



HMCS Athabaskan, last of the Canadian-built Tribal class destroyers to remain in service, was the heroine of a North Atlantic rescue operation on March 1 which saw 34 merchant seamen brought to safety from the Liberian tanker *Amphialos* which had broken in two. (HS-64756-81)

ATHABASKAN'S RESCUE

THE SHIP'S COMPANY of HMCS *Athabaskan* was mustered in the forward seamen's messdeck for divine service on Sunday, March 1. The commanding officer read an appropriate lesson, the officers and men solemnly said the naval prayer. As divine service ended, the officer of the watch, Lt.-Cdr. John Huxtable, reported that a vessel on the port bow five miles distant was stopped and its appearance seemed unusual.

The *Athabaskan's* commanding officer, Cdr. Peter R. Hinton, (I was embarked as commander of the task unit) was proceeding to rendezvous with HMCS *Crescent* (Cdr. Vincent Murphy) and HM submarine *Auriga* (Lt.-Cdr. K. A. Bromback) for anti-submarine exercises.

Course was immediately altered to close this vessel and speed was increased. As the *Athabaskan* neared the

scene an Argus aircraft dropped a smoke bomb near a lifeboat, drawing attention to its presence. Throughout the entire operation the willing co-operation of the RCAF aircraft was of considerable assistance.

All arrangements were smoothly and quietly made to effect rescue if, as

By

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soon became apparent, such should be necessary. Scramble nets were rigged over the side, the sea boat was turned out, the sick bay readied for any emergency.

On closing what proved to be the stern section of the Liberian-registered SS *Amphialos*, two lifeboats were

sighted with personnel on board. All available lookouts scanned the water for lone survivors. Although it was a bright, brisk day, the wind gusted to 35 knots and the height of swell was approximately 12 feet.

The *Athabaskan* closed the wreck and it was seen that a good number of the crew were still on board. There were no liferafts or lifeboats left and the deck was inclined at an angle of over 30 degrees, the forward upper works being well under water. The seas broke over the stricken vessel and the stern hung helplessly with propeller and rudder high in the air.

The *Athabaskan* closed and recovered one boat load of eight survivors and despatched her own seaboot to stand by the stern of the stricken vessel. Two of the survivors from this lifeboat were unable to cope with the scramble net as the lifeboat reared and

plunged in the heavy swell. Men from the *Athabaskan* went over the side into the lifeboat to assist and the two injured men were removed by stretcher. Unfortunately one of these men, aged 69 and apparently suffering from a weak heart, although alive on recovery, died about one hour later.

Meanwhile, the Commander of the Task Unit ordered HMCS *Crescent* to surface HM Submarine *Auriga* and proceed with all despatch to the scene as USS *Searcher* closed the area. At the height of the operation two Argus aircraft and a USCG aircraft orbited the area searching for possible lone survivors.

USS *Searcher*, at the request of the commander of the task unit, launched a motor whaleboat. Due to the weather, the engine failed and her whaleboat was not able to close the wreck. The *Searcher* remained nearby until final recovery was made to provide whatever aid may have been required.

In the heavy sea the *Athabaskan's* whaler broker her tiller and the crew resorted to steering by an oar over the stern. Because of the state of the sea and swell, rescue attempts by the whaler became futile. The whaler did, however, spot a survivor who had jumped from the ship in an endeavour to swim to the whaler and, with the



A Greek sailor is assisted below in the *Athabaskan* where he was given dry clothing and hot food.

aid of signals between boat and ship, the *Athabaskan* quickly manoeuvred toward this man.

AB Donald Patterson, one of the divers who had dressed for duty, was ordered to go to the assistance of the survivor. Within minutes the survivor and diver were both safely on board.

The second lifeboat was closed and eight more survivors were quickly embarked.

