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Ship's Company

The crew of HMCS *Wallaceburg* pose for a photograph in 1944 shortly after the vessel was commissioned. By this time the RCN had nearly overcome the problems caused by the unprecedented expansion it had undergone from 1940 to 1943 and had matured as a professional fighting service. It is doubtful that more than five of the officers and sailors in this photo had ever been to sea before 1939. The RCN was a wartime creation and it learned the hard way at sea in the North Atlantic. (Canadian Naval Memorial Trust)

“Shall I ram?” The death of U-845, March 1944

On 10 March, the destroyers HMS Forester and HMCS St Laurent, together with the frigate HMCS Swansea, forced U-845 to the surface after a series of heavy attacks. The U-Boat attempted to escape at high speed on the surface -using her AA armament to keep her pursuers at bay but the three warships gave chase and scored several direct hits which forced the submarine to stop and ultimately surrender. A few miles away, the fascinated crew of HMCS Matane listened as a blow-by-blow description of the action was transmitted throughout their ship by her loudspeaker system. Among the fascinated audience was Lieutenant Commander Alan Easton, RCNR, Matane’s captain, who was resting in his cabin:

Suddenly a voice said: “Submarine breaking surface – two miles to port.”

A moment later I heard another announcement; this time the voice was obviously English. “Submarine surface to starboard of me – am closing.” There was a lapse of about three minutes, then the same English voice. “General chase – sub getting away on surface – am too distant for accurate fire control.”

The Canadian destroyer [HMCS *St Laurent*] came on the air again: “Enemy drawing away – am using what guns will bear.”

Immediately after this came a voice yet unheard: “Am engaging submarine ahead of me with gunfire.”

It was our frigate [HMCS *Swansea*], who had evidently arrived on the scene as the chase reached its height.

Then from the senior officer in the British ship [HMS *Forester*]. “Am barely closing – enemy has amazing speed.”

After a brief interval of silence the voices came on the air again in quick succession. It seemed as though each was waiting for a chance to speak.

British Destroyer [*Forester*]: “Am closing now – report situation.”

Canadian Destroyer [*St Laurent*]: Range decreasing – now 2800 yards – am making 24 knots.”

Frigate [*Swansea*]: “Maintaining distance – have enemy ahead.”

Canadian Destroyer: “Cannot see fall of shot but have his mark.”

British Destroyer: “Beware of diving.”

British Destroyer: “Report range.”

Canadian Destroyer: “2400 yards.”

Frigate: “3000 yards – holding my own.”

I sat up in my bunk; I could rest no longer. I filled my pipe unconsciously, hesitating to strike the match in case I missed something.

Canadian Destroyer: “Believe scored direct hit – range 1900 yards – enemy fire fairly accurate, if meant for me.”

Frigate: “Assume direct hits also.”

Suspense for several minutes.

British destroyer: “Closing more rapidly – keep star shell up.”

Canadian destroyer: “Sub’s speed has diminished – am gaining fast now.”

Canadian destroyer: “Another hit – sub slowing down.”

Canadian destroyer: “Shall I ram?”

British destroyer: “If he is stopping no.”

Evidently the Canadian destroyer was a good deal closer than the British ship, probably had been throughout the engagement, and was now almost upon his prey. Another message from him convinced his listeners that the U-Boat’s game was up. “Sub stopped – crew abandoning boat – sending boarding party.”



A Lucky German

On 17 April 1943 U-boats attacked Convoy HX 233, escorted by American, British and Canadian warships. In the ensuing battle, **U-175** was forced to the surface by depth charge attack and hit by heavy gunfire. Her crew abandoned their boat and 41 were rescued by the warships including this man, shown being hauled on board the United States Coast Guard Cutter **Duane**. Dangling near his cheek is his Dräger breathing device. (US Coast Guard Photo, author's collection)

"I feel suicidal with shame:" Escort Group 9 gets a kill but does not know it

In April 1944, Escort Group 9, consisting of the frigates HMC Ships Matane, Swansea and Stormont and the corvette, HMCS Owen Sound, were on an independent patrol near Ireland when they got an firm asdic contact. The Senior Officer, Commander A.F.C. Layard, RN, a very conscientious man, recorded what happened in his diary:

Saturday, 22nd April – at sea

Not a very nice day with S[outh].W[ester]'ly wind force 6. We got an H/F D/F bearing at 5.15 [AM] and although we weren't certain of distance I

turned the group to the bearing and steamed along it till 11 o'clock but saw and heard nothing. We were just about in the middle of the area spread out in line abreast when at 2000 we got an A/S [asdic] contact to port. It was a cracking echo and very soon it became obvious that this really was a U boat. I went slow meaning to take my time but the range closed very rapidly and I found myself in to about 300 yds with the bearing going rapidly right and the ship's head swinging as fast as possible to the St[arboard] to keep pointed. Suddenly ahead appeared the swirl of the thing which must have been very shallow. I was still worried lest I was going to get so close as to lose contact before ready to attack when the periscope was reported just off the Std. bow. I then got thoroughly rattled and in case he should fire a torpedo or Gnat [acoustic torpedo], I reckoned I must go for



"Slackers:" The RCN's Major Base, Halifax, 1944

This view from Jetty No. 3 looks south in HMC Dockyard in Halifax on 3 August 1944. In the foreground, with her starboard side to the camera is HMCS *Reo II*, a prohibition rum-runner commissioned in 1941 as an auxiliary minesweeper and examination vessel. To her left, secured to the end of the same jetty, are from left to right: probably the towing vessel HMCS *Standard Coaster*; an unidentified vessel; and the replenishment ship HMCS *Provider*. Immediately behind are three Flower Class corvettes while to the right, across the jetty, is another Flower corvette. Immediately in front of that vessel are two Fairmile B Type Motor Launches used for harbour defence. In the background are, from left to right, the River Class Frigates *Charlottetown* (K 244), *Kokanee* (K 419) and *Lasalle* (K 519). Two other River Class frigates are secured behind *Lasalle* and a third is in the right background, immediately in front of the large dock building. There are more Canadian warships in commission in this view of the dockyard on a day in 1944 than there were in the entire Canadian navy in 1939. (Photograph by Walter S. Legget, courtesy, National Archives of Canada, PA 115367)

him. Went full ahead and forgetting we were still in A/S [asdic] contact I dropped a pattern by eye, which as it turned out was a good deal too early. However, we picked him up astern and the other ships were now on the scene. *Swansea* then attacked and although we held him and so did *Stormont* for a time, the A/S [asdic] conditions, which were never good, suddenly became awful and we simply couldn't get our [illegible] out at all and that was the last we heard of him. I started Observant patrols and then a parallel sweep but it was dark soon after losing contact and if he got away he could make off on the surface. I went through agonies of suspense and worry. What I've always dreaded has happened. We find a U boat and then I make a balls and lose it. It must be admitted the lack of daylight, the bad A's [asdic] conditions and the periscope all made it v[ery] difficult but I feel I've let the ship and group down and I feel suicidal with shame.²

Although they did not know it at the time, Commander Layard's Escort Group 9 had just sunk U-311 although the victory was not confirmed until the early 1980s. Commander Layard had no reason to feel ashamed of his efforts.

Officers' country: The wardroom

Naval officers on a warship had their own area called the wardroom which was their combined dining room, bar and kitchen. In a corvette, the wardroom was a tiny compartment crowded with furniture, in larger warships it was much more sizeable and even a little elegant. In the wardroom, officers relaxed and, although it was not the custom to drink while at sea (except for medicinal purposes), wardroom parties on Canadian warships on "the first night in" after a convoy were raucous occasions when everyone relaxed – perhaps too much. Normally the wardrooms were more sedate and Lieutenant Commander Alan Easton, RCNR, has left a charming word portrait of that on HMCS Saskatchewan, the destroyer he commanded, during a stay in port in the summer of 1944:

There was an atmosphere of conviviality and visitors. It looked cheerful and bright in the glow of the lamps and the more austere aspects of the place were softened by the green carpet covering the hard steel deck. Although it extended across the width of the ship the room was hazy; the wet air outside seemed incapable of drawing the smoky warmth out through the open scuttles and absorbing it.

