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CHRONICLE OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY

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1945

**“I proceeded to drink too much rum and ginger ale.” Escort Group 9 gets a U-boat, February 1945**

*In early 1945, Escort Group 9, operating off the Shetland Islands under the command of Commander A.F.C. Layard, RN, sank a U-boat after going for nearly six months without a kill. As Layard noted in his diary, this success came as a surprise:*

Friday, February 16 – at sea

Just before midnight the 3 other ships all passed in H/F D/F bearings thought to be near ground wave and so I turned to the bearing which was 060 degrees and swept back for 25 miles but without result and so round we went back for Cape Wrath. We made Radar contact with our convoy N[orth]. of C[ape]. Wrath at about 0400 and took station in each quarter till daylight after which we took station ahead. It was misty and blowing a bit from the S[outh].E[ast]. as we went through the Pentland Firth. At about 2.30 when between No. 34 and 33 buoys we got an A/S [asdic] contact while screening on the starboard bow of the convoy. We altered towards, ran over and got an E/S [echo sounder] trace and as by Q.H.\* 3 [navigational charts] there was no plotted wreck in the vicinity I decided to give it a pattern and so we dropped 5 [depth charges] which immediately brought quite a bit of oil to the surface so rather unwillingly, as I wanted to get on with the convoy, I returned and attacked again. After the 3rd attack I was just saying “I don’t think this is anything, do you?” when on steaming through the oil and explosion ca-fuffle we saw a lot of splintered wood work and some paper which, on fishing out of the water, proved to be bits of a German signal log!!!! We lowered a boat and also picked up an -aluminium flask and a tube of sorts marked in German “Medical [illegible] Keil”. All this was most exciting and seemed to indicate that we were on a U boat. Hoisted the whaler and carried out 2 or 3 more attacks before dark but nothing more came up except a great deal of diesel oil and splintered wood. I recalled *Nene* from the convoy and the two of us held contact all night. The whole thing seems such a complete fluke but at last one of the hundreds of contacts we’ve obtained and investigated and attacked in coastal waters has proved to be the thing we’ve been looking for.

Saturday, February 17 – at sea – Scapa

At daylight we started in to renew our attacks on the submarine but in spite of pattern after pattern of D/C [depth charges] and H/H [Hedge Hog] the only thing we could bring up except oil and wood was some torn bits of French charts of the Caribbean with the German Kriegsmarine stamp on them. I can’t believe that after about 70 D/Cs and 5 H/H salvos it is possible that the S/M [submarine] is still alive but all the same the lack of more

evidence is disappointing. E/S traces latterly suggested that the object had broken up a bit. C.in C. Rosyth told us to turn the contact over to *Monnow* and *Loch Alvie* and proceed to Scapa with our evidence. *Monnow* and *L[och]. A[lvie]*. arrived on the scene at about 5 and after some delay in getting contact I pushed off for Scapa at 5.30 arriving about 2000. Went right alongside the oiler *Danmark* and when secured I proceeded to drink too much rum and ginger ale in the W[ard]. R[oom]. before turning in. But still it was a bit of an occasion. I don't know what the experts will say but I don't see that it can be but a U/Boat and I think we killed it.

*Although the group was only credited with a "probable," postwar records revealed they had sunk U-309.*

**The Same View for Nearly Six Years**

Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, it was the same view -- water, sky and ships. The first trans-Atlantic convoy left Britain on 7 September 1939 and the last crossed in May 1945. (Courtesy, National Archives of Canada, PA 200127)





**The last casualty -- the Bangor minesweeper, HMCS Esquimalt, 1945.**

The work carried out by the RCN's 56 Bangor class and 12 Algerine class minesweepers is often overlooked. They served as coastal and local escorts although 16 Bangors reverted to their original role during the Normandy invasion. Ten of the Bangors, including **Esquimalt** pictured here, were powered by diesel engines and somewhat smaller than the rest of the class. **Esquimalt** displaced 592 tons, had a complement of 83, a top speed of 16 knots and was armed with one 12-pdr gun and two 20 mm AA guns. She was sunk in the approaches of Halifax by **U-190** on 16 April 1945 and was the last RCN casualty of the war. The triangular antenna on her foremast is for the Canadian SW2C radar. (Courtesy, National Archives of Canada, PA 116954)

### **“Another died in a similar manner:” HMCS Esquimalt is sunk, March 1945**

*On 30 March 1945, U-190 torpedoed the Bangor Class minesweeper HMCS Esquimalt off the mouth of Halifax harbour. Able Seaman Joseph Wilson was manning the ASDIC set on Esquimalt when the torpedo hit and recalled that*

The ship immediately started to go under, rolling over to starboard and sinking stern-first. She disappeared within four minutes.

