Chapter **9** *EPILOGUE*

# TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY:

# THE LEGACY OF THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

**The Allied Navies Triumphant, 1945**

By the last months of the war, the U-boats had been swept off the mid-ocean and convoy after convoy completed its journey without incident. While Signalman Jack Scott of HMCS **Sherbrooke** mans his projector in the foreground, the corvette HMCS **Barrie** refuels from a tanker. **Barrie**, commissioned in May 1941, was a veteran of the North Atlantic. She was sold to the Argentine Navy in 1947 and broken up in 1972. (Photograph by G.P. Boydell, courtesy, National Archives of Canada, PA 115354)

**The navy's shame: The VE Day riot, May 1945**

There had never been any love lost between Canadian sailors and the overcrowded, expensive and rather grim port of Halifax, the despised "Slackers" in the sailors' vocabulary. Between 1939 and 1945 the city's population had risen from 68,000 to 99,000, swollen by service personnel and their families and there were shortages of everything – accommodation, restaurants, entertainment, recreational facilities, cinemas, cabs – and many unscrupulous civilians had made themselves wealthy by extorting service personnel. Particularly galling in sailors' eyes was that the city was officially "dry," and there were no bars or night clubs although alcohol could be purchased at government liquor stores. The stringent drinking laws, intended to keep intoxication to the minimum, actually created a booming trade in bootlegging. Sailors on shore leave from convoy duty, finding nothing to do in Halifax and nowhere to go, too often ended up purchasing liquor at exorbitant prices from bootleggers and then drinking it in public places because they had nowhere to consume it in private. The city's small police force was overwhelmed, and although the navy's shore patrols assisted, the sight of drunken men in uniform weaving through the downtown area was all too common in the latter years of the war.

The tension between service personnel, particularly sailors, and civilians increased as the conflict in Europe began to wind down and there were muttered threats that the navy would "take Halifax apart" on VE Day. Senior naval officers were aware of the potential for violence but their -attempts to head it off suffered from the fact that there was no single co-ordinating commander for the many shore establishments in the city. -Admiral Leonard Murray was the senior commander but his attention, particularly in the last days of the war, was directed toward operations intended to defeat Dönitz's final offensive in Canadian waters. The commanding officer of each shore establishment therefore made his own -arrangements and no overall authority was in place to head off what was to be a tragedy.

On 7 May 1945, when news of the German surrender reached the city, there were 18,000 sailors, 3,500 airmen, 3,000 soldiers and an estimated 2,000 merchant mariners in Halifax. Many went into the downtown area but finding nothing to do and the government liquor stores closed as a precaution, they drifted up and down the streets. Toward evening a crowd of sailors, egged on by civilians, burned a streetcar and, thus encouraged, spectators broke into two liquor stores and distributed the contents to those gathered to watch the fun. The city police were helpless in the face of the crowd's numbers but, in any event, the participants were in a good mood, helped by the free refreshments, and what followed was a rather happy street party.

At this point, the senior officers of the armed forces and municipal authorities had been given a warning and they might have taken steps to prevent what occurred the next day by confining service personnel to their quarters and beefing up military and naval police patrols. Instead, half the sailors in the port were permitted to return to the city on 8 May and many were roaming the streets during the afternoon as a large civic celebration, complete with bands and politicians, took place on the Garrison Grounds behind Citadel Hill. When it concluded, those who had attended moved into the business section and joined thousands of people wandering aimlessly up and down the streets. Eventually, some uniformed personnel, again encouraged by watching civilians, began to smash store windows and once started, this activity increased – shops were looted and some set on fire, a police car was overturned, a third liquor store and a brewery were invaded – providing free drinks for all and sundry. It was noted that, although servicemen made many of the initial break-ins, the waiting civilians did most of the looting.

By early evening King Mob ruled downtown Halifax in an orgy of drink and destruction. Admiral Murray drove through the streets in a loudspeaker car, appealing to his men to return to their bases and ships, but thousands of sailors continue to reel through the streets and the riot only wound down after a curfew was proclaimed that night and military and naval police began to make numerous arrests. On the following day, 9 May 1945, armed

soldiers from a nearby military camp arrived and the city was quiet. In the end, 19 airmen, 34 sailors, 41 soldiers and 117 civilians were charged with criminal acts and 152 people convicted of public drunkenness.

