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The loss of HMCS *Spikenard*, February 1942

The year 1942 began badly for the RCN when the corvette Spikenard was torpedoed on 10 February while escorting convoy SC 67. Seaman Wilfred Mills, a crew member, recalled that,

When the torpedo exploded it destroyed the stoker's mess and the wardroom and tore upward through the bridge structure, leaving it in ribbons of steel and setting the well deck on fire. I covered my head with a coat and ran through the flames, sustaining third-degree burns on my hands, only to fall into the hole full of water. From there I climbed to the upper deck over the strips of steel to my abandon ship station, which was the port Carley float. People came up out of the stokehold. I was so stunned I couldn't get the Carley float free and someone else came and cut it loose.

Whether there were other people in the water, I cannot tell you. All was confusion. We started out on a port side Carley float from the upper deck, which by this time was level with the water. We caught up with a raft and transferred to it. The convoy steamed on unaware that *Spikenard* had been hit.¹

Mills was one of only eight survivors from Spikenard rescued by the British corvette HMS Gentian after spending eighteen hours in the North Atlantic.

“Almost any meal could be an adventure:” Corvette dining

Living conditions on corvettes were primitive and in no matter was this more apparent than in arrangements for cooking and eating. Seaman Murry Laidlaw remembers that new sailors

had to make certain adjustments changing to Navy grub, getting used to things like “red lead and bacon” – lukewarm, watery tomatoes and either raw or overcooked bacon. My first sea draft was to the corvette *Chicoutimi*, one of the ships which had a short forecastle and kept it until the war ended. There I discovered that there was just one cook for about 65 men. He didn't have the time, space, or facilities to make food dishes like my mother did. Then there was a supply department victualling manual which clearly spelled out the menu and quantity which sailors should eat.

The first long trip was from North Sydney to Tobermory, Scotland – some twenty-one days of questionable weather. Our bread turned green after about seven days out, and after paring off the outside mould, we had only a two-inch square that we could eat. When the bread was gone we reverted

to hardtack, a biscuit some six inches in diameter and half an inch thick. They were so hard the man has yet to be born who could take a bite from one. You either split them with a knife or dunked them and still came up with a tasteless product.

The victualling dry store in the *Chicoutimi* was aft and down under the quarterdeck, with access through a hatch which the V.A. (victualling assistant [or storesman]) always kept locked tight and dogged down. Sometimes, though, not all the dogs were secured and I recall when a bad storm put four feet of water into the storeroom. The water washed all of the labels off the tins of canned goods. As a consequence it was a surprise with every can we opened.

Any seaman who ever sailed in a corvette with an original short forecastle will know the problems that created, whether trying to get from mess to galley or going on watch. You had a stretch of open deck to cross buffeted by high winds, often drenched by waves coming aboard. Many a meal was lost along the way or else was well "salted." Most corvettes later had forecastles extended to as to take in the galley and bridge access.

Crockery was always being broken in rough seas, until it reached a point where we had to eat in shifts. In rough seas, you kept one hand on the plate to be sure it stayed put while you ate, at the same time bracing yourself so that you yourself stayed put. Almost any meal could be an adventure.²

Ports of call (1): "Newfie John," spiritual home of the North Atlantic escorts

St John's, Newfoundland (at that time not part of Canada), was established as a base for the trans-Atlantic escort vessels in May 1941 and, over the next four years, hundreds of Canadian warships visited it. "Newfie John," as the Canadians called it, was one of their -favourite ports of call because of, as Lieutenant Latham Jenson, RCN, remembered, the friendliness of its people:

The redeeming feature of Newfoundland was the nature of the inhabitants. Kind, friendly, generous and decent, rich and poor alike, they could not have been more supportive of all these strangers who had descended upon them.

The escorts generally berthed near the oil tanks on the other side of the harbour from the city. It was a long walk on a rocky road to St. John's and most people took a bum boat over for a few cents. In the harbour were several merchant ships that had been damaged by the weather or the enemy and were awaiting repair. One ship had a large hole blown through her stern and the bum boat man often took his boat and passengers right through the hole. The one lung engine really echoed while we were in the great hole.³



An Essentially Tricky Job

Canadian warships utilized a messing system to feed sailors. Each mess of about six to eight men sent a "messman" to the galley to pick up their food and bring it back to their crewspace where it was eaten. On corvettes serving on the storm-tossed North Atlantic, the messman's return journey, laden with hot food for his comrades, could be a very tricky business and there were many days when sailors ate their food cold and spiced with seawater after the messman had scraped it up off the deck. (Drawing by L.B. Jenson, courtesy of the artist.)