The Captain, who was in his cabin, had a hard time coming up the ladders, but finally gained the bridge. With one look he took in the situation and immediately ordered, “Abandon Ship.” With this, I left the ASDIC hut, went down off the bridge, and across onto the funnel and into the water, where I came up near a Carley float. I clambered in, but the after mast caught me across the back, pressing me back under the surface. However, I had my lifejacket on and I rolled from under the mast, shooting back to the surface.

When I clambered back into the life raft, there were other friends around, all trying to come over the side of the life raft, or simply hanging on the side ropes.<sup>1</sup>

*Seaman Terence Manuel, the Esquimalt’s writer or clerk, remembered that he was still on the deck when the ship went under and,*

After what seemed an eternity and with bursting lungs I surfaced to the oil slick swell of the Atlantic above, having exited *Esquimalt* under water, the last one out of her, my feet coming to rest on the submerged and rolled over bulkhead of *Esquimalt*. I was at nose level to the sea, gasping for air and drinking in sea water and fuel oil, flapping my arms to keep my head above it for I was not a swimmer. A quick look to the left of me revealed approximately ten feet of *Esquimalt*’s overturned bow out of the water beyond, rising five-six feet in the air – she began to roll again under my touching feet and suddenly the support was no longer there – a voice carried across the rolling water “Swim, damn it, – swim, she’s going.”

Rousing myself to that call I endeavoured to do just that but my efforts were impeded by a desperate sailor floundering in the water clutching at me and pushing me under. We struggled and I managed to break his hold just as my eyes caught the movement of an object in the water, it was a sailor’s sea-bag. I grabbed my companion’s disappearing head by the hair and attacked the water to get a hand hold on it. We held onto it until it became water logged and began to settle under water. An anxious shout from me to a float drifting away from us brought the response “Hang on, Scribe” and Carl Jacques, a P.[etty] O.[fficer] Motor Mechanic from Truro, Nova Scotia, swam out to us and pulled us to the float where we grasped the hand-hold ropes along its rounded sides.

Jacques claimed his perch on the float, after a short interval of time he slumped over and was thought to be sleeping from his extra exertion in the water, however, investigation by his immediate companion revealed he was dead as all efforts to rouse him failed. Another died in a similar manner and two others drowned “in the hole of the donut,” the bottom of the float covered with rope netting.<sup>2</sup>

*Seaman Wilson remembered that, on his raft, his shipmates*

spent about six and a half hours in the water, during which time we could see the Sambro Lightship at all times. We tried to row towards it by paddling with our hands, and we were the only raft that actually made the lightship. The rest of the survivors were picked up by HMCS *Sarnia*, which also recovered us.

*Seaman Manuel never forgot the long hours on the face of the ocean:*

Such was the cold rolling water and the slipperiness of the float’s rounded sides that grip was near impossible to hold and in addition to this the clamour of other sailors seeking a purchase too. Shock as well with its terrible body shaking and shivering in tightly clenched self-embrace, or just sheer exhaustion from the struggle and enormity of it all took their toll that morning. Coiled in a foetal position I too had a difficult time of controlling

my own shaking and shivering once a place opened up for me on the carley-float. I was clad only in undershorts and the First Lieutenant's life jacket, identified in white stencil markings, which I obtained from the floating debris in the water

*.Forty-four men out of Esquimalt's complement of seventy died that morning in March, most in the long hours they spent waiting for rescue.*



#### **It Was A Young Man's War**

The Battle of the North Atlantic was hard on ships and men and many sailors were broken by the physical and nervous strain. As the war progressed, the men on both sides became progressively younger as is evident of these pictures of Lieutenant-Commander W.H. Willson, captain of the corvette **Kootenay**, and his officers taken in 1944 and **Oberleutnants zur See** Werner Mueller (age 22) and Ernst Glenk (21) of **U-190** which surrendered to the RCN in May 1945. On his cap, Mueller is wearing the badge of the 2nd U-Boat Flotilla, a submarine transfixied by a lighting bolt. (Courtesy, National Archives of Canada, PA 179887 and PA 191077)

#### **The last patrol of U-190, February–May 1945**

*Oberleutnant (Ing.) Werner Hirschmann describes the last war patrol of U-190 in the spring of 1945 and his experiences as a prisoner of war in Canada:*

On February 10 we departed from Kiel for our last patrol across the Atlantic, with a stopover in Horten in Norway to top up our fuel. On entering that harbour we had to witness another submarine following us being blown up by a mine with a total loss of crew.