The place was crowded, all in the everlasting monotony of blue, relieved only by white collars and cuffs and splashes of gold. A group was sitting at the end of the mahogany dining table leaning across it, talking earnestly, the pack of cards and dice discarded. Some were sitting on the bench around the fire-place laughing; two leaning against the mantelpiece. Others were standing in groups in the middle of the room talking and sipping their drinks, and behind them at the piano several were singing "Roll out the Barrel."

I found Peters with the chief engineer and first lieutenant of a neighbouring destroyer, talking to Bimson and our M.O. [Medical Officer] Behind us on the bench, beside the [electric] fire, Jason was using his hands to illustrate a tactical theory. He was always keen to convince.

From what I could hear of the snatches of conversation going on among those standing near the forward open scuttle, Everleigh was telling his friends from other ships how it was they saw at our bow the open-mouthed muzzle of a pom-pom leaning out over the water like a figurehead. It had been an old ordnance friend who had got it for him, as well as the rockets for the gun-shield of the forward four-seven – all contrary to regulations and not in the books.

The torpedo officer hammered out something fast on the piano, and Larose, with one of the subs and several visitors standing around him in the brave attitude of those who are not going to let lack of talent prevent them from singing, launched into another song. Windram's fingers flew over the keys and his head moved slightly as his eyes watched his hands. The glass on the end of the keyboard vibrated and its contents bubbled.

A quartermaster came to the wardroom door to make a report and two more visitors arrived. But several left and, with the exchange of two guests, the piano and singing stopped.

Unobtrusively the piano began again, quietly, then grew, but songs were not being played. Presently the piano went back to a song. Windram

played a few bars of “Road to the Isles,” then stopped. It was the signal! When the lilting tune began again every voice in the wardroom started to sing what had now become almost a shanty in the Canadian ships, written by a surgeon-lieutenant who had been in the Barber Pole Group:

*It's away! Outward the swing fo'c'sles reel
From the smoking sea's white glare upon the strand.
It's the grey miles that are slipping under the keel
When we're rolling outward-bound from Newfoundland.*

Ports of call (3): Derry of the Emerald Isle

At the other side of the Atlantic, most Canadian escort vessels sailed into Londonderry in Northern Ireland, always a tranquil oasis of verdant scenery and a relief from the North Atlantic, as Lieutenant Allan Stevens, RCNVR, recalls:

When at the end of our run eastwards we had turned over the convoy to the local escort force and headed for Londonderry, the green hills of Ireland would appear out of the morning mist as we made our landfall.

It is impossible to describe how we felt on seeing that beautiful, green, verdant part of the world and to realize that, thank God, we had come through up to thirty-one days of hell and were still alive to fight another day.

Stevens also remembered that when the Canadian warships passed up and down the Foyle, one landmark was always watched for in passage:

Down stream from town was a former Irish estate we called “Boom Hall” [actually Broome Hall]. It had been taken over by the Navy for use as a residence for female Naval personnel. As we sailed past, our way up the stream, it was customary for everybody to try to get to the bridge, and with our binoculars, have a good look at the girls as we swept by. They were usually in various stages of civilian dress or undress in many cases, and the exchange of waves and shouts was a pleasant event after a long gruelling trip across the Atlantic.

The weather never improved: HMCS Restigouche in a hurricane, September 1944

Occasionally, sailors encountered weather so bad that they never forgot it. This was the case when HMCS Restigouche, escorting a westbound convoy in September 1944, ran into a hurricane. Lieutenant Alan W. Stevens, RCNVR, the destroyer's Anti-Submarine Control Officer, recalled that,

As we left St. John's, the barometer had started to fall, and Davey's [his captain] comment was, “There's some dirty weather around.” He ordered lifelines rigged, and everything top side battened down, and in particular one hundred depth charges we still carried. Food was cached after in case the lookouts couldn't be replaced due to heavy seas.