The Halifax Riot provoked outrage across Canada. Vice Admiral G.C. Jones, the Chief of the Naval Staff, flew to Halifax to assume command of all naval personnel in the city and the government appointed a Supreme Court justice to conduct an inquiry, which focused on the navy's role in this miserable event. Murray, believing that a senior officer is responsible for the actions of those under his command, refused to implicate any of his subordinates and took entire responsibility upon himself. He accepted the blame and resigned his commission to go into voluntary exile in Britain, where he died, almost forgotten, in 1971. It was a tragic end to the career of Canada's foremost wartime naval commander, who has been summed up as an officer

**Rear Admiral L.W. Murray, CB, CBE (1896-1971)**
In May 1941, Commodore Leonard Murray took command of the Newfoundland Escort Force and, in the spring of 1943, was appointed commander-in-chief, Canadian Northwest Atlantic, becoming the only Canadian to command a theatre of war during the war. From 1941 to 1945, Murray was the senior Canadian officer most directly concerned with the Battle of the Atlantic and he proved to be a very competent leader. Forced into early retirement by his supposed failure to anticipate and control the Halifax Riot, Murray went to England where he died, almost forgotten, in 1971. In the background of the portrait are four representative ships of the RCN escort fleet: HMCS **Columbia** (Town Class destroyer); HMCS **Restigouche** (River Class destroyer); HMCS **Sackville** (short foc'sle corvette) and HMCS **Sorel** (late type corvette). (Painting by David McIntosh, courtesy of the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic)

deeply and deservedly respected by the seagoing navy. He was neither colourful nor brilliant, yet he was a hero, a dogged hero, though Canadians resist that word. His name should never be forgotten. The irony of his life was that his downfall came the very day his arch-enemies, the U-boats, surfaced to surrender.[1]

Many in the RCN believed that Murray was made a scapegoat and the true culprit was the government of Canada which, although it compensated property owners for the losses they sustained in the riot, had refused throughout the war to spend a cent more than necessary to ease the strained conditions in Halifax.

**The navy's glory: The Bedford Magazine fire, July 1945**

Responsibility for the Halifax Riot is still a matter of debate but there is little disagreement over who was to blame for the Bedford Magazine fire which began on 18 July 1945. By this time, the demobilization of the wartime fleet was in full flood and dozens of ships were decommissioning at Halifax and unloading their weapons, ammunition and equipment for storage. Thousands of rounds were placed in the RCN magazine at Bedford near Dartmouth across the harbour from Halifax. Naval regulations wisely prohibited more than one warship at a time unloading its ammunition on a single dock – only when that load had been safely dispensed in the magazines, could another vessel de-ammunition. These safety measures, however, slowed demobilization of the wartime fleet and the Liberal

government (whose record on naval affairs was not its brightest feature) wanted the process of converting naval personnel into civilians (and potential voters) accelerated.

The government therefore insisted that, in the name of expediency, the safety regulations be set aside and on 18 July 1945 the ammunition of three warships was sitting on the south jetty of the Bedford Magazine in blazing hot summer weather. Even worse, since there hadn't been time to properly store previous loads in sealed structures, thousands of shells were dispersed in open dumps around the magazine area. At about 1800 that evening, a worker noticed that a pyrotechnic flare on the jetty had caught fire and went to put it out but before he could do so, there was a massive explosion that shook Halifax and Dartmouth and shattered windows in both cities and the south jetty simply disappeared.

Captain Owen Robertson, RCN, the officer responsible for fire safety in the naval base, was having dinner with his wife in the Nova Scotian Hotel in Halifax when he heard a "thump" and observed dust coming out of the ventilators. He immediately took an elevator to the top floor of the hotel and peering out over the harbour, was horrified to see a large mushroom cloud, a malignant toadstool in the sky, hanging over the Bedford Magazine. Proceeding quickly across the harbour in a naval speedboat, Robert-son assumed command at the magazine and assessed the situation.

The jetty explosion had set off sympathetic detonations in some of the open dumps and there was a possibility that a deadly chain reaction would start that, ultimately, would detonate the main magazines which contained enough explosives to flatten half of Halifax. As Robertson looked on, ammunition, starshells, flares and rockets were constantly exploding, starting grass fires near the main storage areas and outside the magazine. The situation was perilously close to being a repeat of the tragic 1917 explosion and, with this in mind, Robertson advised his superiors to evacuate that part of Halifax nearest the magazine. Fortunately, there was a well-organized emergency organization in place that ensured that this procedure, which began less than three hours after the initial blast, proceeded smoothly.

