

By Sub Lieut. Frank A. Healy, R.C.N.V.R.

An Eastern Canadian Port – Stoker Fred Brewer, R.C.N.V.R., of Toronto, one of the H.M.C.S. “LOUISBURG” survivors to arrive back in Canada, told today of the gallant and heroic spirit of his fellow crew members before they were rescued by a British destroyer after their corvette was sunk by an aerial torpedo in the Mediterranean.

“I was up on deck when the torpedo hit us,” Brewer said, “and the impact threw me on my back. I rushed to the wheel house just as the captain gave the order to abandon ship. In a few seconds she was listing to port, so I dived in off the starboard side.

“It was so dark that I could hardly see. I swam for 15 minutes and finally spotted some men clinging to a life saver. I just had enough strength left to join them. We all rested for a while and then swam to a Carley float not far away.”

Brewer told how the men sang songs and cracked jokes in the face of death, all the time wondering whether or not they would be picked up or accidentally run down by one of the convoy ships.

“While six of us were clinging to the doughnut – before we made it to the raft,” he said, “a large merchant ship passed and threw down floats and life-savers. When the crew heard the fellows on the raft singing at the top of their voices they cheered. The captain waved from the bridge and yelled, ‘I can’t stop – chins up, lads’.

“You can’t imagine how that cheered us up. And the stuff they threw overboard probably saved many lives, for some men were swimming around at the time with no support.”