THE FIRST MONTHS OF WAR, 1939-1940

"Top hats being trampled:" The Volunteer Reserve mobilizes, 1939

The RCNVR mobilized well before Canada declared war on 10 September 1939 and most trained personnel were immediately sent to Halifax or Esquimalt. As recruiting began for wartime service, there were shortages of everything except men. Sub Lieutenant Jack Anderson, RCNVR, recalls the first months of the war at HMCS York, *the RCNVR Division in Toronto:*

We had absolutely nothing, we started completely from scratch. We had no uniforms in stores, or any sort of equipment whatsoever, except for a few old Lee-Enfield rifles and the twelve-pounder gun. ……

We asked about uniforms for the men and Ottawa said, "There won't be any available until the spring of 1940." I knew the contracts had been let to Tip Top Tailors in Toronto. So I went down and saw the general manager, whom I had known previously when I was at Eaton's, and he made a special effort and said that when these 100 men were assembled in Toronto, send them down and he would personally kit them up with jumpers and trousers. I got a hundred pair of new black boots from Eaton's. I got a hundred caps from Muir Cap Company, who also had received a contract to produce sailors' caps. ……

We found ourselves at the Division, completely trapped without any transportation. So, in discussion with the Captain and some of the other officers, we decided to hold a naval ball to raise funds. Tickets were sold at, I think, $10 or $15 per couple, for a formal ball to be held on the Drill Deck. This was in October '39, around Trafalgar Day. The only unfortunate thing, they sold about 1800 tickets, and the Drill Hall would only accommodate about 600 at the utmost. ……

The evening in question arrived. And cars, large cars, started to arrive, people in tail coats, opera hats, women in mink and sable coats. I don't know where they all came from, and it got to the state where there were hundreds outside who could not get in. ……

There were mink stoles and top hats being trampled on the floor. It ended up in complete disorder. However they seemed to enjoy themselves, and we cleared about $1800 from that dance, with which we bought a second-hand panel truck, painted it navy blue with "Toronto Division, RCNVR" on the side of it. We appointed a driver and we were in business as far as transportation was concerned.[1]

Lieutenant Frederick Sherwood, RCNVR, who commanded HMCS Carleton, *the reserve division in Ottawa, comments on the early days:*

We had some very good Petty Officers and I am a firm believer that it's the men in them and not the ships that make the difference. We had a twelve-pounder on a mounting in the gun battery and we had a twelve-pounder that we could put on wheels. That was our field gun. We had some rifles which we could do rifle-drill with, we had all kinds of equipment for knots and splices, and we improvised quite a lot of things ourselves in signals. I found an old Chief Yeoman of Signals from the Royal Navy, named Pink, who was so stiff he couldn't turn at all, but he could go in a straight line, and if he wanted to turn he'd turn like a robot. But he took on the recruits and he started teaching them signals and morse and flags and things like that. ……

All sorts of people came out of the woodwork to help. It really was a marvellous effort. ……

All that winter we were getting ready for a war which hadn't officially started yet. It wasn't until the Norwegian campaign in April [1940] that they began to realize that there was a war. Then there was Dunkirk and it was at this time that suddenly all the plugs were pulled and they said, "Come on now, we're going to have a war!" Up until then they were trying politically to put on a show of "Yes we're going to do everything we can boys, but let's not do any more than we have to."[2]

"There was no option, so we did without:" Halifax in the early days of the war

Most RCNR and RCNVR personnel mobilized at the outbreak of the war ended up on the Atlantic coast where they manned the small ships of the local patrols. Lieutenant Owen Robertson, RCNR, took over command of HMCS Fundy, *one of the pre-war minesweepers, and remembers the problems he encountered with his first seagoing command:*

At first, in *Fundy*, we had three duffel coats – one that was my personal property and two that belonged to the Navy. You took 'em off and the next guy put 'em on. If it hadn't been for the IODE [Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire] and the people like that, we would have frozen to death. They knitted us scarves and socks – the Navy didn't have any. No oilskins. We couldn't get sea boots for the men at sea. The naval stores had sea-boots that were falling apart; they'd been there for fifty years – had arrived long before the Royal Navy handed over the Dockyard to the brand new RCN. But they were still "on charge" and so there was no authority to replace them. There was no option, so we did without. ……[3]