Under Robertson's direction, squads of volunteer naval fire-fighters entered the magazine and managed to put out the worst fires in the compound. As they worked, they were bombarded by projectiles of all kinds and showers of debris from the larger detonations but, labouring through the night, they managed to extinguish the most dangerous fires within the magazine compound and then turned to the tricky job of removing un-exploded live ammunition from the open storage dumps. This task pre--occupied them throughout 19 July and by the evening of that day the threat of a major explosion had receded and the population were permitted to return to their homes. It took another three days to contain the brush fires raging outside the magazine, a task done by sailor volunteers, many only a day or two from leaving the service but by 22 July all fires were out and the peril had ended.

By efforts that can justly be termed heroic, the RCN had averted a -major disaster and the people of Halifax knew it. If the city had come to loathe the navy after the VE Day riot, it now came to admire it.

### HMCS *Sackville:* An enduring memorial

On 14 August 1945 Japan surrendered and the Second World War, the most bloody and devastating conflict in history, ended. The wartime Canadian escort fleet, always regarded as a temporary and somewhat embarrassing emergency force by the regular navy, was paid off and hundreds of frigates and corvettes sent to the scrapyard or sold for surplus. On VJ Day, the RCN was, as stated earlier, the third largest navy in the world – a year later it had fewer ships in commission than in September 1939. As the escorts disappeared, so did the Canadian sailors who had served in them as most were wartime volunteers only too happy to return to civilian life.

The years, and then the decades, passed and, as the lean young men of the 1940s became portly and grey, many would gather on a Sunday in early May – Battle of the Atlantic Sunday – to honour their fallen and remember the courage and sacrifice of the war years. Each year they are older and,


**Sackville is Dedicated, May 1985**

The official dedication of **Sackville** as the Canadian Naval Memorial took place on 4 May 1985 at the same dockyard she visited many times during the war. At this point, **Sackville** is still missing items (note the absence of rails around the 4-inch gun and the missing AA gun) but they would eventually be acquired. In the background can be seen the Angus L. Macdonald Bridge, named after the wartime Minister of the Naval Service, which connects Halifax and Dartmouth. (Courtesy Canadian Forces, Photograph HSC 85-2775-6)

sadly, fewer in number. Eventually they will exist only as names and photographs in books written about the battle, but when they are gone, the world

will be a poorer place because these men represent a generation that paid a very high price for the preservation of freedom. There are many memorials to their sacrifice, but for those who served on the North Atlantic, perhaps the most important can be seen in Halifax during the summer months at a jetty in front of the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic.

That memorial is the corvette HMCS *Sackville*. Commissioned in late 1941, *Sackville* joined "Chummy" Prentice's C-3 Group and fought in the desperate battle for Convoy ON 115 the following summer. After a refit, she went back to the Mid-Ocean Escort Force in April 1943 as a member of C-1 Group and completed six trans-Atlantic convoys. In July *Sackville* joined one of the first RCN support groups and participated in the last great convoy battle of the war, the struggle for ONS 18/ON 202 in September 1943. She served the remainder of 1943 in C-2 Escort Group and, following an extended refit in Texas in early 1944, rejoined the Mid-Ocean Escort Force only to be side-lined because of a boiler defect which caused her transfer to the reserve fleet. This defect actually saved *Sackville* as most of her wartime contemporaries disappeared into the scrapyards, and in 1952 she returned to the sea to begin a long and worthy career as an oceanographic research vessel.

By the time *Sackville* was paid off in 1982, she had claimed the interest of a volunteer group later formalized as the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust. With the assistance of various levels of government, the Canadian Forces and many other supportive institutions, organizations and individuals, the Trust raised the funds to restore the old Atlantic warhorse to her 1944 configuration and appearance. It took nearly two years but, on the day before the Battle of the Atlantic Sunday, 4 May 1985, *Sackville* was officially dedicated as the Canadian Naval Memorial. In the winter, *Sackville* is laid up at the Naval Dockyard, where her short and stumpy profile looks incongruous moored near the big, streamlined frigates and destroyers of the modern Canadian navy. Each spring she moves to her place of honour, a jetty in front of the Maritime Museum, where she is boarded by thousands of fascinated visitors.

