

ONTARIO ADD

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HEALY

AN EASTERN CANADIAN PORT – A number of Ontario seamen, back in Canada on survivors' leave, told today of harrowing experiences encountered when their Royal Canadian Navy corvette – H.M.C.S. LOUISBURG – was sunk recently in the Mediterranean by an aerial torpedo with the loss of 39 lives.

They were togged roughly in pieces of clothing issued them by the Red Cross at Algiers in North Africa, for they lost all their belongings in the sinking.

One seaman from London, Ont., who didn't even want to take time to be issued with new gear – A.B. Albert Ruthven, R.C.N.V.R. – told how he was knocked about the ship by the explosion, tried to find the ship's mascot, and stayed with the ship till the water on the port side was up to his knees.

"I was standing in one of the hatch covers," he said, "when the torpedo hit. I blew up my lifebelt but the valve hit me in the eye. Almost at the same time something from behind hit me in the back. I over-balanced and fell down the ladder into the P.O.'s mess.

"Pieces of steel were flying everywhere but I ducked around trying to find the dog – the ship's mascot," he said. "The seconds ticked by and I decided I had better get back up top without him. I crawled up to the quarter-deck but didn't get far. There was too much steam.

"I went aft on the side to which she was listing and tried to loosen a Carley float. The water then was in line with the deck. I worked on the float until the water was up to my knees. Then I dived in and swam as fast as I could to get away from the suction of the ship as she went down.

"A few minutes later I reached a float and the fellows pulled me onto it. We stayed until a British destroyer picked us up."

Another Ontario rating, A.B. Mike Regan, R.C.N.V.R., whose mother lives at 299 Ontario St., Stratford, Ont., was working in the radio room just aft the bridge when the ship was hit.

"I heard an explosion and then the lights went out," Regan said. "I dashed out on deck and heard the order to abandon ship. Everyone was jumping into the water so I went over the side. One of the men in the water threw me a lifebelt and I swam to a 'doughnut' (lifesaver) and hung on till I was picked up."

The LOUISBURG's cook, Wilson Ransome, R.C.N., of 549 Dundas St., Woodstock, Ont. – who can't swim a stroke – says he didn't drown because he kept saying to himself: "I can't go down! I can't go down!"

"I refused to let myself think that I might drown," he said. "It all seemed more like a dream."

Ransome went down into the galley to get his helmet when action stations were sounded. As he came out of the port-side of the galley, he heard the explosion and with the abandon ship order rushed to help his mates heave a float over the side.

"It was too crowded to hold me," he said, "so I rushed up to the fo'castle, took a deep breath and dived in head first. I forgot to take my steel helmet off and nearly broke my neck. I had no lifebelt and I couldn't swim.

"I managed to struggle out of the ship's suction and tread water about 15 yards from the bow of the ship. I remember watching her as she sunk. Her bow seemed to give a big lurch out of the water and then she just slid back under. When I looked around me in the dark I found I was about 15 feet from a float."

Officer's Steward John McAuley, R.C.N.V.R., of Tecumseh Rd., Windsor, Ont., was below deck in the officers' quarters when the torpedo hit. He rushed up top and heard the captain giving the order to abandon ship.

"I had brought my lifebelt up top with me," McAuley said, "and it was a lucky thing. I dived into the water and struggled to get away from the suction of the ship as she went down.

"An officer swimming nearby, who didn't even have a lifebelt on, came to my aid and shunted me along to one of the floats."

Another Ontario man, Stoker Petty Officer Charles Julliette, R.C.N.R., of Blind River, Ont., was with four other ratings below deck when the corvette was hit. Two of the other men lost their lives.

"When action stations sounded we were all set to go full ahead," Julliette said. "Then there was an explosion and the lights went out. We scrambled up the port and starboard ladder to the deck and heard the order to abandon ship.

"I plunged into the water," he continued, "and groped about in the darkness looking for something to cling to. Finally I spotted one of the Carley floats and swam to it. The chaps on the float had to haul me up"

Leading Supply Assistant J.M. Latremouille, R.C.N.V.R., of Ottawa, was the fifth man to jump overboard. He swam to a Carley float and hung on until picked up by the destroyer.

"I ran to the starboard side, took off my sea boots and prayed like hell," he said. "I heard the command to abandon ship, and over the side I went"