Leading Seaman R. Houliston, RCNVR, was assigned to HMCS French, *an auxiliary patrol vessel, and -remembers what happened when a green officer joined the vessel:*

One of new arrivals was a middie at first, and then picked up his first stripe. He was detailed off as the Gunnery Officer. I remember when we were taking off from Halifax harbour on a patrol, he closed the crew up to the main armament, which was a six-pounder gun; I don't know what we'd do with it if we had come up with anything. He gave the order to train the gun to starboard, and told the lad in charge of the gun, "Load with HE [High Explosive]," which was done. The Gunnery Officer turned to the Captain and said, "Permission to fire?" And the Captain said, "Yes." The Gunnery Officer gave the order to fire and nothing happened. So he repeated the order and nothing happened. The third time he asked the Captain of the gun, "What's the problem?" The reply: "Sir, on the bearing we're trained on, Camperdown Lighthouse will be gone if we let this thing go!"[4]

Petty Officer R.M. Smith, who began his naval career as a rating in the RCNVR in September 1939, recalls the early days of the war at HMCS Stadacona, *the shore station at Halifax when he was the duty bugler:*

Every morning I played "Wakey-Wakey" – which I blew over the mike at the Quarter Deck, then [went] to every block and blew it again. Every time

I did it in the old [barrack] block down by the dock where all the "re-treads" and "ex-merchant" ratings were, I had to run through [and] between the lockers playing the bugle – and the boots, etc., were flying around my head complete with loud comments of what I could do with my bugle!

When I arrived at the block where I had been with my buddies, they were hollering as well … couldn't I play anything besides "Wakey-Wakey?" so I chose to blow the first notes of the "Tiger Rag."[5]

How to be a plumber in one easy lesson: The navy expands

Lieutenant Owen Robertson, RCNR, was transferred to Ottawa in early 1940 to assist recruiting for the wartime navy. He remembers it being a hectic time:

In Ottawa we had nice easy working hours – seven days a week from eight until you were finished, generally about seven o'clock at night. If you were going to be later than that, you went home or went somewhere to eat and then came back and finished off. Four nights a week we went down to the basement in the RCNVR Headquarters and taught for a couple of hours. Saturday was a good day – we tried to knock off work at six or seven o'clock at night. We worked on Sunday mornings – Sunday afternoons we had off. ……

In recruiting seamen, it wasn't so difficult, because we knew how long it would take before you could ship them off to sea as seaman gunners or whatever. But the technical trades! To turn out an artificer or an artisan took six to nine months before they were fit to send to sea and manage a propulsion plant. ……

Very quickly, I had to learn what skills were required for the various trades so that I could talk glibly about them. Every night I'd go to sleep with a manual on my chest: *How to Be a Plumber in One Easy Lesson*, or something like that. ……

We'd go on these recruiting trips for a week, sometimes up to three weeks. As we stepped off the train, guys would be waiting at the station to join up. When we were leaving on the train, there would sometimes be about ten guys still with us. ……[6]

1 Basic Training -- Two Variants on a Theme
Recruits in both the Canadian and German navies had to undergo basic military training as shown in these photographs. On the left, sailors at the training establishment, HMCS **Cornwallis**, near Digby, Nova Scotia, prepare to repel boarders using First World War vintage rifles which would not have been much use against a U-boat. Across the Atlantic, meanwhile, officer cadets at the German naval academy at Flensburg make intimate contact with the ground although a knowledge of how to crawl through the mud would have had only limited use on the North Atlantic. On the other hand, such is life in the service. RCN photograph by G.A. Milne, courtesy National Archives of Canada, PA 128091; German photograph, courtesy Werner Hirschmann. [Robin, the Hirschman photo was sent to you by .jpg]

“Have sighted German, swimming strongly:” The early days at sea

For the first nine months, the war at sea was relatively uneventful for the Canadian navy. Sub-Lieutenant Ralph Hennessy, RCN, of HMCS Assiniboine *recalled that one highlight came in early 1940 when that destroyer was serving in the West Indies.*

