

Sub-Chaser Rescued in Raging Sea

U.S. Seamen Are Saved By Canadian Sailors

An Eastern Canadian Port. march 10. - Adrift in a tempestuous North Atlantic sea, without communication, steering or motive power for 23 hours, a United states Navy sub-chaser and her crew of 20 were rescued recently by the men of the Royal Canadian Navy minesweeper, H.M.C.S. Guysborough, in one of the most dramatic sea rescue operations of the war, naval service headquarters revealed today.

The R.C.N.V.R. ratings from Manitoba - eight of whom hail from Winnipeg - played important roles in the rescue. They were: Chief Engineer Albert Sayer, Transcona; A.B. Fred Seeley, Dauphin; Ldg Smn. Robert Lawson, Edward Carey, Tel. Gordon Robertson, Ldg. Sig. Alexander Gaer, Coder Tommy Ross, Stoker Howard Higgins and Stoker James Bonnett, all of Winnipeg.

The American ship was on patrol duty at the time of her plight. She first ran into grief when a drifting log, heavily driven by a giant wave, smashed into her steering gear, putting it out of commission. Minutes later, while trying to contact the nearest ship or shore establishment for assistance, the ship's radio and communication system went out of order. Then, while endeavoring to battle her way through heavy seas to the nearest port she ran out of fuel. She was at the mercy of the sea when picked up by Guysborough, who towed her to her home port.

The rescue, carried out in one of the fiercest winter storms in months - was highly praised by two governments. Canadian sailors were credited with displaying initiative, enterprise and tenacity in their handling of the situation.

Lieut. Benjamin R. Russell, R.C.N.R., of Halifax and Red Deer, Alberta, commanding officer of Guysborough, who directed the rescue operations, said North Atlantic winter was then enemy in the rescue.

"We were bucking the heavy swells as lone escort of a merchant ship en route to an Allied port," he went on, when Signalman Pal (... line missing ...) distress rocket flare off our starboard bow at 2 o'clock. It was about five in the morning and the stormy weather conditions made it difficult to ascertain how far the flare was away.

"I asked if any report of a ship in distress had been received on the wireless and was informed that had been none.

I signalled the commanding officer of the merchant ship, reporting the flare, and told him we were going to investigate. The merchant ship then headed into port unescorted."

Lieut. Russel told how his ship plowed through the heavy swell toward the location of the flare, only to discover upon arrival at the estimated position that there was no ship or any signs of like around.

"We made a sweep of the spot and were starting back toward the merchant ship, when another flare was reported by Paltiel about three miles off," he continued. "I was a little dubious about the flare as it's a well-known Nazi trick.

"But then the third rocket made its appearance short afterwards I decided to chance it."

"We took quite a beating from the rough sea as we made our way toward the flare," said Lieut. William Findlay, R.C.N.V.R., of Toronto, "for we were bucking a heavy headwind. After covering about three-quarters of our distance we noticed a series of lights that looked like a Christmas tree in the middle of the ocean," he continued. "It appeared a bit odd that a ship should be lighted so, and we were warned by the captain to be prepared for anything."

"As we drew near we signalled the ship with our Aldis lamp, but received no reply." said Sub-Lieut. Stanley Slade, R.C.N.V.R., also of Toronto. "We began to wonder what was up at this point, but decided to give the ship another chance to answer our signal," he continued, "and this time were told they were a U.S. navy craft out of commission requesting a tow."

Our problem was to get near enough to the American craft to pass the towing line and still not crash into them," said Lieut. George Whynot, R.C.N.V.R., of Toronto, executive officer in charge of the rescue operations on the quarterdeck. "One minute we'd be right on some of them and the next we'd be yards away. The ice-covered decks, cold winter blasts and roughness of the waves made the task a most difficult one. All of us were might lucky that we suffered no mishap during the affair."

To Charles (One-Shot) Barnett, R.C.N.V.R., of Vancouver, crack gunner of Guysborough, who fired the Costen gun that carried the towing line to the distressed ship, it was "like trying to hit an attacking Spitfire with a B.B. gun."

"I was fortunate enough to hit the deck of the American ship, but it was more luck than good shooting," he added.

Said Signalmen Robert Bishop, R.C.N.V.R., of Calgary, "most of the seaman on the American ship, like many of us, were suffering from seasickness, and staying on our feet on the slippery decks was a job in itself."

"We didn't encounter a great deal of trouble after we got the towing lines operating," said Sub-Lieut. Harry Meanwell, R.C.N.V.R., Windsor, Ont., who with Lieut. John Willington, R.C.N.V.R., and Sub-Lieut. Kenneth Blanche, R.C.N.V.R., both of Vancouver, directed towing operations at the stern of the ship.

Although they experienced many physical hardships from the cold, the water and the slippery footing, the ship's company to a man regard the episode lightly.

"All I can say is that I'd have done much better if I'd have had my skates on," said Ordinary Seaman Edward Carey, "the decks were a mess of ice and so slippery that it was a job to stay on your feet."

As token of their appreciation, American seamen of the rescued ship showered the Canadian sailors with cartons of cigarettes and chocolate bars after being towed into safety.

"It just rained cigarettes and chocolate bars for a while," said Able Seaman Eugene Webber, R.C.N.R., of Upper Lakeville, N.S.

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Photo caption

Credited with one of the most dramatic sea rescue operations of the war, officers and men of the Royal Canadian Navy minesweeper H.M.C.S. Guysborough were commended by two governments for the efficient manner in which they saved a United States Navy sub-chaser and her crew of 20 men from a gale-swept North Atlantic sea. The American ship was without communication, steering or motive power when picked up by the Canadian sailors. Here are nine Manitoba ratings who played important roles in the rescue operations. From left to right, the are, front row, A.B. Gordon MacGregor, R.C.N.V.R.; Sto. James Bennett, R.C.N.V.R.; Sto. Howard Higgins, R.C.N.V.R.; Tel. Gordon Robertson, R.C.N.V.R. and OS. Edward Carey, R.C.N.V.R., all of Winnipeg. Back row, CERA Albert Sayer, R.C.N.V.R., Transconna; A.B. Fred Seeley, R.C.N.V.R.; Dauphin; Coder Tommy Ross, R.C.N.V.R and Ldg. Sig. Alexander Gair, R.C.N.V.R., both of Winnipeg.