*Sackville* looks better today than she ever did during her wartime -career. Freshly painted and well maintained, she is a far cry from the rust-streaked little ship that battled the U-boats and the elements on the North Atlantic. *Sackville*, however, is more than a floating museum, she is a living ship and her decks and crew spaces often resound with the laughter of young sea cadets – some the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of the veterans of the Atlantic – who use her as a training vessel.*

It is very fitting that HMCS *Sackville* is the Canadian Naval Memorial because she is a perpetual reminder of what was Canada's greatest contribution to Allied victory during the Second World War – the Royal Canadian Navy's participation in the Battle of the Atlantic. *Sackville* is the last wartime corvette, the sole survivor of all those "far flung, storm tossed little ships on which the German Fuehrer had never looked and yet which … stood between him and the conquest of the world."[2]



## THE AFTERMATH

**The navy's shame: The VE Day riot, May 1945**

*There had never been any love lost between the RCN and the overcrowded port of Halifax. As the war in Europe wound down, many naval officers became concerned about the mood of their sailors, who were muttering about "taking the town apart" on the day victory was announced. During the evening of 7 May 1945, the day before the war in Europe officially ended, a crowd, headed by service personnel including soldiers and airmen but mainly sailors, broke into a brewery in downtown Halifax and touched off what would become known as the "Halifax Riot." Lieutenant Commander Anthony Griffin, RCNVR, was in Halifax that evening.*

**The Navy's Shame -- VE Day Riot in Halifax, 8 May 1945**
This photograph of the downtown business section of Halifax, taken from the intersection of Barrington and Salter Streets shows the view north with mobs of civilians and servicemen roaming Barrington Street looking for trouble. Although there are a number of soldiers in the crowds, it is unfortunate that the majority of the service personnel are sailors. (Photography by R. Harvey, courtesy National Archives of Canada, PA 79585)

I had changed into civilian clothes and gone out to dinner with a fellow officer. When we came out on the street, the first thing we sighted was a car overturned and on fire. Then a streetcar blazing and a big crowd of naval ratings throwing large stones through a plate glass window. There was an atmosphere of total chaos.

I stopped one of them without identifying myself and asked him what possessed these men to indulge in such an orgy of destruction. He naturally assumed I was a native Haligonian and said, "We're going to repay you bastards for the way you've treated us over six years." Then came a group of three staff cars, all blowing their horns, the leading one carrying the flag of Admiral Murray, addressing the rioters through loud-hailer, telling them they should recover their senses and go back to their ships or barracks immediately. He was totally ignored. After a while, seeing the downtown section of the city laid waste, and having no authority or connection with the Admiral's staff, I went back to my hotel and slept fitfully, feeling quite sick.[1]

*Wren Rosamond Greer recalled that the situation got worse the following day:*

Several of us [Wrens] wandered down to Waverly House, a YWCA Hostel which was always open, thanks to dedicated volunteers, and there listened to the King's victory message on the radio and had tea and cake. It was late afternoon as we started back to *Stadacona*.

We thought things were not quite as they should be when we met sailors, soldiers and civilians loaded down with cases of beer and bottles of liquor. And we were sure of it when a soldier invited us to have a drink at the well-stocked bar he had set up on a tombstone in St. Paul's Cemetery. But we did not realize we were in the midst of a riot until we found ourselves surrounded by a mob of servicemen and civilians smashing windows, rushing into stores and carrying away all their arms could hold. Clothing, furniture,

dishes, bedding, everything sold in the stores lining Barrington Street, was being carried out and loaded into waiting cars and trucks. A sailor, his arms wrapped around a naked mannequin, slumbered peacefully away upon the bed in an Eaton's display window. A typewriter flew out a third-storey window, missing us by inches. We passed people vomiting in doorways and lying on the sidewalk, cut and bleeding, some unconscious. In the streets the mob was out of control, shouting, drunken, hostile and ugly.

We did not need the announcement blaring over the police car loudspeaker to tell us it was time to "return to quarters immediately." We ran just as fast as we could, through streets covered by shattered glass, over piles of broken bottles and prostrate bodies, back to the sanctity of the Wren Block.[2]

*The riot finally ended early on 9 May when a thousand armed soldiers were brought into the city from nearby Debert Camp. Downtown Halifax was devastated, two hundred people were under arrest, -including 34 sailors, and three people were dead. Despite the fact that more civilians than servicemen were convicted of criminal charges arising from the disturbances, most Haligonians held the Navy primarily responsible – at one point there were nearly 9,000 sailors rampaging through the business area of the city – and a subsequent federal government inquiry blamed the disturbances on Rear Admiral Murray, the senior naval officer present. Murray refused to implicate any of his subordinates and took full responsibility for the riot and retired prematurely, bringing a very successful 35-year career to a sad end.*