Newfie John -- A Place of Rest

St. John's, Newfoundland, as it appeared during the war with its hills and wooden docks. (Sketched by Lieutenant L.B. Jenson, RCN, courtesy of the artist)

Recreation activities were limited, as Seaman Frank Curry -remembers, but “a run ashore” in Newfie John was usually -enjoyable:

Many of us set out on the long hike from the South Side, around the end of the harbour, and into the centre of town. The narrow, cobblestoned streets were jammed with sailors, all searching for a break from life aboard ship. The restaurants were packed with hungry sailors, happy for a rest from everyday fare aboard ship. The movie theatre always had a long lineup. Many a sailor was on the lookout for something to drink other than tea or pop. Beer was often in short supply, but it didn't take long for us to discover the joys of Newfoundland's famous Screech, a liquor based on rum, clear and innocent enough to look at, but powerful enough to knock out even the hardest of drinkers. Bottles of this native drink passed hands in dark alleys in exchange for seaman's -precious dollars. Well into the night, sailors crawled back on board -after polishing off a bottle of Screech. More important than food, drink and movies was a bit of female

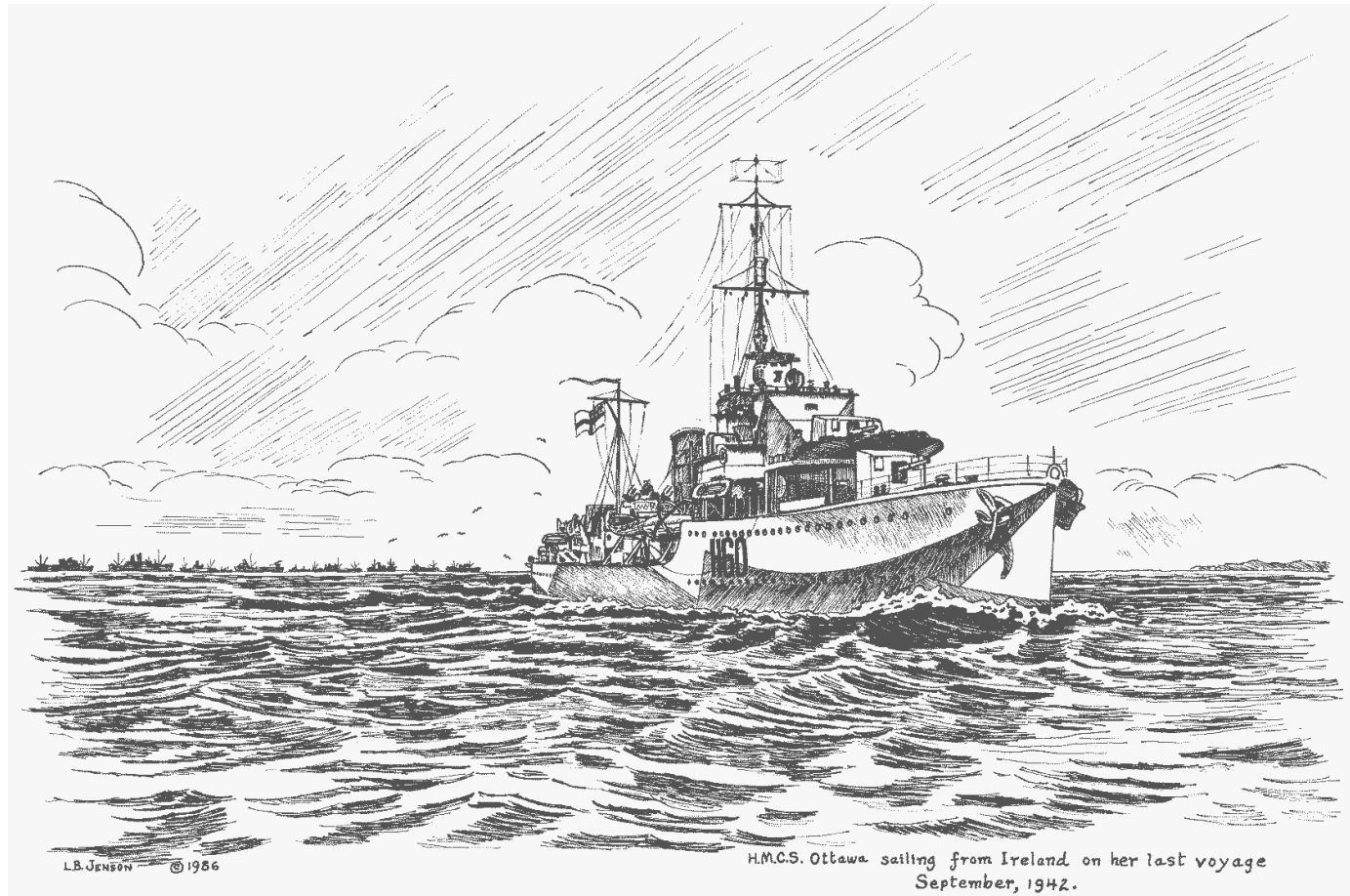
companionship, for which we sailors were constantly on the lookout. The search often proved to be a tricky business, since sailors vastly outnumbered the girls. There were crowds of seamen pouring ashore; there were soldiers and airmen; and there were our greatest rivals, the Yanks from Fort Pepperall and the American ships. Despite the competition, many a Canadian sailor found romance. Many of them married into St. John's families.