In December 1944 another boat had been quite successful in attacking convoys leaving Halifax and to our High Command it seemed to be a promising area of operations. With spending about two hours surfaced at night to charge the batteries and otherwise crawling along at less than pedestrian speed, when submerged, it took about six weeks to cross the Atlantic. Under attack a few times by surface vessels we managed to escape

each time. I remember how we admired the crews on the surface vessels for their tenacity in staying with us in absolutely horrifying storm conditions with mountainous waves.

When we approached the Canadian coast, we no longer surfaced during the night and started a period of fifty days submerged prowling around the approaches of Halifax. As Chief Engineer I wasn't too involved in tactical matters, but it seemed that all commercial traffic in the area had come to a halt. On the other hand we must have been suspected of being in the area, because there was a never-ending search for us with asdic and depth charges dropped on imagined targets. Any time the situation became too uncomfortable we snuck close in shore and spent some hours on the bottom, where we felt relatively safe. Few of the depth charges came close enough to cause more than minimal damage and even fewer to present a real danger.

In the middle of April once again we heard the pinging of asdic and then noticed a small warship rapidly approaching from astern. We were sure that she had discovered us and prepared for an -attack. We fired an acoustic torpedo from one of our stern tubes and went deep. We heard an



#### **U-boat Farewell Party, 1944**

Contrary to popular myth, farewell parties for U-boat crews about to depart on patrol were fairly staid affairs as shown in this photograph taken on 9 March 44. It shows the officers of **U-66** and **U-190** (wearing their grey service uniforms) saying goodbye to their comrades in the flotilla mess at Lorient. **U-66** never came back from its patrol. (Courtesy, Werner Hirschmann)

explosion, followed by the typical noises of a sinking ship. We had not been able to identify our target, but were told later that it was the Bangor minesweeper, HMCS *Esquimalt*. Since the loss of the minesweeper was not discovered until many hours later, we were able to sneak once more close inshore and to avoid any direct retaliation.

At the end of April, the state of our fuel and food supplies indicated the need to embark on return to our home port and we turned east to begin the long journey. A few days later, to lift our sagging spirits, we staged a somewhat rather unmilitary interlude. May 1 was Germany's National Holiday and we realized that the year being 1945, this was most likely the last opportunity to celebrate that occasion in style.



I must mention here, that in normal times each member of the crew of our subs received a generous ration of alcoholic drinks in form of several bottles of liquor. In normal times these bottles were left in port to be taken home after -return from a mission. When we left Germany in February 1945, we were not altogether certain that we would ever come back to that particular harbour, and to prevent the falling of these bottles into undesirable hands, we just loaded them aboard and took them along, just as we did with our dress uniforms. On May 1 the outlook for -future parties to enjoy our liquid cargo was rather dim and we decided to live up to our duties and have a rousing National Holiday party right then and there, at a depth of 60 metres somewhere between Halifax and the south of Newfoundland. ....

#### **Wardroom of U-190, 1945**

This somewhat grainy photograph taken in September 1944 shows the officers of **U-190** in their cramped wardroom. From left to right are **Oberleutnant-Ingenieur** Werner Hirschmann and **Oberleutnants zur See** Reith and Schmidt. Reith and Hirschmann surrendered to the RCN in May 1945 and spent a year in the U-boat officers' prison camp at Gravenhurst, Ontario before returning to their homeland. (Courtesy, Werner Hirschmann.



On May 12, somewhere southeast of Newfoundland, Germany requested us to surface and radio our position in open language. The war was over and looking back – my proudest achievement of the war was that, at the end, the 57 members of our crew were still alive.