Down in the Caribbean we did manage to intercept one German [merchant] ship. The British cruiser *Dunedin* and ourselves picked up the *Hannover*, which subsequently was converted by the Royal Navy to an auxiliary aircraft carrier. She was a brand new ship – a lovely one – but her crew tried to scuttle her. They set her on fire but made a mess of the scuttling. So *Dunedin* and ourselves went alongside her. …… For the trip from there into Kingston [Jamaica], we had *Dunedin* on one side of her and ourselves on the other with fire hoses going and eventually we put out the fires they’d set. ……

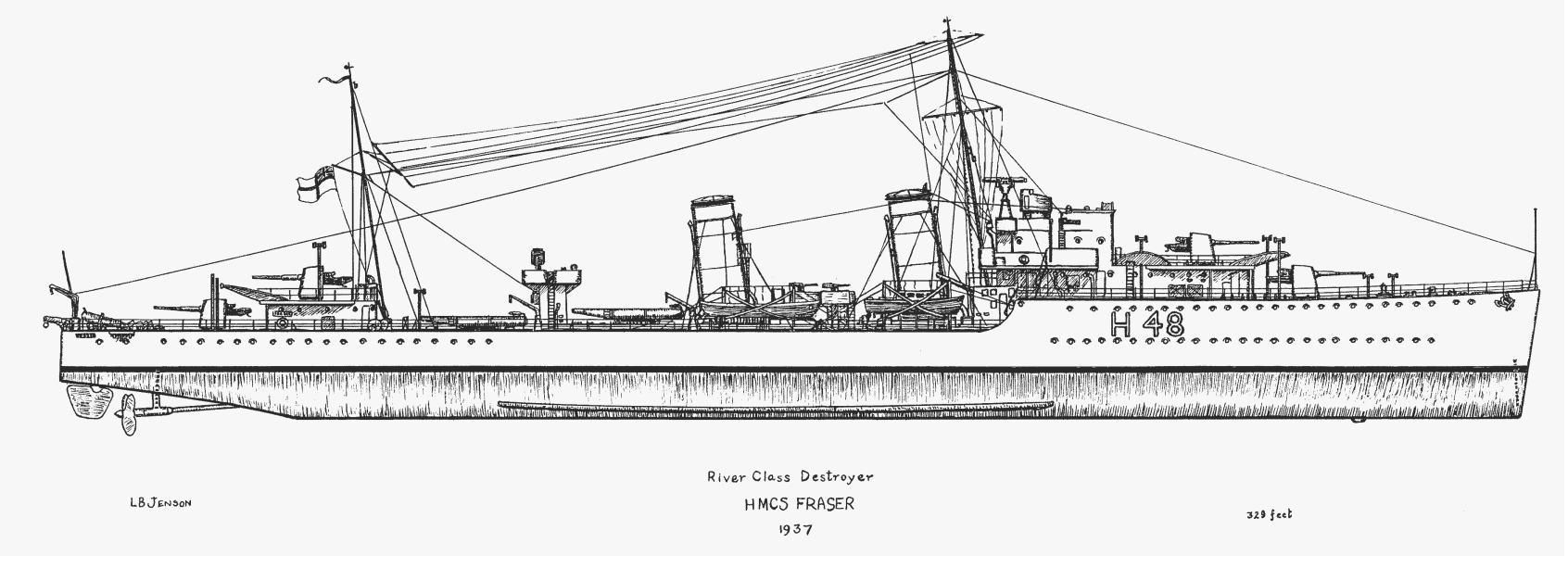
We made sure the German crew stayed on board. *Hannover*’s decks were quite hot to stand on as a result of the heat from the fires, and the German crew tried to come on board both our ships. But we said, “No effing fear – you just stay right where you are, friends.” They were all into fire fighting, once they knew she wasn’t going to sink. ……

At quite an early stage, one of the “better” Nazis on board, refusing to be dishonoured by being taken prisoner, dove over the side and headed for the Fatherland by rhumb line, under his own power. After things began to come under control *Dunedin* sent us to recover him. *Assiniboine* sent back a series of messages:

“Have sighted German, swimming strongly.”