We thought we were ready.

The waves grew steadily larger. The wind began converting their crests into fine mist. Soon we were enveloped in what seemed like a white smoke cloud. It was impossible to see anything through it, except from the height of the bridge. All that was visible of our convoy was the tops of the masts of the smaller ships and the funnels of the larger ones – eventually they also disappeared from view.

My last entry in the log at the end of the first dog [watch] read, I think – “Barometer falling rapidly. Wind force 6, racked by waves, some rivets



The Sea was always the Worst Enemy

The caption of this photograph, taken on board a Canadian destroyer states that the ship was being buffeted by 100 mile per hour winds. This might be an exaggeration although winds of that velocity were not unknown on the North Atlantic. In any case, the vessel is listing strongly. The weather was the most constant enemy faced by the North Atlantic escort fleet. (Courtesy, National Archives of Canada, PA 200128)

However, as usual they were soaking wet twenty-four hours a day. In the officer's quarters things were as bad. Our wardroom furniture was tied down but if one tried to sit in a chair, there was no way to prevent yourself from being forcibly ejected and thrown across the room when a large wave hit. It was easy to break an arm or a leg. To move around it was necessary to hang onto something solid with one hand. Hot meals were impossible, but our stewards, God bless them, found ways to make thick sandwiches with Spam or bully beef. Coffee and tea were replaced with beer.

Although we had on revolutions for 20 knots, at the end of the storm, we were four hundred miles astern of our position when the storm began.

have popped.”

The howling of the wind increased until it sounded like a banshee. The flying spume began to freeze in our rigging. To add to our problems a fire started in one of the boiler rooms and the stokers were unable to extinguish it. Our engineer officer, Leslie Simms, was called to the bridge where he caught a blast from the captain, who was a worried man.

Simms advised him the only way he could put out the fire was to seal off the boiler room to stop air from getting in and he would have to shut down the boiler for a few hours. We could still make revolutions for 20 knots on the other boiler so the order was given.

The fire was extinguished and the boiler fired up so we had extra steam pressure in case it was needed.

A few hours later the fire broke out again and the whole process had to be repeated. The fire was caused by oil that had leaked into the bilges due to popped rivets in the fuel tanks. In addition to this problem, we had popped so many rivets that the sea was pouring in and soon the boiler room pumps were no longer able to keep it under control. We were going to sink, unless something was done.

Restigouche had survived a hurricane in 1941 almost as bad and had limped into Gourock [Scotland] a wreck. Many of the repairs carried out then [now] started to let go. A rupture in the fuel tank at the break of the forecastle opened and closed as we pitched.

The storm continued to increase in intensity during the night. The needle on our wind speed indicator, which was calibrated to a maximum of 120 knots, had a stop at the high end. The needle reached this and broke off. As we discovered later, the wind reached 180 miles an hour, making it the worst hurricane ever recorded in the Atlantic.

Restigouche began to suffer serious damage.

Below decks it was chaos. In the forward mess decks it was impossible to serve a hot meal. At least the crew had no trouble sleeping in their hammocks, the problem was getting into them.

Meanwhile the water level in the boiler rooms was steadily rising and we must have lost ten percent of the rivets which held the ship together, including many in the fuel tanks. The engineer officer had over three inches of oily salt water in his cabin. We finally staggered into Halifax and the shore staff took over the pumping.

“There was one Christless explosion:” Chebogue gets hit, October 1944

In October 1944, the frigate HMCS Chebogue was part of Escort Group 2 which was escorting a small convoy when it encountered U-1227. Leading Seaman Richard Aldhelm-White of Chebogue remembered that she

had all the latest equipment on board, and suddenly we got into an engagement which lasted eight hours. We went over the submarine, attacking it repeatedly, going back and forth, dropping charges, and I had the brilliant job (at Action Stations) being a communication number of the quarterdeck, converting all the ABCD codes to depths; screaming them out to the crew members who physically set the depth charge pistols.