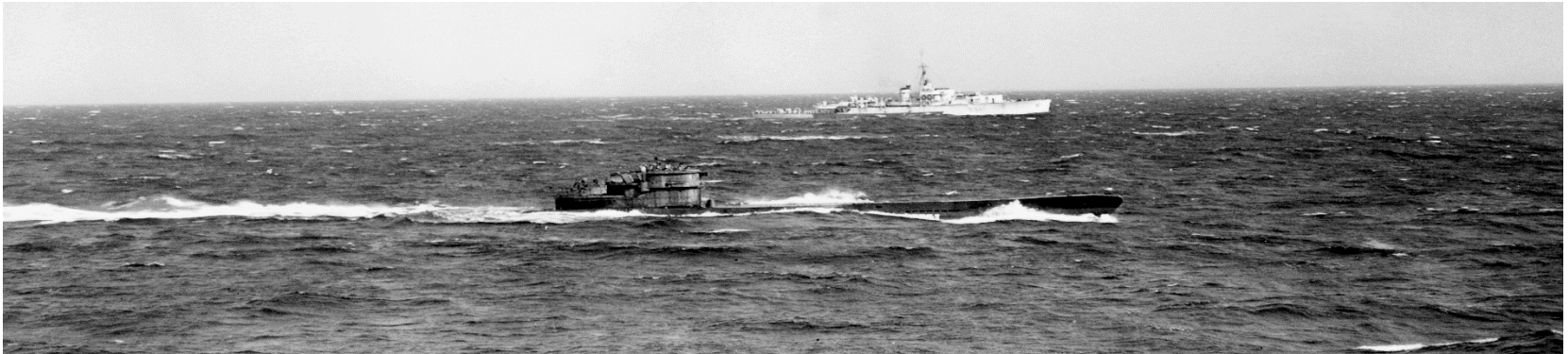
Soon after we were asked to change course to Newfoundland and during the following night we were picked up by two Canadian warships, HMCS *Victoriaville* and HMCS *Thorlock*. With the exception of eight engine room personnel and myself, our crew was transferred to the Canadian warships and Canadian crew took over to complete our final journey.

On the next day I became aware of a commotion going on in our bow torpedo room. There I observed a Canadian petty officer berating a group of his sailors who were highly inebriated, very happy and just having a whale of a time. When looking into the matter, the Canadian officers and myself pieced together the sequence of events: our sailors, justifiably concerned about the fate of their nicely labelled bottles, had had time enough to hide

their precious property by pouring the contents into their military issue canteens which were then left lying around all over the place. Obviously they had not counted on the acute sense of smell of their Canadian colleagues who forthwith made the best of their discovery. When the situation was back under control, the canteens were only half full at best.

The relationship between the Canadian officers and our crew was full of respect and fairness. I remember being on the conning tower at night, listening to piped-up Strauss waltzes and discussing with my Canadian guests family, war and other problems of the world. I will always remember their names and sorely regret that I never met anyone of them again. I had one final triumph – I beat one of my guests in a chess game!

We entered Bay Bulls a day later where we were reunited with our captain and the rest of the crew. We were then transferred to the Canadian



**Loch Eriboll, 1945 -- A Canadian Frigate Escorts a Surrendered U-boat**

In May 1945, the RCN Escort Group 9 under the command of Commander A.F.C. Layard, RN, brought 15 U-boats and 4 German surface vessels into Loch Eriboll in Scotland to surrender. This was the largest single capitulation of German submarines at the end of the war and the British media enthused over this signal triumph of the "Royal Navy." During the war, the British people knew little about the contribution made by the RCN in preserving their seaborne lifeline and the RN never showed much interest in informing them. (Courtesy, National Archives of Canada, PA 191027)

frigate, HMCS *Prestonian*, which took us to Halifax. On this trip we had long discussions with the Canadian officers. They demonstrated how they chased us, and we explained how we escaped – a meeting of former enemies, full of respect for each other.

After a warm farewell at Halifax, we officers were then separated from the crew of U-190 and began the long train trip to Gravenhurst in Ontario. Eating in the dining car, in full dress uniform among the passengers of the train, lightly supervised by two Canadian naval officers, was certainly a welcome first step in our transition to a more civilized life.

At the Gateway Hotel in Gravenhurst, which served as prisoner-of-war camp No. 20, we had all the comforts of life with the exception of female company. We were treated like guests of the country. We had our own dance band, playing mainly big band swing, our symphony orchestra, our internal university, six first-run American movies a week, in summer time under the trees. We had a tennis court inside the barbed wire and outside, there were two hockey rinks and our own fenced-off swimming area in Lake Muskoka with diving tower and water-polo basin. The latter facilities we could use after giving our word of honour not to escape. Further away we had our own farm with chicken, pigs, horses, potato fields and maple trees that supplied us with maple syrup. Eaton's catalogue challenged us to splurge our money, \$20 a month. Beer was officially delivered, spirits were distilled illegally and protected through an elaborate alarm system.....

