

(By JOHN LEBLANC.)

Halifax, March 30 (CP). — Seamen of the Royal Canadian Navy died "without a whimper" in the chill sea off Halifax after flames had driven them from the blazing H.M.C.S. Otter, survivors of last week's disaster that took nineteen lives said proudly Saturday.

"They died like men," said 19-year-old John Slavin of Montreal, youngest of the twenty-two sailors taken from the water by two ships. "There was never a murmur as they slipped away one by one. They were real sailors."

Eight men who set out in a life-raft died—Slavin and only three others aboard surviving. Others drowned or died of exposure when they were flung into the water — below freezing temperature—as one of the two lifeboats capsized in heavy waves after the patrol boat caught fire.

"All us fellows are lucky to be alive," Able Seaman Slavin said. Signalman Hilary Martin of Grand Falls, N.B., relaxing in the next cot as he recovered from frostbite, agreed.

One of the four who elbowed his way past death on the raft, Martin said: "I never want to go through that again."

Both were on the point of unconsciousness when they were dragged through the water by a line flung from a warship that found them near the burning Otter. For 2½ hours they had been sitting in water up to their chests, their feet dangling through the open ropework of the raft's bottom, with a sea breaking clean over their heads every few minutes.

Then There Were Four.

"Every now and again one of us would give out," they related, "and the others would hold him up. But it was hard, as more and more went. After a while, there were four of us trying to keep six unconscious men from slumping into the water. The others were dead."

That men with whom they had worked only a few hours before should die so quickly, and so silently, surprised them. "They just slipped away without a word," Martin said.

"Armstrong went first—Telegraphist Irvin Armstrong of Halifax," Martin said. "Then Gerald D'Eon, a victualling assistant from Meteghan River, N.S."

"Chief Skipper (Andrew) Parker was next. He died while I was holding him." Parker hailed from Parrsboro, N.S.

The others on the raft, as Slavin and Martin recalled, died in this order: Telegraphist Elmer Mabey, Charlottetown; O.S. Lucien Laurin, Hull, Que.; Stoker Lionel Stuart, Lockeport, N.S.; Edward T. Wall, Dartmouth, N.S., and Wallace O'Hara, Westmount, Que.

"Wall left the raft all right, fastened to a line from the warship," Martin said. "But just as they were hauling him aboard, the line slipped and he fell back and drifted away. One of the warship's sailors, trying to pull him back, fell in, too. But they fished him out all right."

O'Hara was one of three men—the

others were Slavín and Walter Guildford of Bedford, N.S.—who volunteered to leave one of the crowded lifeboats for the raft so it could go back to take off the commander, Lieut. Denis Mossman, left aboard alone when she was abandoned.

"But don't try to make heroes out of us for that," Slavín grinned. "We weren't long on that raft before we were wishing we could change our minds. Boy, was that water cold! They had taken the temperature shortly before the fire broke out, and it was 30 or 31 above zero."

He exhibited a patch of peeling skin as evidence of frostbite. Parts of Martin's body were still devoid of feeling from the icy immersion.

The other two survivors of the group on the raft — Guildford and William Hunter of Toronto — had been discharged from hospital. Guildford had stayed behind until the last, putting lines aboard the others, and then his numbed fingers let go the rope and he drifted off from the rescue ship. A British officer swam out with another line and got him in.

"I guess it was Guildford who put the line around me," Martin said. "I don't know for sure, though. I was pretty far gone. Next thing I knew, they were pouring rum into me on the ship. Then I went back out again."

From one of the four men who survived when one of the loaded lifeboats capsized against the side of a rescuing merchant ship came the story of how the men on that boat died. He was Leading Seaman Leslie Stevens of Quebec City, in hospital with arm injuries and a strained back.

Helped Over Rail.

"A big sea just hammered us against the side of the ship," he said, "and we went over. I was the first to get aboard the vessel. I grabbed a rope and climbed thirty feet up the side of the freighter, and, believe me, it was some job in that sea. Finally, the ships' bos'n helped me over the rail.

"Most of the other fellows weren't so lucky. As they stayed in the water, they got weaker and weaker, and very quickly. Before I pulled myself up, the first lieutenant, Alan Walker of Halifax, was drifting near me.

"He yelled: 'How are you making out, coxswain?' I answered I was fine. He said he was doing all right, too. Next time I saw him he was floating face down, gone.

"There were others like that. There was nothing we could do for them."

The men in the boat tried to cling to its slippery underside when they were tipped out. One of these was Motor Mechanic John G. Drew of Toronto, brother of Lieut.-Col. George A. Drew, Ontario Conservative Leader.

Drew slipped from the boat and was being carried away when one of his companions seized him and dragged him back. But he lost his grip a second time, and this time was washed out of reach. He was lost.

Stevens said the others in his boat who got aboard the rescue ship safely were Steward Ernest Russel

of Scotland, Able Seaman Eric Woodbury of Aylesford, N.S., and Stoker James Noade of Halifax. **Survivors Tried to Help.**

To get the others off, a seaman from the freighter descended with a line about his waist and sent them up one by one on another rope. Lieut. Walker's body was brought up, with those of four others, and survivors and members of the ship's crew worked over them more than an hour.

The youngest man aboard the Otter—18-year-old ordinary seaman John Blyth of Winnipeg—was among those who failed to survive the capsizing of the lifeboat. Shipmates said he disappeared soon after the boat turned turtle.

Stoker William C. Clark of Oakville, Ont., was one of the men who thrust aside their own condition and tried to help resuscitate their unconscious companions aboard the rescue freighter. He had been on the second lifeboat from the Otter, which brought its complement safely to the side of the rescue ship.

Clark was on duty in the engine room when the fire broke out suddenly Wednesday morning, and he said he was the last to leave that smoke-filled chamber.

"Most of the men on our boat were veteran seamen," he said, "and I guess that helped us land her safely up on the other ship."

He got away in only a sweater and trousers, but counted that no handicap. "Overcoats weren't much help once you landed in that water," he said. Clark had a back injury. "Some one jabbed me with an oar," he explained wryly.