Many of us headed for the hostels which had sprung up with the war, most particularly the YMCA, the Sally Ann (Salvation Army) and the K of C (Knights of Columbus). In these hostels we found a bed for the night; three-tiered bunks, stacked inches apart in the huge dormitories which -reminded me of the Stadacona barracks, except that the beds were real ones. With overnight leave until 0700 hours, it was possible to get a good night's rest, and have supper and breakfast in somewhat more civilized surrounds than the seaman's mess.⁴

For officers, the greatest attraction in St. John's was the famous Crowsnest Club and Lieutenant James Lamb, RCNVR, -remembers that,

If any single place could be said to be the heart of the corvette navy, the Crowsnest, officially entitled the Seagoing Officers Club, would be it. Certainly it was home to all of us in the escort ships; a place you could drop into at any time of day or night and be assured of a welcome, a drink, or a simple snack – the hot ersatz eggs and Spam sandwiches were always good – from the assiduous Gordon and his wife, who presided there. Dozens of enormous leather armchairs were scattered about the bare floor, and grouped about the fireplace, with its comfortable padded fender. The walls were resplendent with the crest of every escort ship in the western ocean; original works of art, most of them, and always worth a tour of inspection to see what new ones had been added since the last visit. In a corner, the head of a large spike, “Spikenard's Spike,” protruded from the floor; it had been

driven in there by Shadforth, commanding officer of the corvette *Spikenard* during a nail-hammering contest on his last night ashore before *Spikenard* sailed. She was torpedoed and lost with all hands, and her spike in the Crow'snest floor was retained as a memento of lost friends.⁵



HMCS Ottawa, September 1942

HMCS **Ottawa**, a River Class destroyer, sets out on her last convoy. She was sunk with great loss of life on 13 September 1942. Drawing by L.B. Jensen, a former officer in **Ottawa**, courtesy of the artist.

“U-boat considered sunk:” Convoy ON 115, July–August 1942

Convoy ON 115, which left Britain bound for Halifax in late July 1942 was attacked by two different U-boat wolfpacks during the course of its voyage but fairly effective defence by the Canadian escort group limited losses to three merchant ships. On the plus side, HMC Ships Skeena and Wetaskiwin disposed of U-558 on 31 July following a hunt which lasted more than five hours and involved repeated depth charge attacks as the two vessels worked in concert, conversing by frequent messages, including this final exchange:

Wetaskiwin: Contact bearing 300 degrees, 1000 yards.

Wetaskiwin: Attacking [with depth charges].

Wetaskiwin: Lost contact.

Skeena: Echo bearing 120 degrees, 700 yards.

Wetaskiwin: O.K. Let me do an attack now.

Skeena: Unable to gain contact.

Wetaskiwin: I will try to help you by directing.