With pride and humility, I have now accepted an honorary membership in the HMCS *Esquimalt* Memorial Association. As recognized by the *Esquimalt* veterans and myself: all of us only did our duty.





**The End, 1945.**

**U-889**, a Type IX boat, at Shelburne, NS, in May 1945. **U-889** left Germany on 6 April 1945 but by the time it got off the Canadian coast, the war was over and its commanding officer, **Kapitänleutnant** Braeucker surrendered to HMCS **Dunvegan** at sea. **U-889** was escorted to Shelburne, NS and Braeucker (wearing a white cap cover) is seen talking to RCN officers while a Canso (Catalina) aircraft of 161 Squadron, RCAF, flies overhead. Note the snorkel attached to the conning tower. (Courtesy, National Archives of Canada, PA 116720)

### **“Am I thankful it has come:” VE Day, 8 May 1945**

*On VE Day, 8 May 1945, the RCN's 9th Escort Group was at sea. As the ever-conscientious and ever-worried Senior Officer of the group, Commander A.F.C. Layard, RN, recorded in his diary, it was a very special day:*

Tuesday, May 8 – at sea – Lissahally

..... We got a signal shortly after leaving saying today the 8th was V day and at about 0100 a signal from Com[modore] (D[estroyers]) telling us to return to Moville and so we turned back and anchored at about 0330, very nearly hitting the wreck off Dunagree Point as we came in. .... -After we were alongside and secured the Captain cleared lower deck and read prayers - very badly I thought - and then I addressed the ship's company also rather badly. I was having a V[ictory] day glass of beer in the W[ard].R[oom] before lunch when we got a signal to embark pilots and proceed up to Lissahally and give leave to one watch. .... At 1500 Churchill broadcast to the nation that the war with Germany was over and the Admiralty ordered “Splice the Main Brace”. From then on most everyone in the ships was tight. After that I went ashore for a walk. It was a lovely hot sunny day but my walk was spoilt by worrying about the drunks. As I came on board I passed 3 men carrying jugs to the Canteen with the intention of bringing beer back on board for the watch on board. I found Skinner half tight in my cabin but he gave me some good advice and calmed me down just as I was thinking of putting sentries and patrols everywhere. Really there was nothing for it but to permit booze coming on board and otherwise let them be. Our Ward Room in the evening was full of Wrens who had bicycled over. I had a good many drinks but didn't enjoy myself. Thank God V[ictory]. day only comes once in a lifetime but oh am I thankful it has come.

*Lieutenant Commander Louis Audette, RCNVR, -remembers the end of the war:*

When the European war ended I was in the middle of the ocean. Thank God I was not in Halifax. I was Senior Officer of EG 27 and had four ships in company. One of them was Phil Evans in *Lévis*, another frigate. We were given orders to patrol a line of latitude. .... We patrolled the line, which meant steering west for so many hours and then altering 180 degrees and steaming east for so many hours – and back and forth. It was a pretty dull affair. One morning when I came up to the bridge a signal came in from *Lévis*. It said, “Thirteen Hebrews verse eight.” I dragged my bible out and the verse in question was “Jesus Christ. The same yesterday, today and forever.”<sup>3</sup>

### **“This made the Canadians awfully sore:” EG 9 rounds up the U-boats, May 1945**

*In mid-May Escort Group 9 was ordered to intercept a German convoy of surface ships and submarines in the North Sea and bring the U-boats to Loch Eriboll in Scotland for an elaborate surrender ceremony during which Commander Layard, RN, managed to dodge the media:*

Thursday, May 17 – at sea

..... at about 0530 we sighted the convoy on our Port Bow and so all was well. We went to actions stations as we approached. It consisted of a couple of large armed yachts and 3 Submarine Depot ships and auxiliaries and 15 U boats. We closed the leading yacht obviously the S[enior].O[fficer]. and the others closed the U boats and the whole convoy was ordered to stop. I tried to give my orders by hailing but that was hopeless and so I lowered a boat and sent No. 1 over who found a Captain on board who called himself S[enior].O[fficer]. Arctic and Barents Sea. When he heard his U boats had to go to England he was inclined to refuse as it was contrary to the orders for his High Command but No. 1 was v[ery]. firm and he soon saw he had to do as he was told. The chief thing was to get him to tell the U boats how to form up, to find out if the surrender terms had been carried out and such details as amount of fuel, numbers of the boats etc. .... The U/B[oa]ts were in 2 columns, *Matane* ahead and 2 escorts either side. My troubles weren't over then, however, for they started to straggle and develop engine trouble and eventually I made a signal