“German in boat. Has requested Cox’n to shoot him.”

“Cox’n regrets he has no gun.”[7]



HMCS Fraser, River Class Destroyer, 1937
In 1939 the RCN possessed six modern destroyers of a standard British design. These vessels displaced 1,375 tons, were 329 feet long, had a top speed of 31 knots, carried a complement of 181 and were armed with four 4.7 inch guns, eight 21-inch torpedo tubes and two 2-pdr. (40 mm) anti-aircraft guns, as well as depth charges. HMCS **Fraser**, the former HMS **Crescent**, entered Canadian service in 1937, participated in the early war convoys and the evacuation of France but was sunk in a collision with the British cruiser, **Calcutta**, on 25 June 1940. Drawing by L.B. Jenson, courtesy Directorate of History and Heritage, DND.

"G-G-Good G-G-God, there's a gun!"
The fall of France, 1940

In the spring of 1940 the tempo of the war changed when Germany conquered the Low Countries and France in the space of six weeks. Canada sent all its destroyers to serve in British waters and one of the first tasks they carried out in June 1940 was the evacuation of civilians, diplomats and allied troops from small ports in the west of France before the seemingly invincible German army arrived. Commander W.B. Creery, RCN, captain of HMCS Fraser, *recalls the evacuation of the St. Jean de Luz in the Bay of Biscay in late June 1940:*

Sub-Lieutenant Landymore was sent by motor boat to try to persuade the skippers of some Belgian trawlers anchored in a distant part of the harbour to sail north to England instead of south to neutral Spain.

The evacuation party [Landymore] was obliged to leave the shore before 1300 and, therefore, be re-embarked while there were still a few boatloads of evacuees waiting passage to the merchant ships. I decided to remain until all evacuees had been embarked.

So there we were: our time was up, the Germans were known to be approaching, the evacuation was not completed and Landymore and our motor boat had not returned. We spent a miserable forenoon. At noon, boatloads were still arriving from shore and the decks of the little tramps were swarming with people who would have to live there for a week with little or no protection from the elements and a few facilities. Suddenly the Officer of the Watch, who had a slight stammer, exclaimed, "G-G-Good G-G-God, there's a *gun*!"

Sure enough, over the brow of a nearby hill a small force with a field gun and a tank had appeared. We couldn't make out their nationality but, to guns on land, ships in harbour are sitting ducks and there was only one thing to do. I sounded "Action Stations," ordered the merchant ships to sea and prepared to follow them. We watched sadly as several boatloads of evacuees turned back to shore.

Our motor boat returned and had difficulty hooking on the hoisting falls because we were light in the water and rolling badly in the confused swell. Landymore sent the boat's crew swarming up the falls and inboard as soon as the boat was hooked on, but remained in the boat himself. I was anxious to go to action stations and weigh anchor but we had no power hoists and it took all hands to hoist the boat. However, we had a try at doing all three things at the same time and, although the boat smashed badly against the ship's side as we hoisted it, all was going reasonably well until a steadying line parted, the boat canted sharply outward and Landymore was catapulted into the sea.

As if this were not enough, the Focsle Officer reported that the anchor had apparently fouled a cable on the bottom of the harbour and could not be weighed. Then the Officer of the Watch reported that there were now several guns on the nearby ridge, all of which appeared to be trained on us! Obviously we could delay no longer, so we fished Landymore out of the water, slipped our cable and departed in haste if not dignity. ……

Because of this sudden move, we had to leave one final boatload of refugees but, in all, 16,000 Polish soldiers and thousands of refugees were successfully evacuated.[8]

Canadian warships were not directly involved in the rescue of the British army from the beaches of Dunkirk but some RCN personnel did participate as individuals. One was Sub--Lieutenant Robert Timbrell, RCN, who was at the RN gunnery school at Whale Island at -Portsmouth one morning in June 1940 when he and his classmates were hurriedly ordered to take command of an armada of small craft gathered for the rescue attempt. Timbrell was sent to Llanthany*, a millionaire's spanking-new diesel yacht, and later recalled that, when he first mustered his complement,*