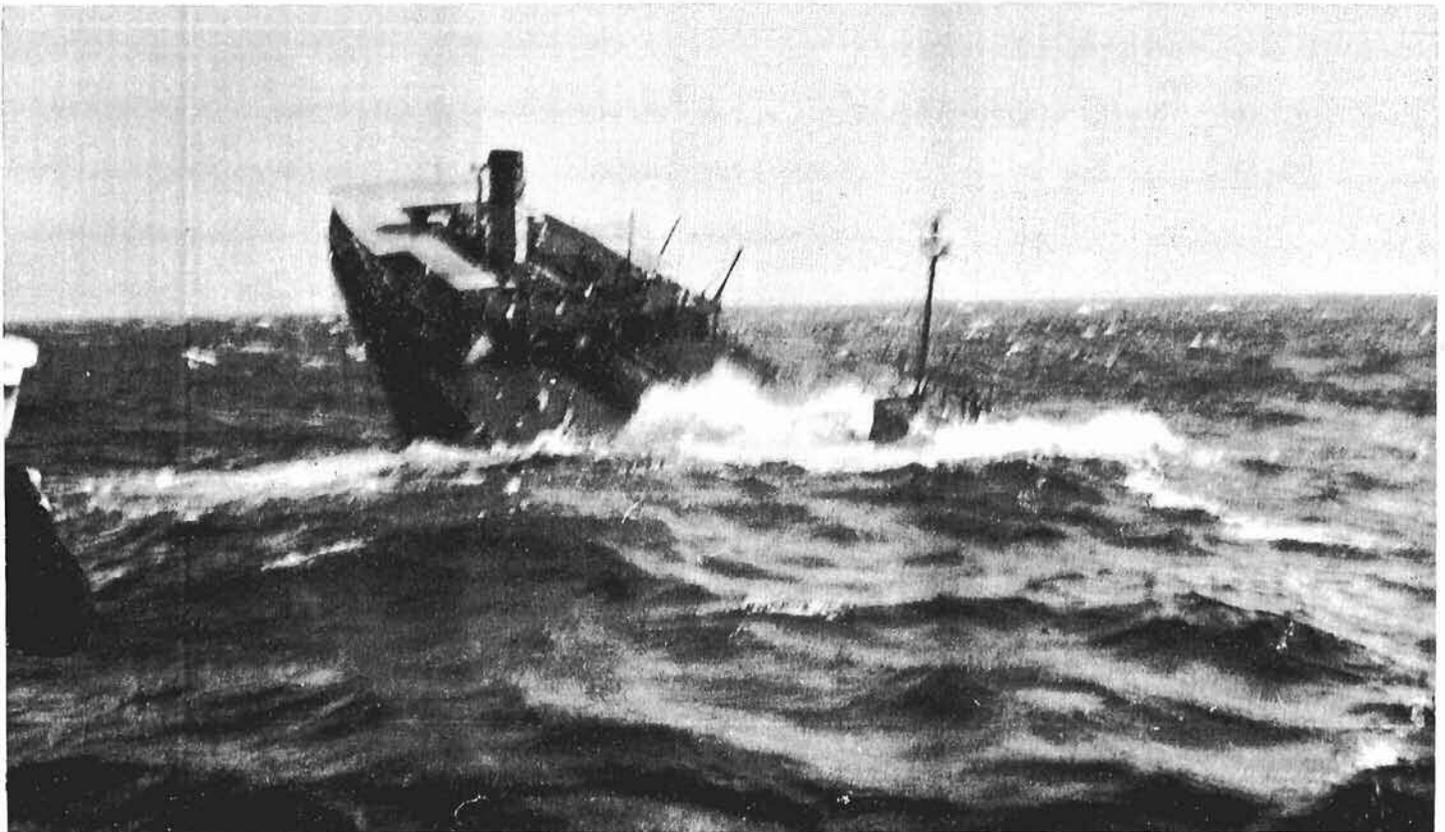
The survivors said that they did not think the ship, with a number of men still on board, would last another hour. (At 1800 on Feb. 29, with no warning whatsoever, the forward section of their ship had broken away and attempts to transmit a distress signal became impossible.)

The *Athabaskan* stood to windward of the wreck and endeavoured to swim a 20-man liferaft to the stern section of the *Amphialos*, edging perilously near to the submerged section of the vessel. However, the divers, due to the extensive oil on the surface, were soon exhausted and had to be recovered.