We’d go running for an attack, but there were a few whales in the area and that sort of screwed it up for a while, but we finally got on, and we kept after this son-of-a-gun until about 2200 at night.

I guess the U-boat commander finally got fed up with our nonsense and decided to come to the surface. That was great! They then went into surface action. At this particular time, of course, we opened fire with the four inch. I left my position and got as far as the forecastle break, when all of a sudden there was one Christless explosion, and I bounced off the funnel! Luckily nothing happened to me, other than bruises. Apparently the submarine which was on the surface, and since we were running in on him, had decided that they’d fire acoustic torpedoes.

So we came to a grinding halt in the moonlight, wondering what to do next?

The Damage Control parties then began shoring up the bulkhead at station 133 and we didn’t know whether she was going to sink or not, or whether the Admiralty wanted to sink her, as she did have a lot of good equipment still aboard.

Arnprior came sneaking up behind us, after all this had transpired, and immediately thought we were the submarine! They lit us up beautifully, with a starshell, and then found out who we were. They then came alongside us with a beautiful piece of seamanship, and took most of us off, where we then operated in *Arnprior* for a while.

Chebogue survived and was towed to Britain but was so badly damaged that she was never repaired. The submarine, U-1227, was destroyed by bombing at Kiel in 1945.

But sailors still got ill: Late war medical practice

Leading Sick Berth Attendant Ray Burrell recalls his duties aboard the corvette HMCS Huntsville, which served on the North Atlantic in the last months of 1944:

The life of an SBA at sea is not a hard one, but as to the rest of the crew, he must be constantly alert. On him depends the well-being of very member. The ship I was in, a Castle Class corvette, carried a crew of one hundred and twenty-six. Situated on the port side and forward of the After Gangway, the Sick Bay formed the nucleus of all medical -facilities aboard. At strategic points First Aid kits were placed, ten in all. Two other emergency posts, one in the Wardroom Flats and one in the Officer’s Accommodation Lobby acted as emergency centres. Packed in a chest in the Sick Bay and ready for use at all times were sterile instruments, intravenous glucose, blood plasma, apparatus for taking and giving blood, containers of sterile dressing of all kinds, and various sterile trays. This chest, if necessary, in case of action, would be taken to the Wardroom.

A patient admitted to Sick Bay slept in one of two swinging bunks, and should the occasion arise, as it once did, when we had two cases of Scarlet

Fever and four contacts, the port gangway was closed off and micks (hammocks) slung there.

On occasion, the Medical Officer of the Group could be contacted over TBS (Telephone Broadcasting System). Generally, based on information provided by the SBA, the MO's opinion on the prognosis and treatment of the case was all that was necessary. Only once did a patient have to be transferred from our ship to the Senior Ship while at sea and this only because the condition required the continued close observation of the Medical Officer.

Daily sick parades ran no more than ten or twelve ratings and generally the simplest kind of treatment sufficed. Our most common ailment, infection of the upper respiratory tract requiring bed care, I put in the bunks. Once I had a case of chronic seasickness to look after until we reached port. There wasn't much one could do except feed him RCN Seasick Tablets, but he could never keep them down long enough to take effect.

On the whole, the SBA seldom runs into a case which requires him to put into use his full training, knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, the sound of the next "Action Stations" could just be the occasion to do so.

They also served: The Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service

Prior to 1939, the Royal Canadian Navy showed little interest in recruiting women to serve in any other capacity than as nurses. Even in that respect, the RCN was very traditional – a Royal Canadian Navy Nursing Service was not formed until late 1941 when the expansion of the navy resulted in a demand for medical personnel. It was only in 1942 when, faced with a personnel shortage, NSHQ seriously began to contemplate recruiting women and, in July of that year a Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service was created, modelled on its British counterpart.

