37 men lost.

1942, September 11th. RCN Corvette *Charlottetown K244* torpedoed in the St. Lawrence River off Gaspé while escorting a Convoy with *HMCS Clayoquot*. Struck by two torpedoes many of the crew got off only to be killed when *Charlottetown's* depth charges went off as she sank. 10 men died and the rest of the crew survived. Another *HMCS Charlottetown* would be launched later in the War, a River Class Frigate with pendant number K244.

1942, September 13th. RCN Destroyer *HMCS Ottawa H60* was struck by two torpedoes in the Atlantic off St. John's while escorting a westbound Convoy. Previously the *Ottawa* had rescued 24 survivors from a Merchantman torpedoed three days earlier. 115 of *Ottawa's* crew died. 62 of *Ottawa's* crew and seven of the original 24 Merchantman survived. The remaining 17 Merchant seamen perished.

1942, October 14th. Although not a warship the sinking of the government ferry *SS Caribou* merits inclusion as a government vessel travelling in Convoy and under Escort from North Sydney to Port-aux-Basques in the Gulf of St. Lawrence with the loss of 136 persons. Among them, 118 members of the military, 73 civilians 11 children and 15 of the ship's 46 man crew. The attacking U-boat had observed *Caribou's* smoke which was something the SOE had cautioned her about earlier.

1942, November 17th. RCN River Class Destroyer *HMCS Saguenay D179* having been torpedoed in the Atlantic in December 1940 by an Italian submarine (21 dead on *Saguenay*) the ship was repaired and returned to sea only to be rammed by a Panamanian Freighter in the Convoy she was escorting. The collision detonated *Saguenay's* depth

charges blowing off her stern. *Saguenay* was eventually towed to Halifax and used thereafter as a training ship for recruits at the training base *HMCS Cornwallis* in the Annapolis Basin.

1943, February 6th. RCN Corvette *HMCS Louisburg K143* was attacked and sunk by German aircraft in the Mediterranean while serving in support of the ongoing North Africa campaign. Struck by bombs and air dropped torpedoes the ship sank in less than 3 minutes. 43 crew killed. A second *Louisburg K401* was constructed and launched in July 1943.

1943, February 22nd. RCN Corvette *HMCS Weyburn K173* strikes a Mine off Gibraltar. 12 men perished.

1943, September 20th. RCN Town Class Destroyer *HMCS St. Croix I81* initially built for the US Navy and transferred to the RN and then the RCN is torpedoed and sunk in the North Atlantic while on Convoy escort. Damaged by a new German acoustic torpedo she stopped engines and one hour later sank having been stuck by a second torpedo launched by the same U-boat. With 68 killed by the two torpedo strikes 81 survivors from *St. Croix* were taken on board British River Class Frigate *HMS Itchen K227* which was hit in turn two days later by another acoustic torpedo. *Itchen* blew up. Only 1 man from *St. Croix* and 2 from *Itchen* survived.

1943 October 21st. RCN Bangor Class Minesweeper *HMCS Chedabucto J168* is sunk in a night time collision with the large Cable Ship *SS Lord Kelvin* in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Efforts to tow the ship were unsuccessful and she rolled over and sank with one casualty.

APPENDIX 2  
RCN Warships Sunk and Damaged in Battle  
1944-1945

As with the previous Appendix the list does not include casualties for those who were swept overboard and drowned or those who died of medical events on board.

1944

29 April ... Tribal Class Destroyer *HMCS Athabaskan G07* (sister ship to *HMCS Haida*) torpedoed by a German E-boat off coast of France. 128 men dead and 83 became prisoners of war of the Germans. 44 men rescued.

7 May ... River Class Frigate *HMCS Valleyfield K329* torpedoed off Cape Race Newfoundland. The ship sinks in less than 4 minutes. 125 men died. 38 survive.

2 July... RCN *Motor Torpedo Boat 460* strikes a Mine off Le Havre France. 11men die. 6 survivors

8 July... RCN *Motor Torpedo Boat 463* strikes a Mine in the English Channel. 5 men wounded

20 July... River Class Frigate *HMCS Matane K444* struck by a German radio controlled glider bomb launched by enemy aircraft off the French Coast. Badly damaged she was towed back to Port with 3 men dead and many wounded.

