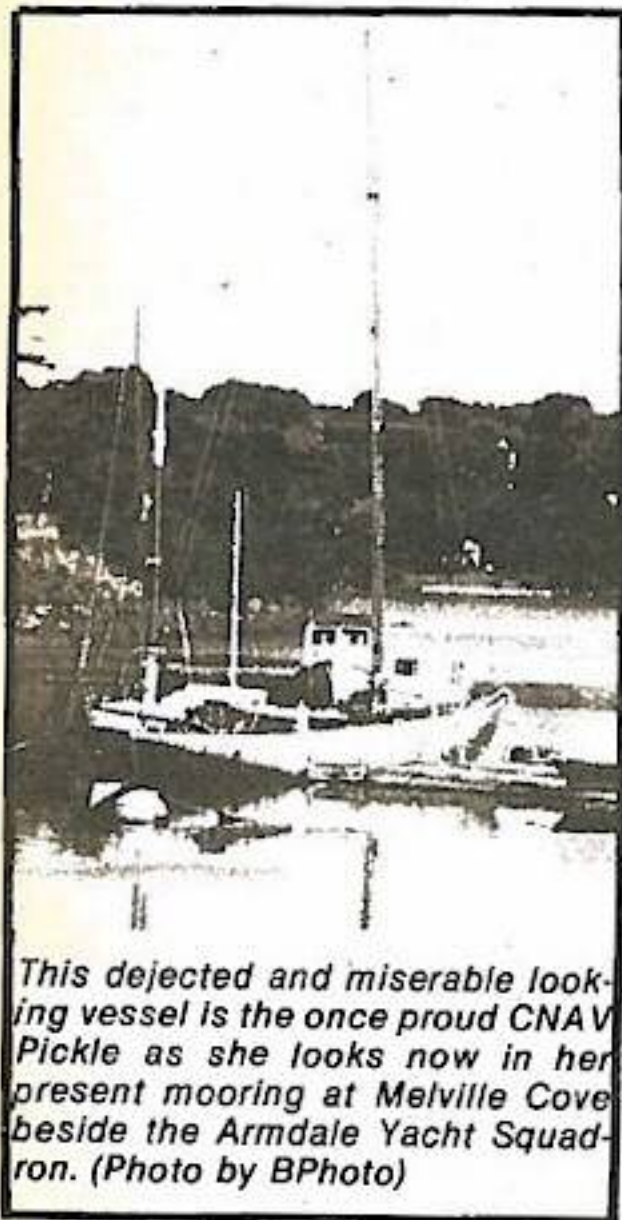# Whatever Happened To Pickle?

by Kathy Levesque

This dejected and miserable looking vessel is the once proud CNAV Pickle as she looks now in her present mooring at Melville Cove beside the Armdale Yacht Squadron. (Photo by BPhoto)

I am sure the name "Pickle" brings back fond memories for many of our sailors, present and past, and there are those who may have wondered what happened to the old girl.

Well, the 60 foot, two-masted yawl, once the pride and joy of the Canadian Navy, can now be found lying forlorn and dejected in Melville Cove beside the Armdale Yacht Club.

This once proud sailing yawl started out her exciting career as the "Heligoland", a German yawl, designed by Henry Gruber as a racer. Her graceful lines were along those of the Roland Von Bremen, winner of the 1935 Trans

Atlantic Race. Her owner at that time, a wealthy German industrialist, entered her in the 1936 King of Spain Cup Race from New York to Spain, and was rewarded for his trouble by the Heligoland winning the cup in this her maiden race.

Just before WW II, Heligoland was to begin a different career as she was commandeered by the German Baltic Training Fleet, and became a training ship for officer cadets of the German Navy, working out of her new home port of Kiel, Germany.

Little is known of the Heligoland's duties during the war. But with a little imagination one can envisage all sorts of exciting and dangerous exploits during this period of her lifespan.

