

Sent: 7-Oct-06 1:36 AM

To: +Marcommuseum@MARLANT HQ@Halifax

Subject: The sinking of the Valleyfield

Dear Sirs:

Timothy John Wilbert Pollock on July 7, 2006 related to his wife Rita Frances Pollock nee Robinson, the story of how he on the Giffard and his mates rescued the only survivors of HMCS Valleyfield that was sunk by a submarine. I hope you will want to include this in your archives. It is a verbatim account from the tape I recorded. If you would like a picture or two of Tim, please advise.

Yours Sincerely,

Rita Pollock

**Tim's account:**

It's my involvement with the Valleyfield although I was never on it. My involvement with the Valleyfield began April 16, 1944 when I received a posting to the ship. However, when I took my basic training in Vancouver in January - February I was a very immature person so they held me back for two months to assist with the training of the next group that came in. Being in that long I was entitled to some leave so I went home for a week. When the group from Vancouver went to Victoria, when I came back and went to Victoria and I joined the next group that came in and that group came in from Edmonton so I took my basic training in Naden with a group from Edmonton. And in that group were five school friends who had been friends all through public school and through high school. I was with them. I was posted to Halifax with them and was posted in St. John's Newfoundland with them. We did shore duty together and then when we received our posting four of those people were posted to the Valleyfield with me and one was posted to the Giffard. I was approached by the lad who was posted to the Giffard and asked if I would change the posting with him so they could be together. I'd never been to sea before so one ship was same as another to me so I agreed to change the posting. But before they would allow that they advised me that the Valleyfield was a new ship and only made one trip, it was only her second run so she was a large clean ship, she was much larger than the Giffard. The Giffard on the other hand held a crew of about 68 and was a recycled British Navy Corvette, very rough in the water. Well, I didn't really mind which ship I went to. One ship was the same as the other to me. So I took the change of posting. So we did our trip to the west approaches off Europe turned the convoy over, had our refuel on the Foyle River, stopped at Londonderry. Went back out and joined the west over convoy off the approaches to the West Atlantic. Turned it over to the Triangle Escort Group headed for St. John's, Newfoundland about 2:30 in the afternoon. I was going on watch at Midnight just got out of my kip at about quarter to midnight, May 6th. It was ten minutes to midnight when I felt the shock wave of the torpedo hitting. Didn't know what it was about. Got ready to go up on watch, went up on watch and it was later I found out that the Valleyfield had been torpedoed. The bow went down in about one and a half minutes about one minute to midnight the torpedo hit the stern went down. So the ship was totally down in nine minutes. The Giffard circled, didn't know what had happened, circled around, went back to where the Valleyfield was and the Valleyfield was dead in the water at seventeen

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minutes after midnight, May 7th. We picked up the survivors. The one thing that will stay with me till the day I die is the sound of the people, the Navy people who went in the water, in the cold, suffering, and their cries, pleas for help, was something I had never heard before and I hope I never hear again. It was the most terrible sound that I've ever heard in my life. The cry was similar and was audible and as intelligible as the cry of a group of whales or sea lions but the only thing is, you could feel the terror in the sound that was coming. And we stopped to pick up what survivors we could. The method, what was being done, we lowered the scramble net, we lowered ropes to the carley float. The first person to come on board was the commander of the escort team. The rope was put around his life jacket, the shoulder of his life jacket, and we lifted him clear of the carley float and when he got against the side of the Giffard, his arms went up, he slid out of the life jacket because he forgot to fasten his crotch up, slipped down between the carley float and the ship and was never seen again.

Rita: That was the commander of the Valleyfield? Tim: The commander of the fleet, the C1S, the escort group. I forget if it was the C1 or the C5. His arms went up and he went down. We did take several people on board out of the carley float. Myself, I went over the side and as the people would come up against the net, too exhausted to grab the net themselves, I would grab their life jacket and hold them and get assistance to take them on board, to take them over the side and rescue them. There was one person of specific note, and I believe his name was McDonald. He was a red head from Nova Scotia, who actually went in the water, swam out, rescued people who were free in the water, without carley float and brought them into the netting where we could get them and take them onboard. Just absolutely heroic and he was a red headed lad and I'm not sure of his name. I believe he was mentioned in dispatches. Another person who I will never forget is the Coxan Master-at-arms, John Armitage. He was asked by the Gunnery Officer, Lt. Bert to come over the side and assist me to bring some of the people up from the scuffle net. He stood smartly to attention, and told Lt. Bert, "as long as the skipper was in command of the ship, there was no order, save the order to abandon ship would cause him to put his foot over the side of the boat." For his dedication to duty John Armitage was mentioned in dispatches for his actions. No actions. Another thing that should be said in here somewhere, is that the water that night was 32 degrees, 70 miles off Cape Race where the escort group was, when they were hit with the torpedo. Included in this report was the fact that Lt. Commander Black, commanding officer of the Giffard, because he stopped his ship in the vicinity of enemy submarines and endangered the ship and the life of the people on board, he was demoted and lost his command. Another fact that goes back to the sinking of the Valleyfield that has not been mentioned was the fact that there were 68 members of the Royal Navy who were residents of Newfoundland who were returning to Newfoundland for leave who were on the boat and the majority of those ratings were lost with the Valleyfield. Those people should be included because although they were not Canadians at the time any survivors and the parents of those people became Canadians citizens when Newfoundland joined Canada. So although they were British at the time they eventually were Canadians and should be honoured with the members of the Valleyfield. The total complement of the Valleyfield as I recall was 168 members and there was 68 Newfoundlanders for a total complement of 236 people on the Valleyfield. Of those 236 we took 43 on board the Giffard. No other ship took any on board and when we landed we had 38 live people in St. John the following day at just before noon and they were the only survivors of 236 people of the Valleyfield. It was a distressing time.

After the people were taken on board there was a very substantial job of clean up because the people who came on board were soaked with bunker oil, they were just absolutely covered with it and they had literally swam in the bunker oil that was floating on the water. The people who assisted with the rescue, myself included, the young red head who had done the swimming, the other people who helped on the scramble net, to take the people overboard, their clothing was soaked, saturated with bunker oil and they themselves. We looked like as if we were part of the people that had been rescued so there was a major cleanup for us to do on ourselves as well. This is something that I don't think I'll ever forget, the extent this bunker oil had spread and contaminated everything that it touches. And even those, when I saw

what had happened to the seabirds at the sinking of the Valdez I realized the fate of these birds because I had been there and experienced that.

One of the first that was rescued that survived was a person from Port Moody by the name of Iona. He was rescued in the Atlantic in St. Johns, Newfoundland. I've have always intended to see if I could contact him but I never have and I don't know what happened to Iona when he came back to Port Moody. But other than that I don't know many of the other people that were rescued but I did hear that all five of those people I took my training with that went together to the Valleyfield had lost their life. There was none of them that survived so for this story I can just repeat the words that were spoken by the young Ensign in the Royal Navy who had been with Captain Cook, Capt. Bert, when he looked and saw the six people plucked from the yard arm of the ship, he stated, "but there for the grace of god, go I". And that was one of my experiences of war.