8 August ... Corvette *HMCS Regina K234* torpedoed off Cornwall UK. The ship sinks in less than 1minute 30 men die. 66 survivors.



21 August... Corvette *HMCS Alberni K103* torpedoed in the English Channel. The ship sinks in less than one minute. 59 men dead with 31 crew rescued.

4 October... River Class Frigate *HMCS Chebogue K317* torpedoed in the North Atlantic by U-1227. 7 men dead. Ship towed to harbour but declared a total loss

8 October... Bangor Class Minesweeper *HMCS Mulgrave J313* strikes a Mine in the English Channel. The ship is declared a total loss.

14 October ...River Class Frigate *HMCS Magog K 673* torpedoed in the St. Lawrence River. The ship does not sink but is a total loss. 3 men die. 147 survivors. The crew are ordered by Ottawa *not* to reveal location of the torpedoing so as not to upset the Canadian public with the proximity of the attack to Canada.

25 October ...Destroyer *HMCS Skeena D59* sinks due to storm off Iceland. 15 men dead.

25 November ...Corvette *HMCS Shawinigan K136* torpedoed in Cabot Strait entrance to Gulf of St. Lawrence. The ship explodes with the loss of the entire crew of 91 men.

24 December... Bangor Minesweeper *HMCS Clayoquot J 174* torpedoed immediately off Halifax Nova Scotia Harbour by Sambro Light. 8 men dead.

## 1945

14 February... Five *RCN Motor Torpedo Boats 459, 461, 462, 465 & 466* destroyed in an explosion and Fire Ostend Belgium. 26 men dead.

22 February... Corvette *HMCS Trentonian K 368* torpedoed in English Channel. 6 men dead.

17 March... Bangor Minesweeper *HMCS Guysborough J52* torpedoed off the coast of France. 2 men die in the explosion and another 49 men die in the water while awaiting rescue.

29 March... River Class Frigate *HMCS Teme K 458* torpedoed at western edge of the English Channel near Land's End. 4 men are killed. The ship is declared a total loss.

16 April... Minesweeper *HMCS Esquimalt J272* torpedoed just off Halifax Nova Scotia by U-190. 44 men die from the explosion and exposure in the water while awaiting rescue.

## APPENDIX 3

Ships sailing with *New Glasgow* as part of C-1On Seven Atlantic Convoys

Numbers beside each ship's name indicate which of the seven Atlantic Convoys accompanied *New Glasgow* as Escorts as described in the text.