Skeena: Attacking.

Wetaskiwin: Excellent.

Skeena: Did you hear that underwater explosion?

Wetaskiwin: Yes. Definitely.

Skeena: Your turn.

Wetaskiwin: Plenty of wreckage over this way.

Skeena: I am lowering a whaler to pick up the guts.

Skeena: (General Signal) U-boat considered sunk by HMCS *Wetaskiwin* and HMCS *Skeena*. Floating wreckage and human remains recovered.⁶

“He opened fire with all his guns:” Convoy SC 94, August 1942

A second confirmed submarine kill was made by HMCS Assiniboine on 6 August 1942 when she sank U-210 after a running gun battle on the surface through patches of fog. As Assiniboine’s captain, Lieutenant Commander J.H. Stubbs, RCN, reported:

I closed [the] U-boat to ram at full speed.

He opened fire with all his guns and for about 35 minutes the action continued at a point blank range of about 100 to 300 yards. A second degree fire broke out on the starboard side of the break of the forecastle and spread almost to the bridge and through the sick bay flat. The enemy took constant evading action and I was forced to go full astern on the inside engine to prevent him from getting inside our turning circle, which he was obviously trying to do.

It was impossible to depress the 4.7” guns sufficiently at this range, but I ordered them to continue firing, more to keep the guns’ crews busy while under fire than from any hope of hitting. One hit was gained on the conning tower however.

During most of the action we were so close that I could make out the Commanding Officers on the conning tower bending down occasionally to pass wheel orders. A gun’s crew appeared on the deck and attempted to reach the forward gun but our multiple .5’s [.50 calibre] successfully prevented this.

I turned as quick as possible to find him surfacing again but slightly down by the stern, still firing and making about 10 knots. After a little

manoeuvring, we rammed him again well abaft the conning tower and fired a shallow pattern of depth charges as we passed. Also one 4.7” shell from ‘Y’ Gun scored a direct hit on his bows. He sank by the head in about two minutes.⁷

“Would you like a cup of tea?” The loss of HMCS *Ottawa*, September 1942

Late in the evening of 13 September 1942, while escorting Convoy ON 127, the destroyer Ottawa was sunk by U-91. -Lieutenant L.B. Jenson, RCN, was on the bridge when the first torpedo hit:

An amazing geranium-colour flash forward was followed by a great pillar of water which went straight up! All of us took shelter under the overhang at the front of the bridge as the water and all sorts of solid objects tumbled down from the sky. When the downpour stopped, I went back to the compass and we stopped engines. The ship lay still in the water, rocking gently. The forecastle with anchors and cables together with A Gun had vanished, and the forward canopy with B Gun drooped down towards the water. This was visible because the interior lights were all on and shining out all over the ocean. We obviously were a lovely target so the engines were ordered slow astern. Mr. Jones left the bridge and hurried at once to the quarterdeck, where he set all the depth charges to “safe” so that if the ship sank survivors would not be blown up by our own charges.

I asked the captain if I could do a quick inspection and report back. He agreed and I went down the ladders to the starboard passage into the mess-decks. The forward mess-decks, upper and lower, were gone, and the ocean splashed outside the great open hole, illuminated by the mess-deck lights and a calcium flare from a lifebuoy burning in the tossing waters. In the after upper mess-deck a group of about 20 men were clustered by a hammock netting. A number were terribly wounded. Men with grotesquely twisted limbs were lying there; it was like a scene from hell.

Back on the bridge I found the captain and the first lieutenant engaged in firing a rocket, a signal that we had been torpedoed. At almost that very moment a second torpedo hit us, this time in number 2 boiler room, a huge flash then water deluging downwards on us. It was obvious that the ship was doomed.

She started to settle in the water and the captain called out to “abandon ship!” Men were trapped in the Asdic compartment in the bottom of the ship and called up the voice pipe. I cannot bear to think of it. Others were trapped in the seamen’s wash place, where a sliding steel door had jammed shut. If one thinks of war as a policy, also think for a moment what I heard that night and cannot bring myself to describe. Strong men become little children crying for their mothers, not like John Wayne the motion picture hero.⁸

Able Seaman C.R. Skillen was at his action station at one of the destroyer’s anti-aircraft guns when he was ordered forward to assist the wounded. As he recalls, he never got there:

As I stepped onto the first rung of the ladder to the upper deck, the second torpedo hit us amidships and split *Ottawa* in two. It hit directly below me, and when I came to, I was lying on the upper deck, aft of the stern-most funnel, with my legs, somehow pinned by the guard rail. I struggle to free myself, but to no avail, As I lay there, I knew that the bow of the ship had already sunk and that it was only a matter of time before the stern would follow suit. That is when the thought entered my mind that I was going to die.