The purpose of the WRCNS (commonly called "Wrens") was to relieve men for sea duty as stated in the words of their song: "Carry On! Carry On! Sailor boys must sail!" They certainly fulfilled that purpose as, by 1945, there were nearly 6,000 women in the WRCNS, serving in shore stations in such trades as stenographers, cooks, dieticians, telegraphers, signallers, dental assistants, supply assistants, postal clerks, mess stewards, coders, pay writers, drivers, teletype operators and laundry personnel. They were supervised by female WRCNS officers who held the King's Commission and had the same authority and power of command as their male counterparts. The WRCNS was disbanded in 1946 but its value and the exemplary conduct of its personnel had been so obvious to even most conservative male naval officer that it was re-created in 1951.

Recruits to the WRCNS were sent to the training establishment HMCS Conestoga at Galt, Ontario, for a three-week basic training course, followed by specialized trade courses. A former provincial training school (or reformatory) for girls, Conestoga was commanded by Lieutenant Commander Isabel J. MacNeill, WRCNS, the only woman during the - Second World War to have an independent command in the British Commonwealth. The new Wrens experienced the usual difficult adjustment period to service life, made worse in their opinion, by the requirement to wear uniform when "going ashore" because, as one of their songs explained,

*In my sweet little pusser blue gown,
That I wore that first night into town.
But what good does it do when you wear pusser blue,
And your figure looks best in a light, frilly dress?*

Cotton stocking just don't seem to be,

Member of the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service

During the war, about 6,500 Canadian women served in the WRCNS and quickly proved their worth, taking over shore duties that released their male counterparts for service at sea. The artist has illustrated this member of the Service in the light blue summer uniform. (Painting by Ron Volstad, courtesy of the Directorate of History and Heritage, DND)
[Robin, this is Volstad painting from women's book]



*What a young sailor lad wants to see.
You're sharp as a thistle, but can't raise a whistle,
In your sweet little pusser blue gown.⁹*

Even "getting ashore" could be difficult, as Wren Rosamond Greer discovered at HMCS Stadacona in Halifax:

When we went ashore she [their commanding officer] knew our appearance was a credit to the WRCNS because the only way we could get through the Stadacona Wren Gate without a special pass was in a "Liberty Boat." Liberty Boats, like Duty Boats, were not vessels that floated upon the water, but a group of Wrens marching from the Wren Block to the gate to go ashore, and were at the top of our list of "things about the navy we do not particularly care for." They "sailed" on the hour and half hour, and if we were late for one, or failed to pass Liberty Boat inspection (it was never easy) depended upon which O.O.D [Officer of the Day] happened to be on duty at the time. We lined up and were examined from top to toe: shoes must be issue oxfords and well polished, black hose not too sheer and their seams straight, hemlines regulation length, uniforms clean and pressed, white collars stiff and spotless, black ties in a perfect knot, hats worn at the proper angle, no dark nail polish, not too much lipstick, hair neat and one inch above the collar. Many a Liberty Boat sailed without me when I was ordered to, "Go and get that hair off your collars," and no pleading of mine ever softened the heart of an O.O.D. as I endeavoured to convince her that it was not that my hair was too long, but that my neck was too short.

Once through basic training, the new Wrens were sent to various shore stations across Canada. Most ended up in Nova Scotia, where the greater part of the navy's administrative and training establishments were located. Wren Audrey Hill was posted to HMCS Cornwallis, the large new training camp located near Digby, Nova Scotia. She did not have the most exciting job but she explains the devotion of the Wrens to their work:

I was a Writer, and could type or take shorthand, but in *Cornwallis*, I went to work in the Gunnery School, and I worked out of the Instructional Production Section. Here, they drew diagrams of the guns on great big sheets of paper and these were very precise. Then in the section that I worked in, I had to run off the instructions on how to fire these guns, on a Gestetner, and assemble them into pamphlets.

After a while I went to the book store, which was in the Gunnery School, and from there I distributed those pamphlets that had been produced upstairs, as well as hard-cover books like BR-159 handbook of gunner drill. There were always classes of seamen coming into the Gunnery School for training, and it was my responsibility to hand these groups of book out to each different class as needed for their instruction.