*HMCS CHAMBLY* 1,2,3,4,5,6,7

*HMCS DOMINICA* 1

*HMCS FREDERICTON* 1,2,3,4,5,7

*HMCS FRONTENAC* 1,2,3,4,5,6,7

*HMCS GIFFARD* 1,2,3,4,5,6,7

*HMCS HALIFAX* 1

*HMCS ORANGEVILLE* 2,3,4,5

*HMCS CHEBOGUE* 3,4,5

*HMCS CHICOUTIMI* 3

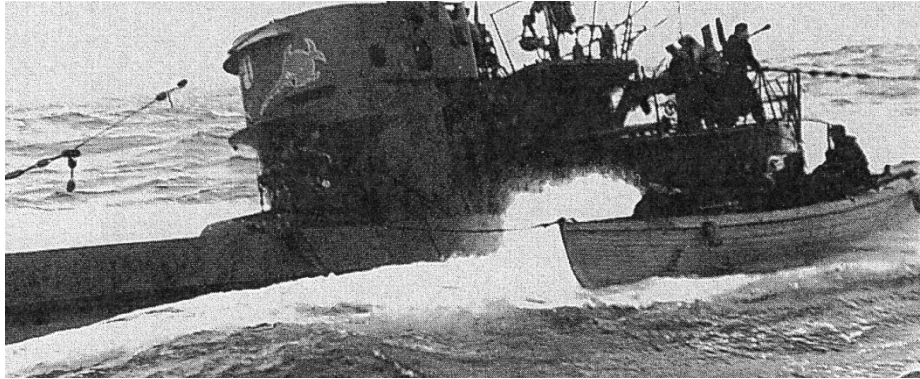
*HMCS ARNPRIOR* 6,7

*HMS BAHAMA* 6,7

*HMCS JOLIETTE* 7

## APPENDIX 4

### The Mystery Photo of U-744



1944 U-744 NAC

On March 7th, 1944 while escorting Convoy HX280 the second longest submarine hunt on the North Atlantic took place. Hundreds of depth charges were dropped by several RCN Escorts (including the River Class Frigate *HMCS St. Catharines* on which ship Norm's future brother in law John Downs would serve) eventually driving U-744 to the surface and then peppering it with shell fire. One of the Escorts, the Corvette *HMCS Chilliwack* sent off a boarding party in the ship's boat and some of the boarding party gained entry to the sinking sub with a view to capturing its secret Code Books. In the end result they were unsuccessful and while in tow the submarine finally sank.

The photo above is an iconic picture showing *Chilliwack's* boarding party. There were other photos taken of the event by other ships. But... there is one photo and only one photo in Norman's collection which is an anomaly for this writer who decided to include in this Appendix instead of the main text. This is the photo below.



The mark on the image is on the original. NFA's photo of *Chilliwick's* boarding party.

The photo is clearly taken from *Chilliwick*. On the back of the photo is Norm's handwriting as follows' '*German U-boat sunk by HMCS Chilliwick*'. Two boarding parties are visible in sea boats ready to board the U-boat. The photo is also consistent with the size, type and coloration of many of his other pictures. How did he get the photo?

When *New Glasgow* arrived in Halifax on February 17th 1944 she required repairs that lasted until the beginning of May. Many crew members, Norm included were assigned to Barracks at *HMCS Stadacona* (Halifax) as there was no point having them on the ship. *Chilliwick* departed from Halifax March 2nd and after engaging with U-744 continued to St. John's. Was Norm temporarily drafted onto *Chilliwick* to serve as a Signaller? I don't know. Such a temporary drafting of needed individuals was far from unknown. There is one

enigmatic entry in his hand written notes stating, 'German sub' for this time period but that is all.

In plain language, if someone sent me a photo from the Eiffel Tower, clearly taken on their camera and with their notes on the back, from a time period when they could have been in France, I would probably conclude that the photographer was in France. And if Norm was on *Chilliwack*, as I suspect, then somehow he was picked up by 'his' ship perhaps when it first arrived in St. John's or he got back in time for *New Glasgow's* North Atlantic operations where he clearly served as Signalman, given the scores of photos and ships papers he had.

U-744 and the *Chilliwack* photo therefor remain something of a mystery to this writer. I should have asked him when I had the chance.

## APPENDIX 5

### Poem 'Disregard'

Written by Leading Coder Thompson and Signalman N.F.Ayre aboard HMCS *New Glasgow* at sea, March 1st, 1945. The word 'Disregard' must have followed many a received message!

#### · HMCS Disregard'

When the lookout sights an 'object',  
Just off the starboard bow,  
And he is quite disturbed by it,  
And thinks our time is now!.....Disregard.

If the 'Asdic' gets a good one,  
That is music to his ears,  
He is sure he's got it this time  
And a miss will bring him tears.....Disregard.

If the Echo Sound is good,  
Length, height and beam correct,  
But there is no sign of movement,  
And the Chart says 'its a wreck!'.....Disregard.

If the Radar shows a little 'pip'  
Though it NEVER there should be,  
And a sailor on the set thinks  
'It's a schnorkel on the sea!'.....Disregard.

If the Huff duff sticks it lucky,  
And they are sure of what they hear,  
The Enemy U-boat message  
'First class bearing and quite near'....Disregard

For although it's not admitted,  
We Glory-Seekers be,  
And we want to sink a U-boat,  
Before we leave the Sea!

So lets take all Asdic contacts  
Schnorkel ,Radar, Huff Duff as well,  
And even if the shots not clear  
Lets blow them all to Hell!

Perchance we'll strike it lucky,  
And a 'wreck' to life may come  
And it won't be a wreck at all,  
But a crafty, lurking Hun!



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