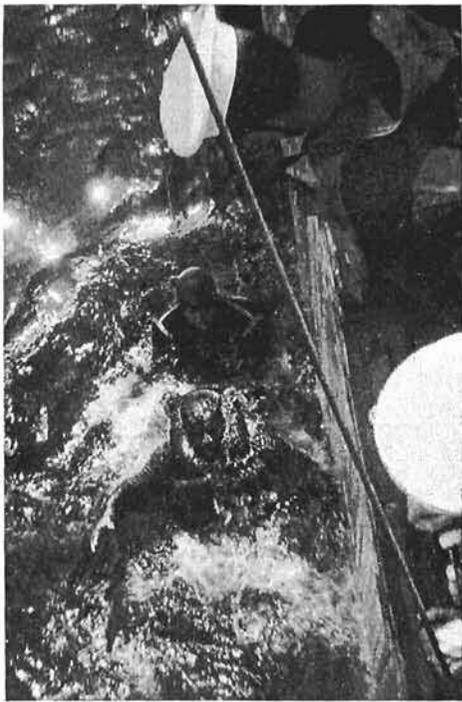
There was nothing left but to get near enough to pass a line to her stern section. The ship was manoeuvred to within 100 feet and after several attempts eventually succeeded in passing a Coston gun line to the wreck. To this a messenger, then a heavier line and eventually a 20-man liferaft were secured and the raft was pulled under the stern.

Eighteen men, including the ship's captain, lowered themselves one by one into the liferaft from the stern 60 feet above.

Due to the drift of the wreck, they were unable to get clear of the ship and



Sailors were clinging desperately to the stern section of the *Amphialos* when the shattered merchant vessel was sighted by the *Athabaskan*.



AB Donald Patterson, clearance diver, helps an oil-covered seaman from the *Amphialos* alongside the *Athabaskan*.



Athabaskan sailors help seaman from the *Amphialos* up the scramble net to safety.

the *Athabaskan* a second time, this time edging even closer, fired a well-aimed Coston gun line over the raft and towed the last survivors clear of the wreck.

The final recovery was conducted without any difficulty and the 20-man liferaft was taken on board.

HMCS *Crescent* appeared, was assigned commander of the scene and ordered to stand by. The *Athabaskan* was ordered to proceed to Halifax with all despatch.

Cdr. Hinton praised AB Donald Patterson and Ldg. Sea. Frank Edgar, both of whom fought their way through the oil-covered sea in attempts to manhandle the two lifeboats closer to the hulk. Both detached their lifelines so they could manoeuvre the rafts in the 15-foot swells.

Most of the survivors were too weak to climb scramble nets hung over the *Athabaskan's* side. Sailors from the destroyer escort climbed down and helped them on board.

Cdr. Hinton also praised the *Athabaskan's* boatswain's mate, PO Sidney McNevin, who supervised and participated in so much of the seamanship that was displayed during the operation.

Throughout this operation I was greatly impressed by the high standard of seamanship displayed by the commanding officer, officers and men of the *Athabaskan* and by the cheerfulness and bravery displayed by the officers and men of the SS *Amphialos*.



At the left, one of five injured survivors of the *Amphialos* is comforted by a fellow crew member as *Athabaskan* sailors stand by to give aid. Two clearance divers (right) from the *Athabaskan*, Ldg. Sea. Frank Edgar and AB Donald Patterson, each spent half an hour in the North Atlantic assisting seaman from the stricken tanker to the rescue ship.

FOLLOWING the rescue operation, messages of congratulation poured in to the *Athabaskan* and *Crescent*. The *Athabaskan*, incidentally, had shared in the search for survivors of a Flying Tiger airliner, down in the North Atlantic, in September 1962.

The *Athabaskan* received praise from many sources, including the owners of the SS *Amphialos*, the Commander Eastern Sea Frontier, Naval Headquarters and the Minister of National Defence. Mr. Hellyer's message was as follows:

"I note with approval the excellent display of seamanship on the part of HMCS *Athabaskan* in rescuing the crew of SS *Amphialos*. Congratulations to all who took part in the rescue on the resolute and heroic manner in which it was so swiftly done."

Mr. Hellyer also sent a message of congratulations to the crew of the RCAF *Argus* that first sighted and reported the stricken ship.

A letter received by Rear-Admiral Jeffrey V. Brock, Flag Officer Atlantic Coast, from His Honour Henry P.