However, I wasn’t going to give up that easily. I said a little prayer to my Maker, asking him to forgive me, and then I gave it another try. My leg came free and I rolled myself into position and slipped into the cold waters of the North Atlantic.⁹



In Peril on the Sea -- HMCS Ottawa Sinks, September 1942

On 13 September 1942 the River Class destroyer, HMCS **Ottawa**, was torpedoed by **U-91** while escorting Convoy ON-127. She was hit twice and many of her crew perished before the ship sank while those who abandoned ship had to wait many hours before they were rescued. Of a total complement of 213 men, only 71 survived. One of the findings of the subsequent board of inquiry was that if **Ottawa** had been equipped with the more modern Type 271 radar, she probably would have located her attacker before the U-boat fired. Unfortunately, it would not be until nearly a year after her demise that the RCN would begin to receive such equipment. (Drawing by L.B. Jenson who served as an officer on HMCS **Ottawa**.)

Lieutenant Jenson, also in the ocean hanging onto a spar, watched his ship sink and then,

Oil started spreading out from where the ship had been. It was all over my face, my head and hands. The smell filled the air and the taste was in my mouth. Gradually it lessened and the waves were now fresh and clean. Three or four Carley floats bobbed around hundreds of yards away. They were crowded with men, some of whom were sitting inside the floats, and the floats kept turning over. Each time there would be fewer men on the float.

Now to my astonishment the ships of the convoy passed through us – the huge ships’ sides (how could they be so big?) and small people at the top calling down to us. One voice told us they dare not stop and I hoped they wouldn’t because we would still be in the water when they were fished (torpedoed).

The night was getting darker, the waves were steeper, the breeze stronger and it seemed to be raining. The men on one of the rafts [floats] were singing. I recognized the cheerfully commanding voice of the gunner’s mate, Petty Officer George Grivel, a splendid man. The songs were “Pack up Your Troubles,” “It’s a Long Way to Tipperary” and “There’s a Long Long Trail A winding to the Land of My Dreams.” These were the hit songs of the First World War, sung by our fathers and uncles as they had faced death in the hideous mud and trenches of the Western Front.¹⁰

Seaman Skillen, badly wounded, jumped off the sinking destroyer and remembered that,

When I surfaced, I could hear my shipmates yelling and moaning in the distance. I made my way towards the noise, but all the while I watched the stern of *Ottawa* slowly disappear beneath the surface. I was pretty certain that there would not be an explosion from the depth charges, since these had been rendered safe. Soon I came across a carley float, and this would be my lifeline for the next five hours. Although the seas became rougher as time passed and more and more of my shipmates succumbed, one by one, to the cold, slipping silently away, I clung to that float, knowing that one wrong move would spell the end. I wanted to sleep so bad, with the sea lulling me into a false sense of warmth, but I knew that if I shut my eyes, I would suffer the same fate as my shipmates. Therefore I hung on with grim determination.

The sea tossed the carley float about like an old inner tube. I think that there had been originally twenty-two of us clinging to it, but there was only about six of us left, when suddenly out of the dark loomed the outline of a ship. I soon recognized it as one of the escort group and they had found us!¹¹

The rescue vessel was the British corvette HMS Celandine, and when Lieutenant Jenson was identified as an officer, he was directed to the wardroom where he encountered a shipmate from Ottawa.;

Immediately I entered, Barriault, our leading steward, came over and said, as if nothing unusual had happened, “Good evening, sir. Would you like a cup of tea?”

So I replied, “Good evening, Barriault. That would be very nice, thank you,” and had a cup of delicious, wonderful hot tea.¹²

Of the Ottawa’s crew of 213 officers and men, 69 survived.