The crew was mixed – there were a Petty Officer and four RN seamen, six Newfoundland navy ratings and two 50-year-old engineers in civvies. I found out that the civvies had come from the London Transport bus depot. I thought the Newfoundlanders were my saviours – until I found that they had put on their uniforms a month before, having been lumberjacks in Newfoundland and had never been to sea. …… *Llanthany*'s main armament consisted of my .45 revolver, holstered in a marvellous leather belt, stamped "1914." ……

We sailed [from Ramsgate] and did the "usual" day trips to Dunkirk. …… The RAF were over the Dunkirk beach, doing a marvellous job, but the odd German got through. The beach was also being shelled. The town was in flames.

I had two boats on davits and I sent the Petty Officer in with them to embark troops to our anchorage north of the jetty – the jetty was reserved for destroyers and cross-Channel ferries. *Llanthany* carried about 100 or 120 Allied soldiers with their rifles on each trip, and we returned the instant we were loaded. Every conceivable yacht and pleasure craft was occupied in the rescue. ……

Mussolini's Revenge, December 1940
After HMCS ***Ottawa*** sunk the Italian submarine, ***Faa di Bruno***, in October 1940, the Italian navy extracted its revenge by torpedoing the destroyer ***Saguenay*** in December of that year. Although 21 men were killed, the ship was saved by good damage control and was able to reach port where she is seen in the photograph. ***Saguenay*** was repaired and returned to sea in May 1941 as part of the Newfoundland Escort Force but a collision with a merchantman late in 1942 led to her being relegated to service as a training vessel. (National Archives of Canada PA 114155)

On our third or fourth trip we got knocked about a bit near Dunkirk end – I don't know whether it was a bomb or shell – but I lost half the crew, my anchors and the fuel supply line to the engines. We ended up on the beach. We carried out some repairs -- the hull was OK – and were ready for the tide to come up and spring us loose. I kept looking at my first command, high and dry there on the beach, with the water seeming to be a mile away. ……

A sergeant came down with about six or eight men; they turned out to be the remains of a battalion of Guards. The sergeant said they would like to get back to England – a statement we agreed on. He asked how he could help. I asked him to go off and find a tank and he found a bren-gun carrier and drove it out into the ocean until it stopped. We put a line around it and winched the yacht off.

After we got the yacht off the beach and loaded with troops, we went back to Ramsgate and were met by the [RN co-ordinating] Captain, who was still meeting every ship. I reported that I had lost half the crew and asked, "Could you make arrangements for replacements?" The Guards sergeant, there and then, said, "Sir, we would like to stay with you, if we're permitted, and go back and get our mates!" The Captain could have got replacements for my sailors but he asked the sergeant, "Are you sure you want to go back?" The sergeant said that they would stay – and they stayed the whole time, for all the rest of the runs.

Up until then, the only gun on the yacht was my .45 revolver. The

soldiers were able to get machine guns and some anti-tank guns which fired something like a one-inch shell. The guns proved useful later when E-boats came down on the last two nights.

After we did the last trip back to Ramsgate, we went on to Portsmouth. …… Then, with the sergeant and the troops and the remains of my original crew – including my two civilian engineers – we marched to the lower gate at Portsmouth Dockyard. We were asked one question, "Are you back from Dunkirk?" I replied, "Yes," and the Dockyard sentry said, "Pass."[9]

Rescuing survivors

On 2 July 1940, the liner Arandora Star *carrying nearly 1300 passengers was torpedoed and sank west of Ireland. HMCS* St Laurent, *under Lieutenant Commander Harry De Wolf, RCN, picked up many of the survivors and, as Lieutenant Ralph Welland remembers, they were in a terrible condition:*

They had been in the water about 8 hours and by the time we got back to Greenock … at full speed, 32 knots, 62 of them had died. I remember the number. De Wolf had told me … "You, Welland, take two strong sailors, and you're in charge of Category 2 people." I said, "Category 2, sir?" He said, "Yes, dead."

The ship was a shambles. Within an hour of picking those people up, not one lavatory in the ship worked. The whole thing was covered by oil. People had been throwing up. …… There were 50 people in the wardroom, all lying down in rows, like a slave ship, and all in pretty poor shape, and dying all the time.