**The navy's glory: The Bedford Magazine fire, July 1945**

*The responsibility for the Halifax Riot is still being debated but there is very little disagreement over -responsibility for the Bedford Magazine fire which began on 18 July 1945. Naval regulations wisely -forbid more than one warship's ammunition to be unloaded and present on a dock at one time. These safety measures, however, delayed the process of -demobilizing the RCN. Mackenzie King's Liberal -government wanted the process of converting naval personnel back into civilians – and potential Liberal voters – expedited and insisted the ammunition regulations be set aside. On 18 July 1945, as Captain Owen Robertson, RCNVR, recorded,*

there were three ships' outfits on that South Jetty [the jetty at the Bedford Magazine]. Later on, we found one crater about three hundred and sixty five feet across, where about three hundred depth charges had been piled up. Further on, we had stored some very large bombs out in the open. We had broken all bloody regulations there, because of Ottawa's insistence.

As far as we could [later] trace from reports made by ships in the area, we think a pyrotechnic must have leaked and flared and set off some ammunition. AB [Able Seaman] Craig, one of the naval guards at the magazine, spotted it and shouted to his mate, "I'm going down to see if I can put it out." He just got to the end of the jetty when the whole jetty blew up. It was not until the third day of fighting the fire that we found Craig's body about two hundred yards inland.[3]

*Captain Robertson, RCNVR, the Commanding Officer of HMCS* Scotian*, the Halifax dockyard, was also the King's Harbour Master responsible for naval firefighting. In November 1943, Robertson had won the George Medal for leading a small fire-fighting team onto the burning merchant ship* Volunteer, *lying in Halifax harbour loaded with small-arms ammunition and highly flammable barrels of magnesium, and putting out her fire before the vessel exploded. When the South Jetty blew up at about 1900 on Wednesday, 17 July 1945, he was having dinner with his wife at the Nova Scotian Hotel.*

We had just sat down when there was a *bang* and all the dust came out of the ventilators. I rushed out to the front desk: "What was that?" "I don't know, sir." "Give me the keys for a room at the top overlooking the harbour." A bellboy followed me into the elevator and let me into a room and *Christ*, there was a mushroom cloud *over the magazine*![4]

*That same evening Seaman Edward O'Connor was on duty at HMCS* Stadacona *where he was awaiting demobilization after eighteen months service on the North Atlantic in the corvette, HMCS* Morden*. O'Connor*

mustered with the others at 1900 hours to be given "clean up for rounds" duties. We were still fallen in on the parade ground when several popping sounds were heard, followed soon after by explosions. Word was that an ammo barge had blown up at Bedford and there followed considerable panic as more explosions followed. Our cleaning jobs never materialized and, instead, I was sent to the rear of the Administration Building as a guard to keep any people out. This was because windows and inside partitions were being blown out by the concussion of every blast. I was kept busy dodging falling glass myself and remained on duty here until sometime around 0100 hours. Finally my relief turned up – but what to do now? I joined a crowd trying to get some sleep on the parade ground and learned that all women had been sent out from the base, that civilians in that part of town were rushing off with whatever possessions they could quickly gather. It seemed sleep was to be impossible here. At 0200 the call came for us to make for the basement of the Torpedo building, a big blast being expected at any moment. We never quite made it, being knocked down like ten-pins as we crossed the square.[5]

*While Seaman O'Connor and his comrades were being blown around the parade square at* Stadacona*, Captain Robertson had entered the magazine with the three foremen and a fire-fighter named Emerson who, Robertson recalled, had the job*

to keep track of me. I climbed up over a little hill and sheltered behind a small brick house. Shells up to 4-inch calibre would [explode and] separate, with the bullet going one way and the shell-case the other way – very slowly. Some of the smaller ones were going so slowly that you could catch a 20-millimetre round in your hand – but gracefully. Unfortunately, the cartridges were setting fires behind us on the grass. The Magazine Foreman crawled up and yelled, "For Christ's sake, sir, get out of there." I said, "I'm all right, I'm all right." Then he really scared me [by shouting]: "*This building* [behind which Robertson was sheltering] *is the detonator shack*!"