“The release we sought:” Shore leave

Seaman Frank Curry has left an excellent account of the -importance of shore leave to the sailors on the North Atlantic run:

Sometimes, the release we sought was no more complicated than a soccer game. With our ship tied up for a few hours, and no shore leave, the crew got hold of a soccer ball and turned the jetty into a field, for the wildest game. It was no-holds barred soccer, with plenty of kicking and butting, as we released every pent-up feeling, battered each other into bruised submission, and finally climbed back aboard to collapse, exhausted yet restored. In

some ports, we managed to gain access to a gymnasium, where we had a two-hour game of floor hockey, a game which must be the most savage sport ever invented, especially the way we played it. But the violent exercise did a lot to relieve the miseries buried deep within us. Others settled for a good meal, a haircut, a night in a hostel bed, a hot shower and a long walk in the English and Irish countryside – another effective way to restore the soul; to try and ready oneself for the return to sea.

Sometimes, the release came in a good old-fashioned brawl. Sailors clashed with each other or with civilians; shop windows were smashed; and patrols lugged bleeding and drunken sailors back to their ships, or to lock-up. Often, through the long years of despair, our pent-up feelings found temporary release in man's oldest source of comfort – alcohol¹³



Survivors, 1942

Crew members from the corvette, HMCS **Trail**, rescue survivors from the American troopship, USS **Chatham**, torpedoed in the Gulf of St. Lawrence on 27 August 1942. This oil-covered man had been in a lifeboat for four days and was too weak to climb onto the corvette's deck. The medical facilities on the smaller escort vessels were limited and many Sick Berth Attendants were forced to carry out advanced surgical procedures on survivors. (Picture by Lieutenant A.W. Stevens, 31 August 1942, courtesy National Archives of Canada, PA 200327)

Enlisted men were not the only sailors who drank too much. Lieutenant Latham Jenson, RCN, never forgot the night he was ordered to accompany his captain and an infamous officer, "Two Gun" Ryan, on a run ashore:

My captain, "Do" Donald, found a kindred spirit in Two Gun Ryan and ordered me, as his sub-lieutenant, to go ashore with the pair of them, I suppose to bring them home. They conversed in what sounded like grunts, not that it interfered with their consumption. On one occasion when we went to a club, Donald said he was interested to find a glove in the urinal. As he was urinating, he was able to move the glove back and forth. Ryan, who was rather intoxicated, grunted from time to time in response to Donald's story. Then when we left the club, Donald discovered he only had one glove.¹⁴

“It tore me asunder:” Hard decision on Convoy SC 107, November 1942

In the autumn of 1942, Convoy SC 107 came under ferocious and concentrated submarine attack and lost 15 ships. Lieutenant Commander Louis Audette, RCNVR, commanding HMCS Amherst, obtained a good asdic contact and moved into the attack, only to be faced with a dilemma:

This was in the middle of the night – dead black of night – and I mean no lights of any kind. Then all of a sudden ahead of me I saw a lot of little flickering lights in the water. These were, of course, the little flashing lights on the shoulders of the survivors in the water. The submarine was about fifteen hundred yards ahead of me – so were the lights – the submarine was beneath the men. I don’t think it was there deliberately, it just happened.

I was struck with the stunning realization that I was going in to attack and that I was going to kill these men or, at the best, maim them ... and they were the very men we were trying to protect. And everybody on the bridge realized that at the same time as I, because the lookouts who were supposed to be looking out were looking in at me, obviously thinking, “What’s the old blighter ever going to do?” and very glad that the decision was mine to make and not theirs. I wasn’t quite as glad but I really had only minutes in which to make the decision.

Number One ... asked me in sort of hushed tones, “Are you going to go ahead?” and I said, “Yes.” Now I think it was the right decision. I know it was the right decision. I mean, I couldn’t leave the submarine. I held him on asdic. But don’t think that’s an easy decision to make – it would tear any man asunder, and I’m no stronger than the rest – it tore me asunder.

But those men were lucky; one of our guardian angels was out on special duty-watch that night. As I moved, my asdic broke down [and] then the solution was simple. I couldn’t drop charges among those men by guess-work. That would have been a criminal thing to do, so I countermanded the attack.