I and my two sailors went around and collected the people who were dead and stacked them up on the Y gun deck. That's a lot of dead people. ……

We did the best we could. Everybody gave all their clothing, all their blankets, all the canvas sheets, hammock covers, to wrap these people in to keep them warm, because most of them were on the upper deck. There wasn't room for that number of people down below, so they were wrapped up in the upper deck with the ship doing 32 knots and the spray coming over.[10]

Double disasters: The loss of *Fraser* and *Margaree,* 1940

During the course of 1940, the RCN lost two destroyers, HMC Ships Fraser *and* Margaree, *about a fifth of its modern fleet, in collisions at sea.* Fraser *was cut in half by the British cruiser* Calcutta *on 25 June 1940 and her captain, Commander W.B. Creery, RCN, remembered the moments that immediately followed:*

The upper bridge [of *Fraser*], where eight of us were standing, was neatly picked up by *Calcutta*'s focsle. The shock of the collision sent us flying and it was a moment or two before we recovered our senses sufficiently to realize what had happened. To us, our perch seemed very precarious and we hastily climbed over the front screen of *Fraser*'s erstwhile bridge and dropped some six feet or so onto *Calcutta*'s focsle. So *Fraser*'s bridge personnel – myself, the Officer of the Watch, the Second Officer of the Watch, signalmen and lookouts – were now aboard *Calcutta*. One of the wheelhouse crew was also rescued there – he was in a small cavity between *Calcutta*'s deck and the floor of *Fraser*'s bridge, which had buckled. The man who had been standing beside him had been squashed flat. *Fraser*'s bridge remained on *Calcutta*'s focsle until it was burned off in Devonport Dockyard by acetylene torch. ……

By now it was pitch dark and I couldn't see any part of *Fraser*, but I had heard shouts from the fore part and then, a little later, the men's voices singing "Roll out the Barrel."[11]

Sub Lieutenant Robert Timbrell, RCN, was in Margaree *when she was cut in half on 21 October by the merchantman* Port Fairy. *He remembers the experiences of the last men on board the destroyer:*

By now, it was two-thirty or three o'clock in the morning. …… Four of us were left on board: Pat Russell – the First Lieutenant, Bill Landymore – the Gunnery Officer, the L[eading] T[orpedo] O[perator], and myself. ……

By now we had drawn well away from the *Port Fairy*. Pat had the ship checked – there was no one else on board, number one boiler room was filling up and number two was leaking. It was decided we would get a carley float out. We had a float on the torpedo-tubes, so we swung the tubes outboard on the leeward side. The LTO and I got up on the tubes to throw the float over the side but, before doing so, we passed the line over to Bill Landymore, not giving any thought to the length of the line. When you're in such a position and thinking of saving your soul, you seem to get extra adrenalin or super-strength – we *threw* that carley float – the next thing we saw was Landymore hanging on to the rope, going over the side and hitting the cold Atlantic water.

On the Bridge
Officers and sailors of HMCS ***Restigouche*** on the North Atlantic in late 1940 or early 1941. The circular apparatus on the right is the ship's radio antenna. (Courtesy, National Archives of Canada, PA 176750)

… it must have been four or five o'clock in the morning – it was October and cold, and we were about five hundred miles west of Ireland. There was dead silence on top of the tubes looking down, Pat Russell was at the ship's side looking over. Up came the fluttering, unhappy Gunnery Officer and I can still see this moment of crisis. Pat Russell leaned over and yelled, "Landymore, did I give you permission to leave the ship?"[12]