As fate would have it, the Heligoland changed hands once again at the end of the war when she became a War Prize of the British Navy. Her new home became Portsmouth, England where she was renamed "Pickle" in honour of the dispatch ship in Nelson's fleet that brought home the news of Nelson's victory at Trafalgar. Plans were to use her for Sea Cadet training, but owing to lack of funds the Royal Yacht Squadron could not afford to keep her. It was then decided to send her over to the better financed Royal Canadian Navy Sailing Association where she became the last sail-training vessel on the east coast.

CNAV Pickle arrived in Halifax in the summer of 1954, catching her glimpse of HMC Dockyard from the flight deck of HMCS Magnificent. After spending a year and a half alongside, she was transferred over to the Royal Canadian Navy Sailing Association where she underwent refurbishment. A new deck of Oregon pine, stainless steel rigging, and a new diesel
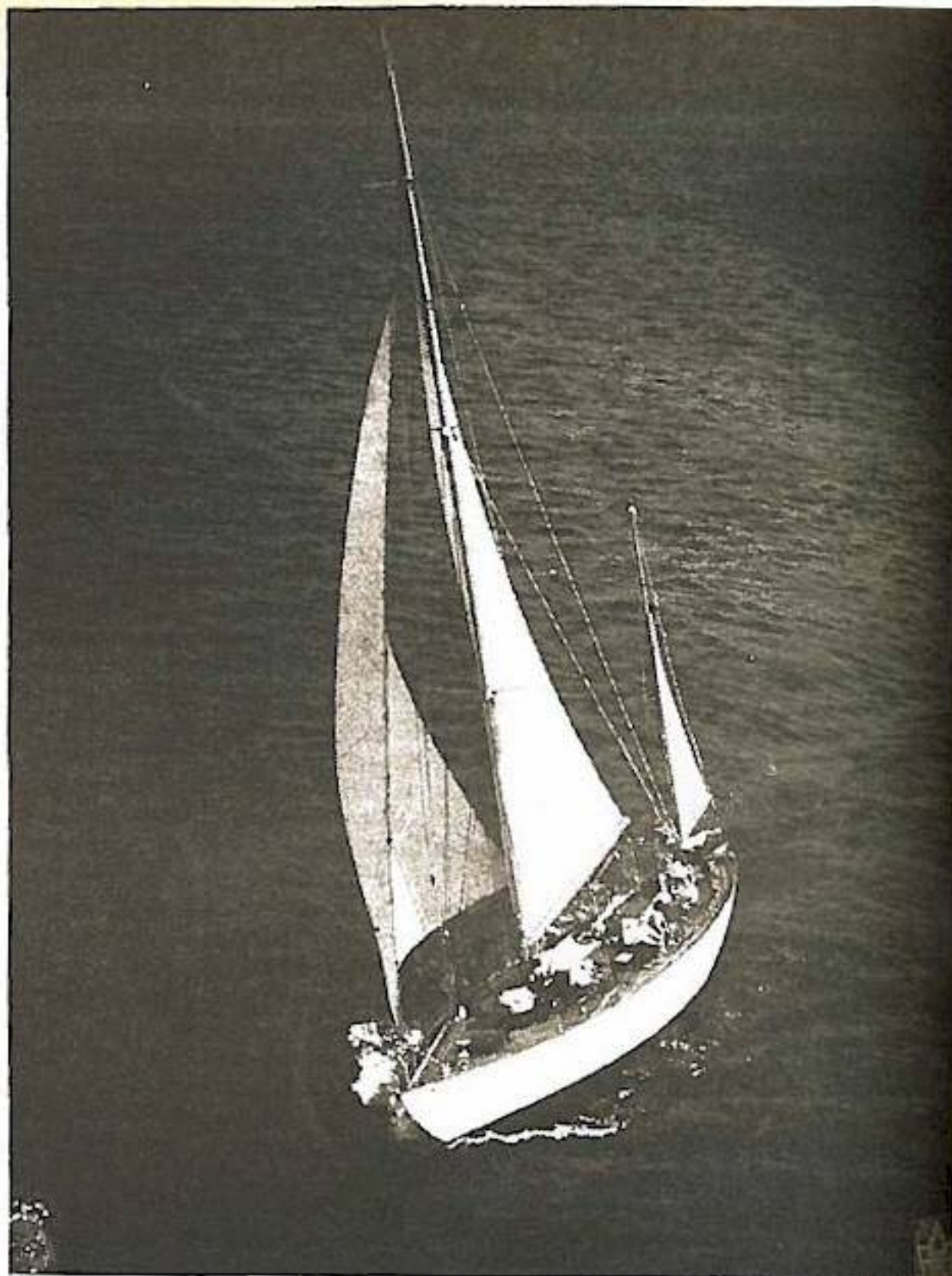
Pickle on one of her many pleasure cruises enjoying warm sun and a light wind at her back. (Photo by DND)