So I started following him over the hill, when something let go and blew me into a small pond surrounded by alder bushes. I flew through the bushes and landed in the pond, so I didn't hurt myself too badly. But I was shocked and I guess I didn't know what I was doing. I was wandering up the road, when the Doctor, Len Prowse – a hell of a good guy – saw me from up by the North Gate hill. Len grabbed a fire engine and came through all the cordite all over the place and scooped me up. Apparently I was just stumbling down the road, babbling, and all he could get out of me was: "Mackenzie King, the bastard, won't give my wife a pension!"

*Thankfully, Robertson was able to clear his head and organize the naval fire fighting parties who were to spend four days struggling to prevent the many small fires from reaching the main ammunition magazines or from setting off brush fires in the nearby area. The worst of the danger was over within the first twenty-four hours although it took nearly four days for all the fires to be extinguished.*

### "It was time go home:" After it ended

*When it was all over, thousands of men and women in the RCN returned to civilian life and their reactions to peacetime varied. Lieutenant Commander Alan Easton, RCNVR, suffering from ulcers brought on by four years of service on the North Atlantic, remembered when he docked his destroyer, HMCS* Saskatchewan*, at Halifax for the last time:*

When a seaman sails from his native shore and he is young, he is embarking on adventure; if he is neither young nor old he will have an ache in his heart; if he is old he is used to both. But when his ship is homeward bound he is happy no matter what his age. .....

At sunset the shrill call of the bosun's pipe sounded. Those of us who were on deck faced aft and saluted. As the white ensign slowly fluttered

down, I knew that it had been lowered for the last time in a ship of mine.

Seeing my distress, the first lieutenant, who was standing beside me, asked, "Do you really think you will not come back with us?"

"I'm afraid not, Bimson," I answered after a long pause during which I saw many things. "I'm destined for the big house on the hill tomorrow," I added, nodding towards the tall hospital building above the dockyard. "I shall be able to sleep there without a voice-pipe at my ear. No, I shall never go to sea again – and I'm not sorry, fond as I am of ships and men."[6]

*As he recorded in his diary, for Commander A. Layard, RN, the end of the war was the end of the pressures of command:*

Saturday, May 26 – Heysham – Prinsted

..... Liverpool train left at 0830 and we changed at Preston and on arrival at Exchange Station I had to cloak room all my stuff and I had a considerable amount. From there I walked to Derby House and in due course had an interview with [Admiral] Sir Max [Horton] who was v[ery]. nice and told me to insist on a long bit of leave. ..... An uncomfortable journey but the train was pretty punctual at Euston at 1830. I had thought of spending the night in town but changed my mind and trundled all my stuff to Waterloo in a taxi and caught the 7.26 slow to Havant. Got an Army -officer, who got out at Guildford, to telephone J[oan, his wife]. and ask her to fix a taxi which was waiting and I was home at about 2145. My God it's wonderful to be home on some really worth while leave and is it a relief to have finished with all that worry and responsibility.

*Although almost all the wartime volunteers wanted to return to civilian life, they knew they would miss their comrades. Wren Rosamond Greer, whose exit from the RCN was delayed by illness, was one of the last to be demobilized:*

At the end of the sixth day at *Peregrine* I was completely "processed." All of my documents had been found and gathered together, the required signatures secured; my transportation to Vancouver, where I would obtain my final discharge at HMCS *Discovery* ..... arranged; my bags packed.

Although it was a time I had looked forward to eagerly for a long time, it was also the loneliest of any I spent in the WRCNS. All of my friends were gone. Girls I had lived and worked with for almost three years were back home in cities and towns spread all across Canada ... and I did not know if I would ever see them again.

Our lives took different paths once we shed His Majesty's uniform; but the friendships formed would never forgotten, and the *esprit de corps* would remain with us for the rest of our lives.

On Monday, March 4, 1946, there were no parades ... no brass bands. But when I heard the call to "Wakey-wakey – rise and shine!" I knew my job was done.

It was time to go home.[7]

*Leading Seaman Frank Curry remembered his last days in the service and the train voyage back to Manitoba:*

My last night in naval barracks brought an appropriate final task: duty watch. I found myself in charge of fire patrols, and once again, but for the last time, I got through the long hours between midnight and 0400. Then, later that day, it was back to the Halifax train station, packed with sailors, soldiers and airmen waiting to head off across Canada to their home towns. We caught the old D.A.R. Railway across Nova Scotia to Digby, crossed the Bay of Fundy on the *Princess Louise*, and then came the biggest shock of our naval careers.