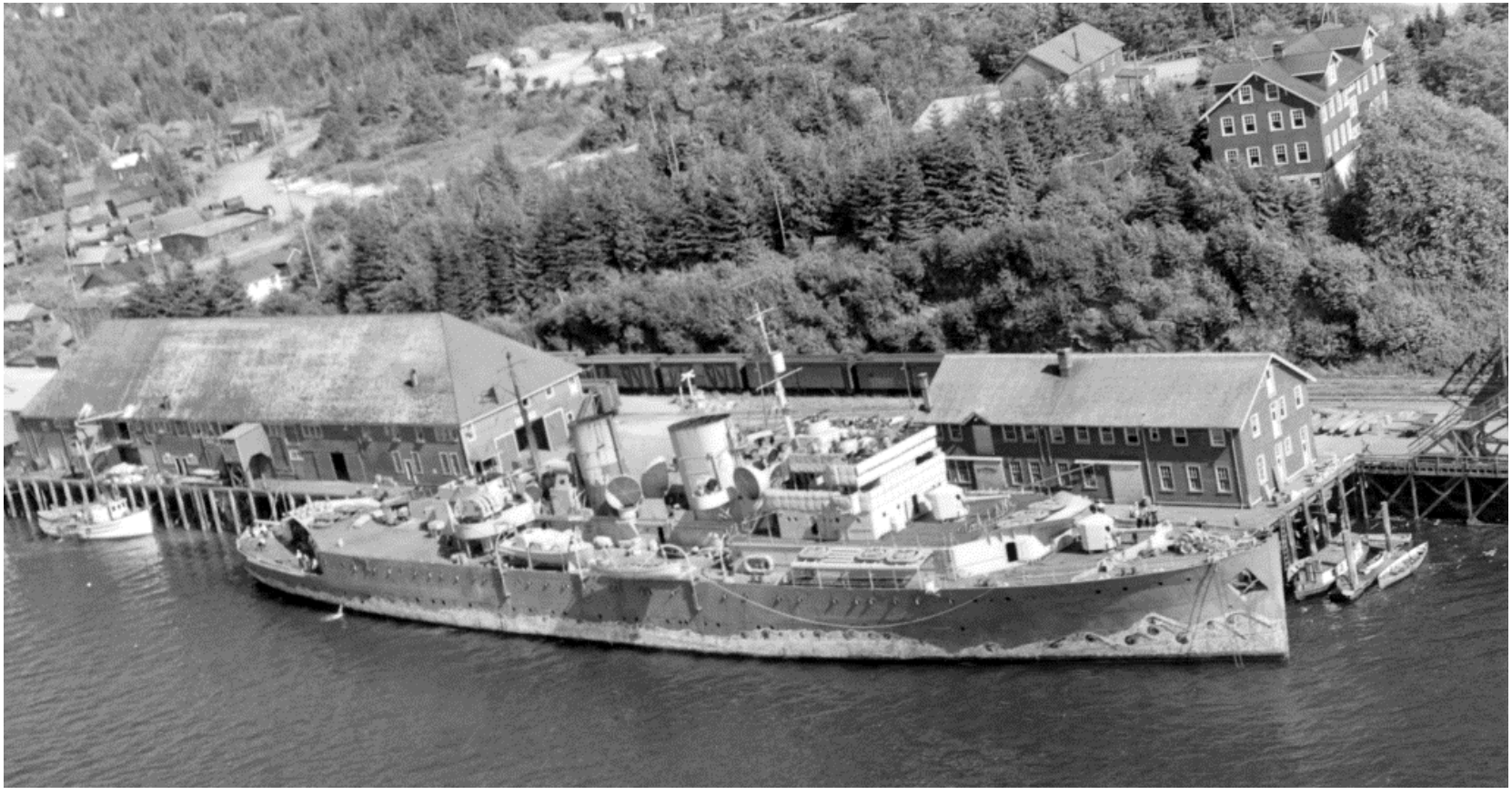
"I can't get down the ladder:" HMCS *Saguenay*, December 1940

On 1 December, the Italian submarine Argo *torpedoed HMCS* Saguenay *about 400 miles west of Ireland. Lieutenant Louis Audette, RCNVR, never forgot the heroism of a young seaman during the moments that followed:*

There was a strange hush about the ship. I went up to the bridge and [Lieutenant Commander G.W.] Miles [captain of *Saguenay*] told me to go aft and take charge of the -after guns. Most of the focsle was blown away and everything around the two forward guns was ablaze. Nobody could man the forward guns, so I went aft. Of course, when your ship's been torpedoed, you don't know who's been killed – you don't know who's been wounded, and you don't know who's available for anything. I had to man X and Y guns. I got Y gun manned and went to X gun, and called for volunteers.