engine helped to transform the 'Ole Girl' into one of the finest racing yawls Canada has ever seen.

Once in operation, Pickle didn't waste any time becoming the Club favourite. There was never a shortage of eager sailors to man her waiting decks.

Her busy schedule included entry in the Marblehead to Halifax race from 1955 to 1970; the 1968 Centenary Trans-Atlantic Race

from Bermuda to Travenmude Germany (a total of 3600 miles), and the international trans-Atlantic race from Newport Rhode Island to Cork Ireland in 1969. Throughout her years of racing she won two cups for the RCNSA. The Bermuda to Halifax race in 1964 brought her the Commodore Bruce S. Oland Perpetual Trophy for best corrected time in Class A, and for the ocean races of 1957, 59, 62, 64 and

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...was awarded the Halifax ...adron Rear-Commodore's ...ry.

...ving her 18 years with the sail-...sociation, Pickle sailed over ...0 nautical miles. In 1970 ...under the command of LCdr ...Coell, Pickle sailed more than ...0 miles in a one year period. ...excerpts from the personal ...Petty Officer John Scott give ...dea of the pleasures and ...rs encountered while per-...g the duties in the life of a

...9, 1970 — 1030 hours — ...up to sailing watches at ...Set sail for Europe to repre-...Canada and the Canadian ...s during Kiel Week in Ger-...and the Commonwealth ...s in July in Edinburgh ...nd. This voyage was also to ...a training exercise for 16 ...who were recent graduates ...Royal Military College.

...ships company consisted of ...Ron Coell, the Skipper, Lt R. ...e, Navigator; Chief Petty ...Gary Durham, Mate; Petty ...John Scott, Watch Mate; ...ble Seaman Ken Thompson,

...0 hours — During the after-...watch all the cadets were ...couple of them really bad. ...closed up at 1800 hours I ...d two lads available as the ...were all green and on the

...9, 1970 — 0500 hours — ...wn has arrived and the sun ...utiful, water and air tempera-

ture at 45 degrees F. We should be in the Gulf stream today.

May 31, 1970 — 0200 hours — Starboard watch had trouble with wind just before 0200 hours. It dropped right off and they had to go and find it.

June 2, 1970 — 0200 — This middle watch has to be the best yet as we logged 22 miles. I am now able to put these lads to work and they are beginning to find things falling into place and are shaping up as helmsmen.

June 4, 1970 — The wind is to the southwest and we have covered 160 miles in 29 hours. There is just over 1,000 miles on the log and we are starting the long uphill leg of the journey.

June 8, 1970 — The wind held all night and another beautiful day has dawned. This weather has picked up the morale of the crew tremendously. The boat looks like a Chinese junk with all our gear and sleeping bags all over the upper deck. Our gear was really wet though so this is a great help.

June 12, 1970 — We are all pretty pissed off, as we are experiencing very light southeast winds sometimes dropping off to nothing at all like first thing this morning. This is the 4th day of this and there has been no change. We cannot possibly make our ETA if this keeps up.

