

Collision of HMCS NEW GLASGOW and U-1003

*An excerpt from “Ready, Aye, Ready” by Lieutenant Commander John Kenneth (Jack) Macbeth*

*Submitted by Eric Hanbury, son of the captain of the New Glasgow at the time of the collision.*

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No one aboard the frigate *New Glasgow* was expecting trouble from any quarter as she steamed northward from Londonderry to rendezvous with a southbound convoy off the coast of Scotland. It was March 21, 1945—seven weeks before the war’s end—and this was to be her final escort job before returning to Canada for a refit and, for her weary crew, long-awaited home leave. A piece of cake, they thought.

In company with her three sisters—*Ribble*, *Sussexvale*, and *Beacon Hill*—she was breezing along in bright moonlight and a calm sea at a comfortable twelve knots. The group was formed up in line abreast, one mile between ships, and *New Glasgow* was second ship in line, reading port to starboard. Her Captain was Lt-Cdr. Ross Hanbury, RCNVR.

In the chart house just below the bridge, the navigator (the present writer) was checking the ship’s position, not too complicated in this instance since only minutes earlier they had left the Foyle Buoy, which marked the entrance to the winding Foyle River. Or had they?

Suddenly the 1,500-ton ship lurched upward and over to starboard, as though some gigantic fist had reached down from the inky sky to pluck her from the sea and fling her aside. An ugly grating, grinding noise—like steel on rock—pierced the midnight silence.

“Holy Christ!” cried the navigator, bounding up the darkened stairway to the bridge, two steps at a time, sweating. “We’ve run aground!” Visions of a court martial flashed through his mind.

A cluster of shadowy figures milled about the forward end of the bridge, including the captain. No, said he, *New Glasgow* had not piled into a rock, although in some ways she might have been better off if she had. What had happened was this: At 2317, one of the bridge lookouts reported a “low flying aircraft” off the port bow. At this time of night? Hardly likely. Seconds later, another report: “Object in the water, very close!” The “object” was now seen to be a U-Boat’s *schnorkel* rising from the water, partly obscured by a pall of yellowish smoke. It made a low grunting noise. It was at that instant that the frigate received her shuddering thump. As far as is known, this was the war’s only such accidental collision between two belligerent warships.

Hanbury wheeled his ship around in a wide circle and, within a matter of minutes, began firing star shell in an attempt to illuminate the submarine. Other ships in the group joined the hunt. From official records available after the war, however, it was learned that U-1003, managed to dive after impact and escape her pursuers. For two days, the stricken U-Boat lay on the bottom off the coast of Northern Ireland in about 250 feet of water. Desperate efforts to save her failed and, on March 23, the boat’s captain gave the order to surface and scuttle. In abandoning ship, he and sixteen members of his crew were lost. Another thirty-one were picked up as prisoners.

The collision tore several ugly gashes in *New Glasgow*’s hull and mangled one of her propellers. Following first-aid treatment in Londonderry, she was ordered to do a full refit at Rosyth, on the far side of Scotland. There she languished, in dry dock, when peace descended on Europe.