That night was really the nadir of my war experience.¹⁵

“A huge bubble rose from the surface:” ONS 154, December 1942

For most Canadian sailors on the North Atlantic run in 1942, the enemy remained unseen but there was always the knowledge that the U-boats were there, waiting. Seaman Rod Kendall of HMCS Napanee spent the entire year on convoy duty in the North Atlantic and never saw his opponent until the night of 27 December 1942 when

Towards midnight I stepped out on the wings of the bridge for a breath of fresh air. One of the merchantmen fired a star shell and there dead ahead was what I first took for one of our escorts. It turned out to be a sub on the surface, facing the convoy. The captain ordered full ahead to ram. Our 4-inch gun fired a start shell and I could see the sub going into a crash-dive. I ran back to the asdic set, but as the operator had good contact with the sub, I let him operate.

We dropped a full pattern of charges and opened to the customary 1,000 yards before turning back to run another attack. The ratings manning the depth charge throwers on the starboard side could see the disturbed water caused by the sub’s crash-dive. That’s how close we were.

According to routine, the leading torpedo operator dropped a calcium flare over the side with the last of the charges to mark the spot in the event we lost contact by asdic. It was the leading torpedo operator’s job to keep his eyes on the flare and he told us later that after the charges had all gone off, a huge bubble rose from the surface. As we were ordered to maintain our station, we couldn’t turn back to investigate. We heard later than an aircraft reported a damaged sub on the surface in our area.¹⁶

“Some called it sea-fatigue:” Exhaustion takes its toll

For Canadian sailors on the North Atlantic, 1942 was a grim and terrible year. The unrelenting struggle to preserve the sealanes, however, was beginning to exact a human price as Lieutenant Commander Alan Easton of the corvette HMCS Sackville, who spent the entire year on the North Atlantic, -remembered:

Symptoms of jadedness – some called it sea-fatigue – were beginning to show on the surface. There were always fears, of course. But these fears could be held in check, could be stowed away in the recesses of the mind. Now, and more frequently, they were pushing to the fore. They were vivid pictures of the ship breaking up under stress of weather, of getting in among the ships of the convoy on dark, invisible nights, as had happened, and being run down by a heavily laden merchantman, of being torpedoed and trying to abandon ship on a rough night.

The worst time was dusk, when the dull day was fading and another ominous night was bearing down. I hated the sight of the yellowish-grey light, the dun seascape, the cold, curling waves as the evening dissolved into blackness.

There were times when I had been unjustifiably irritable, intolerant, which made me angry with myself afterwards – and probably angered others more. It was stupid, but there it was! Yet it was hard to tell how acutely I had been affected. I wondered how good my perspective was in judging my own nervous behaviour. I felt certain I had had enough.¹⁷

Seaman Frank Curry of HMCS Kamsack felt that service on the North Atlantic was so awful that,

I don't think anybody can really comprehend it, unless you have been through it. It's not just the one or two, or even sometimes three weeks of this kind of living, but it's that it went on and on and on and on. If you spent most of your time at sea, (as I happened to do) the overwhelming feeling was that it would never end! That was the terrible part of it; you thought this was a war that would never end.

The ones I feel sorry for were the ones that just didn't have quite enough strength. I don't mean they were weaker than me: I can still remember when I thought I just couldn't take it any longer. I just thought that way for a while, then toughed it through. However, I think there were others that just didn't get over that barrier as I had.¹⁸



We're not downhearted but we sure are hungry

Before the war, Britain was dependent on imported foodstuffs to feed her population. The U-boats threatened to cut off that supply and although every piece of arable land was placed under cultivation, strict rationing was required to ensure that every civilian and member of the armed forces got enough to eat. The operative word is "enough." Civilians could eat unlimited amounts of bread, cereal and potatoes but all other foodstuffs were strictly controlled and this photograph shows **the weekly ration** of an adult British civilian late in the war. From lower left: 55 grammes (2 ounces) of coffee; 1 shilling, 2 pence of meat (about 3 small lamb chops and 4-5 thin slices of bacon as shown); 1,185 grammes (42 ounces or 5 small glasses) of milk; 225 grammes (8 ounces) of sugar; 225 grammes (8 ounces) of fat (butter, margarine or lard); 85 grammes (3 ounces) of cheese; slightly more than half an egg; and in the centre, 115 grammes (4 ounces) of jam or honey. British doctors reported that obesity disappeared as a medical problem. (Photograph by Dianne Graves)