June 17, 1981 — This has been the most gorgeous day since leaving Halifax, not wind wise but a blistering sun and very light winds. We only move at 1 1/2 to 2 knots in

This is CNAV Pickle's crew for the 1964 Newport-Bermuda Race. Back row, left to right — Ed Wiggs, Julian Benoit, John Huxtable, "Neuf" Sibley, and Art McClusky. Front row, left to right — Terry Haley, Ron Wade, Hal "Vasco" Davies, Peter Poole-Warren, John Scott, and Ron Coell. (Photo by Tom Martin)

this situation. Both watches spent the afternoon on the upper deck basking in the sun and drying clothes. I slept a couple of hours on the forcastle.

June 22, 1970 — 1800 hours — I just can't believe this is happening, we just cannot get a wind in our favour, even the forecasts are away out of whack. We are back on the engine again and only moved about 150 miles on track since Sunday night. Spirits were pretty high among the crew then but now they are at a low ebb. It is only possible to maintain about 4 1/2 knots under the engine power so it may take us another 48 hours to reach port if we are constantly steaming.

June 24, 1970 — 1800 hours — The wind has begun to come

around where we need it. Then the rains came in squalls. Gary's watch suffered through 4 hours of torrential rain and barrelled along at 6 knots. The word from the Skipper is to drive her while we can take advantage of this wind as we are only 100 miles off the entrance to the Elbe and could make it by noon Thursday.

August 1, 1970 — The other night in the rough going and high seas we lost our starboard navigation light over the side, but managed to save the port one. Rigged a jury rig on the port side and are using a green reflector and hand light for the starboard side.

August 7, 1970 — 1900 hours — Just slipped into the dockyard at Ponta del Gada and have received a warm welcome. The Skipper has contacted the Canadian Attache

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here and he is to come down to the boat at 2030 hours.

August 10, 1970 — 1900 hours — Naturally, this call to Flores was too short, even though unscheduled. We wished we had more time to stay and so did the populace. Weighed anchor and started on our last leg home, with a full load of fuel in the event that engine power will be needed. We are heading due west now along the 40th latitude, no engine power as we must rely on the sails as this westward leg.

August 24, 1970 — This is a beautiful day and we have just breasted Sable Island. We have about 100 miles to go now and the wind is holding. Halifax is experiencing WSW winds and it is clearing there tonight. If we move

at 6 knots all night we could be in at noon tomorrow. Hope so.

August 25, 1970 — Wind dropped on us and we missed our ETA by about 7 hours arriving alongside at 2100 hours.

On completion of the Halifax to Kiel Germany trip in 1970, Pickle was chosen to be host ship at the 1972 Olympic Games. This honour was snatched away when top military brass decided because of the high cost of upkeep, it was more beneficial to sell her. So began her trip down from stardom to purgatory. Torn from the warm and loving arms of the Sailing Association she was anchored at Smith's Wharf in Halifax Harbour. There with her bilges full she almost sank, but was finally rescued from this fate and presented with a not

much better one, when she was sold to a Toronto businessman for the sum of $25,000.

Pickle was then transferred to Melville Cove, where she remains all but forgotten by her new owner. Much to the dismay of her former skipper, LCdr Coell (Ret'd) life has not improved for his lost love, but indeed worsened. Although Pickle is not rusting or rotting away, the lack of "tender-loving-care" has forced her into such a state of disrepair she is literally falling apart. Scavengers have stripped her of all her fine adornments and bared her soul for the world to see.

Mr. James D. Rosborough, owner of the Marina where Pickle is moored, said he has been trying to reach her Toronto based owner but to no avail. He estimated that

Pickle isn't worth any more than 20 to 25 thousand dollars, if that much, in her present condition. And, of course; that's not counting the astronomical cost of approximately another $40 to $50 thousand to refurbish her. One avid yachting enthusiast said you would save some money; a yawl of her calibre would cost anywhere from half to three quarters of a million dollars to build at today's inflated prices.

But as Commander Hal "Vasco" Davies, one of Pickle's former navigators and skippers, mused, "It's a damn shame that the 'great ole girl' couldn't be brought back and used once again for sail training, she'd more than earn her keep — for 'There really is no life like it'."