MacKeen, Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Nova Scotia, reads:

"Through you I would like to congratulate Cdr. Hinton and the ship's company of HMCS *Athabaskan* on their outstanding achievement in rescuing the crew of the tanker *Amphialos*. I had an opportunity of discussing the episode with the master and mate of *Amphialos* yesterday and I can tell you they were loud in their praise of the seamanship, courage and kindness of those in the *Athabaskan*. As far as I could learn every incident during the rescue reflects the highest credit to the training, efficiency and personnel of the Royal Canadian Navy."

Other messages included the following:

"Commander 1st Coast Guard District extremely pleased and most appreciative of your outstanding seamanship in rescuing the crew of the tanker *Amphialos*. Your excellent performance has exemplified the finest traditions of the sea."—Rear-Admiral C. L. Harding USCG.

To *Athabaskan* and *Crescent*: "Your fine example of seamanship in rescuing

crew of SS *Amphialos* reflects great credit on your ship. Congratulations to all officers and men who took part in the rescue on an excellent job well done."—Chief of the Naval Staff Ottawa.

"The officers and men of the Pacific Command join me in congratulations for your fine rescue work."—Flag Officer Pacific Coast.

"On behalf owners and master steam tanker *Amphialos*, may we express our gratitude to the officers and men of the Royal Canadian Navy whose heroism and gallantry saved the lives of 34 crew members of our vessel. The prompt and efficient rescue was performed under most difficult conditions in a manner which reflects credit on your entire service. Please convey our most sincere thanks and admiration to all concerned"—United Operations Shipping Agencies, Corp., 660 Madison Ave., New York City".

"My heartiest 'congratulations' and 'well done' to HMCS *Athabaskan* for outstanding performance in rescue of crew of SS *Amphialos*"—Vice-Admiral H. T. Deutermann, USNS COMEAST-SEAFRON.

OPENINGS FOR SUBMARINERS

THE FORTHCOMING acquisition of three "O" class submarines from Britain by the Royal Canadian Navy will mean a continuing requirement for volunteers from general service to complete the manning of the new submarines to provide replacements.

A general message, dated March 26, says it is expected the three "O" class submarines will commission in 1965, 1967 and 1968 and will replace the "A" class submarines at present loaned by the RN and based at Halifax.

At the end of March a total of 382 qualified submariners were enrolled in the Royal Canadian Navy. This total was made up 32 officers and 350 men.

Actually serving in submarines, either Canadian or British, were 20 officers and 206 men.

RCN submariners, now serving in the RN submarine service, will be transferred to service in the RCN as required.

All three of the "O" class submarines will be based at Halifax, while HMCS *Grilse* will continue to serve in the Pacific Command.

Volunteers will be accepted for service regardless of the type or locality of the submarines. The general require-

ments, other than medical, are given in General Order 10.21/1, which provides in its opening paragraph that "officers and men may volunteer for service in submarines at any time during their service career". Once personnel have undergone basic training and qualified as submariners, they are entitled to wear the submarine badge.

Trades to which the submarine service is open are: Weaponman Underwater (WU); Sonarman (SN); Radar Plotter (RP); Radioman (RM); Engineering Technician (ER); Engineering Mechanic (EM); Electronic Technician (LT); and Electrician's Mate (LM). A few volunteers will be accepted from the following trades: Firecontrolman (FC); Victualling Storesman (VS); Naval Storesman (NS); Cook (CK); Steward (SW), and Medical Assistant (MA). Special consideration will be given to ex-submariners now in general service.

Basic submarine training will continue to be given in either the United States or Britain, depending on the type of submarine to which the trainee is to be initially drafted.

The present intention is to permit men to remain in submarines for as long as

they remain qualified in all respects and within the limitations of complement. In addition, within these limitations, men will be permitted to return to submarines after absences for trade courses etc.

The duration of basic submarine training abroad will not ordinarily permit men to take their families but, for men drafted to commission "O" class submarines or to undergo acquaintanceship courses subsequent to basic training, overseas service will in some cases be of sufficient length to enable this privilege to be exercised.

The general message also states that submarine allowance will continue to be paid in accordance with QRCN 205.37, together with the appropriate allowances when drafted outside Canada. The submarine allowance ranges from \$65 a month for leading seaman and below to \$115 for lieutenant-commander and above. Half these rates are payable while undergoing basic submarine training or while serving in certain "annotated" positions, such as spare crew. Non-qualified personnel are entitled to an allowance of \$30 a month while serving on casual duty in a submarine in commission.