We also had to amend the books. They would change the gun drill to make it more efficient, and in doing that, you had all these tons of strips of paper that you had to glue into a hundred books, making sure they all got in there for each class. This ensured that everybody was doing the same thing at the same time.

However, we were acutely dedicated to the work we did. We were always very aware that we were seen as just pasting strips of paper in the books, but that had an extenuating effect, because what we did affected how those boys would fire the guns.

Surrounded and outnumbered by men, the WRCNS had a very active social life. Rosamond Greer recalls the pluses and minuses when servicemen and servicewomen are involved with each other:

Our dates were boys we met at dances and movies, while walking or shopping, in cafes or at work. Some were boys from home ... everybody turned up in Halifax sooner or later during those years. Sometimes they were soldiers or airmen, but Wrens were usually seen with sailors, and on Saturday nights downtown Halifax became a mass of navy blue uniforms. Sailors had a certain protectiveness and possessiveness towards Wrens ... we belonged to them and they did not approve of our dating anyone else (particularly officers, even if they were in the navy).



Women in Pants -- A Source of Puzzlement

Although the WRCNS played a major role in releasing men for sea duty, the idea of women in uniform was a novel one in the Canada of the 1940s. Service photographers delighted in taking shots like this that stressed that novelty. (Courtesy, National Archives of Canada, PA-134330)

At the Wren Gate on Gottingen Street [in Halifax], through which portal no male could pass (unless he was an officer ... the navy paid no heed to democracy) we lined up once again, this time along a rock wall where on warm, balmy evenings, in the pouring rain, and even during blizzards, dozens of couples said their lingering “good-nights.” The Shore Patrol dutifully did their part to cool the ardour of the cuddling couples by parading back and forth along the wall and, when they spied a pair becoming a mite too friendly, tapping the fellow on the shoulder (with a billy club) and issuing the order to “Move along.” It was very effective, I had early discovered that my mother’s admonition to “be careful” had been entirely unnecessary. All I had to do was “be visible.” The Shore Patrol took care of the rest.

Wren Hill remembered that, at Cornwallis,

The relations between the WRCNS and all the sailors coming through was a relaxed, easy atmosphere, somewhat like a big high school. By 1943 they treated us like we were their sisters, but we weren’t any different from them. I know one of my ex-WRCNS in the Association has written a paper, and she said they didn’t know, at first, whether to treat us as ladies of easy virtue, or Madonnas. But we had an easy relationship.

At Galt, Lt.-Cdr. McNeill had always instilled in us the view that we were ladies first, and that kind of prevailed. We had good relations with the sailors, and let’s face it, I think there must have been at least ten sailors for every girl. I can remember one time, I had three dates in one afternoon!

Although members of the WRCNS received less pay than their male counterparts and were tasked with some of the most tedious – but necessary – jobs in the shore stations, they were proud to be doing their bit. As Wren Audrey Hill explains:

At no time did I think of myself as a second class citizen in the Navy. At the time I went in, I guess I got \$.95 a day because I remember receiving \$30.00 a month at pay parade. But I never had that feeling, because what each person did was different, and I was glad to be able to be there, doing whatever I could to help, which was what most of us were seeking. There was never any discussion about us only being paid three-quarters of what the sailors got. We didn’t go to sea, so it just never entered into our discussions.

At \$.95 a day, I was paid less than the sailors, and certainly less than the civilian I replaced, but that didn’t enter into it. We were so fired up that we could do something to help end the terrible war that had been going on forever by 1943.

As Wren Greer recalls, her female comrades were proud to be serving as,

we did consider ourselves to be a very important part of a very important mission. We did not particularly want to carry guns, or sail aboard ships that rocked and rolled and bounced and bucked as they plodded the course across the stormy Atlantic – although we certainly would have, had it been deemed necessary. We had no ambition to do battle with *all* men; Hitler, Mussolini and Hirohito were quite enough for us to handle. Nor did we feel it necessary to burn our bras, or act and swear like men. On the contrary, we tried desperately to be feminine despite the uniform. We wore perfume and makeup, and (against regulations) bracelets on our ankles.

We were girls and glad of it.