Lots of chaps volunteered, one I'll always remember – a youngster, Clifford McNaught, not a gunnery rating, not skilled in the art of gunnery. I put him on as a supply number, which required him to lift cold, heavy, metal shells and put them in the gun tray. We had to do a bit of firing, because the submarine was on the surface and firing further torpedoes at us. Fortunately they missed. This went on for a while. There's an awful lot to do when a

ship is torpedoed, there really is.



Big Ship -- HMCS Prince Robert
At the beginning of the war, the biggest concern was not U-boats but German surface raiders. The RCN converted three small Canadian Pacific Railway liners into armed merchant cruisers. **Prince Robert**, shown in this aerial photograph taken in July 1942, displaced 5,736 tons, carried a complement of 400 officers and men and was armed with ten 4-inch guns, two 3-pdr. guns and eight 20 mm guns. She served in this capacity until 1943 when she was converted to an Anti-Aircraft ship. (Courtesy, National Archives of Canada, PA 205373)

After a while I had a moment when I could do what I wanted, and went to McNaught and said, "I know you're not familiar with the shells." There were shells spread around X gun, which is one deck up, and I was pointing out to him what was armour-piercing and what was starshell, so that he'd know what to do if he was called upon to produce one or the other. ……

All of a sudden the flames on the forepart of the ship went wildly ablaze and it grew a lot brighter. Then I observed that McNaught was standing in a very unusual position, his elbows flexed above his head and his hands very near his face, an unusual position for any man to adopt. I finally really looked at him. For a moment, when the flames were particularly bright, I was able to observe that his hands and face were hideously burned. How he

ever could have handled the shells, I have no idea. Naturally, I immediately told him, "Go below, got to the Doctor in the Wardroom and get the necessary medical care." Then I had to find someone to replace him.

Other things occurred; I can remember the flames were getting near the magazine and the flooding-valve was stuck – that caused a bit of anxiety for a few moments. After a while I found McNaught sitting on the deck – he hadn't gone below. I turned on him angrily and said, "Look! I told you to go below. Go and see the Doctor." Then I realized he was quietly sobbing, just like a child, like a hurt child. Indeed he was a hurt child and those were devastating tears of shock, of course. He looked up at me and really silenced me. He sobbed, "I can't. My hands! I can't go down the ladder." And he couldn't! But he was the fellow who had handled these shells throughout the action, quite cheerfully, no problem. But the moment the strain was taken away he could no longer do it.

I put a line around him and we lowered him down onto the main deck. He was able to walk, there was no problem there. But the next morning he was in quite bad shape.[13]

"Waves cresting near fifty feet:" One of the first corvettes encounters rough weather on the Atlantic

HMCS Hepatica *was one of the first Canadian-built corvettes to be commissioned. Intended for the Royal Navy, she left Halifax for Britain in December 1940 with a veteran merchant marine captain but a green crew, 6 depth-charges and a wooden gun. As Seaman Lionel Kennedy remembers, it was a difficult voyage:*

Three days out of Halifax the convoy ran into a wicked gale that saw the waves cresting near fifty feet, scattering the merchant ships and forcing us to heave to for three days, bow on to the heavy seas and high winds. Finally, the -skipper decided to make a try at swinging the ship about to carry on for the U.K. and at that time I was in the wheelhouse. Seas were far apart and, as the next wave -approached, the skipper kept her bow on until part way up the wave, then put the helm hard over to starboard. This brought *Hepatica* broadside on to the crest and still turning, our stern to the sea as we dropped down into the trough. It was a neatly-done manoeuvre, carried out by a skipper who had once sailed the China seas, and we were glad we had a professional to do it. The rest of us had never seen anything bigger than York Lake or the Assiniboine River.[14]

A wet and open deck
One of the major problems with the original corvette design was that the main deck was open between the bridge structure and the foc'sle where the sailors slept and ate. The result was that in any but the most calm sea, corvettes were very wet ships. His fault was corrected by later modifications that extended the foc'sle back to the bridge. (Canadian Memorial Trust)