Sitting in the railway station in Saint John, all arranged and waiting for us, was a special train, all sleeper coaches, each with berths made up with crisp white sheets and pillowcases; each with porters, ready to show us to our berths. For us veterans it was the most luxurious train trip imaginable: sleeping in clean, quiet surroundings after the turmoil of mess decks; eating full-course meals served on white table cloths in the dining car; travelling

in a style we never knew existed during the long years of war. It was as if the navy had decided to make up for what we had endured with this small taste of luxury. We enjoyed our moment. .....

Then came the sad part: the final stretch into Winnipeg and my stammered farewells to old shipmates continuing across the Prairies and on to the West Coast. I knew few of us would ever meet again. A last wave; a last goodbye and I descended the train steps.

Winnipeg. I was home.

There was no band, no welcoming committee; but it was still a wonderful moment: to return to the old home town after a terrible war, to return in one piece, with many memories to share and tales to tell; and to think about a boundless future, full of possibility.[8]


**Home is the Sailor, Home from the Sea**

In May 1945 the Royal Canadian Navy was the third largest Allied navy with 418 vessels in commission. A year later, it had exactly eight vessels in commission -- fewer than it had in 1939 and and one of those was a former U-boat.

**"Civilian life was hard to cope with:" Picking up the pieces**

*Many found the adjustment to the peacetime world difficult, including Lieutenant Commander Alan Stevens, RCNVR:*

At first civilian life was hard to cope with. Five years of Navy discipline – being in charge of hundreds of seamen, – accustomed to having my orders obeyed instantly and without argument had became so engraved that I made myself unpopular because of the way I reacted to my co-workers. Trouble was, it didn't bother me, but in time, I came to accept that the war was over. I was merely a retired Lieutenant Commander RCN and no one gave a damn.

At home the war was far from over. I had nightmares constantly. If my ship wasn't being torpedoed, we were being dive bombed. I usually ended up on the floor beside the bed – screaming I was drowning in oil. This would wake up my wife who got so fed up she would stick a leg out of bed – give me a kick and tell me to wake up.[9]

*Reunions with old shipmates were always welcome occasions in the postwar lives of many former naval personnel but one RCN veteran, Able Seaman John Isbister, had a reunion with his old ship that was not so happy:*

Immediately after the war, I returned to my job at Stelco. Some time later, word got around that the plant was cutting up naval ships for scrap. One day in 1947, I finally mustered enough courage to walk down to the yard where this operation was taking place. Secretly, I was hoping *Sherbrooke* would not be among them. She was literally my home for the greater part of my war. Never once did she let us down. The pounding and the beating we took on the North Atlantic was a testament to the excellent workmanship and quality of Canadian steelworkers and shipbuilders.

I discovered that some corvettes and minesweepers had been attacked by cutting torches. I recognized the pennant numbers of ships with which we had sailed. I stopped dead in my tracks as emotion overcame me. *Sherbrooke* was there. K-152 had followed me home. She was still intact. She still looked trim and seaworthy as I remembered her. I stood for several minutes and fondly recalled the better days spent aboard her.

It would have been very easy for me to go aboard *Sherbrooke*, but I could not bring myself to do it this time. I would be the only person aboard and somehow it would not be as I really remember her. *Sherbrooke* was a ship, yes, but what really made her was her crew and the comradeship we had with each other. The crew was now scattered, God knows where. Finally, I turned and walked away.[10]

**"We Remember:" In later years**

*In the years, and then the decades that followed, the veterans of the Battle of the Atlantic would gather on Remembrance Day and on Battle of the Atlantic Sunday to honour their absent friends. Lieutenant Commander James Lamb, RCNVR, tells us what they think about:*

We remember when the world was an exciting place in which to be young and when, with a thousand others, we were likely to be sent halfway around the earth and back again, without a care for tomorrow. One had a sense of destiny in those days; of being a part of historic events, of helping to mould a new and better world. How innocent, how naive, how pathetic it all seems now.

But we remember only the pleasant times, the high-spirited times. .....

We who are left are young no more; the eager boys' faces of yesterday are creased by time and pouched with civilian living. Yet still, across the widening gulf that yawns between that age and the present, the memory of our shared youth brings a pang to our heart, and moisture to our eyes.

It is not for the dead that we mourn, those bright hearts we have been revisiting in memory. Rather it is for the passing of our lost youth, and for the spirit of adventure and high endeavour which passed with it.[11]