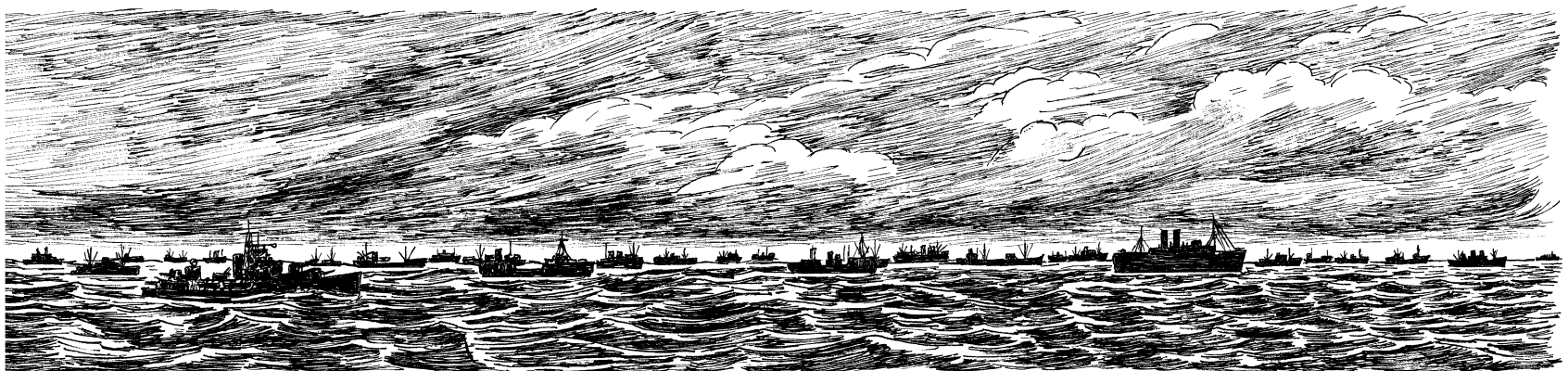
saying this was not in keeping with the known efficiency of the U/B service and on arrival if there was any negligence, C[ommanding].O[fficer]s and any others concerned would be punished and would not return to Germany. .... I don't think they looked like giving any real trouble but it was a most exhausting and worrying day. If we get all [of] them in anybody else can have all the rest of the surrendering they want.

Friday, May 18 – at sea

..... Still rather worried about my boats and thought of all the awful things that *might* happen and wondered what on earth I would do. It is no good I can't be Prussian enough on these occasions. *Nene* has a German interpreter and they intercepted a W/T [radio] signal from the S[enior].O[fficer]. to the other U boats saying it was all over, they had to bite the bitter apple and there was only one thing left to do - to give up their boats. .... however I signalled the S[enior].O[fficer]. and told him we were reading what he [had] made and told him no more signals on W/T without permission.

Saturday, May 19 – at sea – Loch Eriboll

..... Having made elaborate arrangements to get into single line before arriving, S[enior].O[fficer]. Loch Eriboll ..... to get them all inside the shelter before stopping and so I quickly had to alter my orders and we approached in 2 columns. .... As we approached we had aircraft overhead and press photographers. It was announced on the news that 15 U boats were being escorted in by the Royal Navy. This made the Canadians awfully sore. I must say they might have found out or have been told that we were an R.C.N. group. When we got into the entrance at about 1915 I stopped the whole outfit and H[arbour].L[aunch]s went alongside and put guards on board the U boats and took the whole thing out of my hands, and we proceeded up the Loch to anchor. I must say it a great relief to have got them in without incident. I had a late supper and a v[ery]. good whisky and soda with Jonas. A Canadian press photographer came on board. As I am an R.N. officer and of no news value to him I was able thank God to avoid any personal photography and I suggested it would be far more suitable if he featured Skinner heavily.



CONVOY 1943

#### North Atlantic Convoy

During the Second World War, 7,358 merchant ships loaded at Canadian ports for overseas destinations, most of which were on the other side of the Atlantic. Between September 1939 and May 1945 more than 1468 convoys crossed that ocean under the escort of Allied warships. The Battle of the Atlantic had to be fought and won before the war in Europe could be brought to successful conclusion. (Drawing by L.B. Jenson, courtesy of the artist)