

HALIFAX Dec.' 43

For New Year's Edition, *Halifax Chronicle* (Healy)

by Sub-Lieut. Frank A. Healy R.C.N.V.R.

Nova Scotia's jam-packed port of Halifax, one of the world's greatest naval bases, is fast becoming Canada's number one spot in World War II. It is the Dominion's major operational war zone, the zone which turns the wheels of victory in the Battle of the North Atlantic.

Throughout Canada it is known as an "Eastern Canadian Port", but to the men of the Royal Canadian Navy it is a place of respite from the nerve-racking game of hide-and-seek with the German U-boats.

Here the ships of Canada's fighting navy come and go. Here the wives and sweethearts of the seagoing men wait for them to return. It is a city of romance, a rendezvous of tired *matelots*. It is a city housing the men who fight the Battle of the North Atlantic, clearing the convoy routes through perilous, submarine-infested sea lanes; men who are handling almost half the whole North Atlantic convoy job and are performing striking deeds of heroism in European waters.

Since the start of the war the population of Halifax has swelled from 60,000 to a wartime population close to 120,000.

At this historic naval bastion the Canadian stars come ashore and get together after long and tiring runs to spin their yarns on running fights with enemy raiders. They chat about attacks by and on enemy U-boats. Their records are packed with tales of heroism, of death-daring achievements. Many times death has taken the upper hand, but as naval veterans know, "A navy isn't a navy until it has suffered the loss of ships."

In this war-time boom town is found the Royal Canadian Navy's throbbing nerve centre, controlled by one of Canada's most able and sea-minded navy men, Rear Admiral L.W. Murray, C.B.E., R.C.N., Commander-in-Chief, Canadian Northwest Atlantic, upon whose shoulders rests the responsibility of clearing the U-boats from the North Atlantic – the United Nations' most important lifeline.

As Commander-in-Chief, Rear Admiral Murray is in command of an operational war in which the enemy is being actively and constantly engaged. To this port often come the casualties of battle, ships torpedoed but still afloat, thankful men in Red Cross Survivors' kits, and prisoners of war.

Now totalling more than 73,000 men and 500 ships, the Royal Canadian Navy has made a name for itself as a convoy escort navy and a U-boat combatant, and the destroyers, minesweepers and tough-riding, sturdy little frigates and corvettes have done a job of which the whole Allied war is proud.

Under the Commander -in-Chief and his staff of highly-trained anti-submarine tacticians the convoys move steadily from bases along this eastern Canadian seaboard – bases of which Halifax is typical. Great new barracks and dockyards have sprung up almost overnight to accommodate and train the ever-increasing personnel of the navy. Near here is Canada's huge new training establishment, H.M.C.S. "CORNWALLIS" – the largest of its kind in the British Empire.

Off this port last spring, Germany, realizing its importance, sowed an arc of high-explosive mines. Canada's minesweeping fleet accepted the challenge, worked tirelessly day and night until they announced the danger area completely under control – without loss of life or convoyed shipping.

This is the kind of show Canadian sailors are proud of. They are proud too of the rapidly-growing, powerful and death-dealing outfit their navy has turned into. They are proud that their navy is manned by Canadians from every part of the country, men who left quiet, peace-time jobs and homes to be whipped into seagoing fighting efficiency with amazing rapidity since the war began.

Looking back over an active and successful year, the Royal Canadian Navy took its first steps in development of a larger-ship navy. Four new Canadian Tribal Class destroyers – H.M.C.S. "Athabaskan", "Iroquois", "Huron" and "Haida" – were commissioned and another one – H.M.C.S. "Micmac" – was launched at Halifax. And yet more and larger ships will soon be acquired. R.C.N. officers and men are now in training in Britain in preparation for the taking over of two cruisers.

Losses during the year were heavy. H.M.C.S. “St Croix” was sunk in the North Atlantic by an enemy U-boat with the loss of 146 lives, the heaviest toll for a single R.C.N. sinking in the war to date. The corvettes Louisburg and Weyburn were sunk in the mediterranean.

But the victories of H.M.C.S. “Ville de Quebec”, “Port Arthur”, “Regina”, “Drumheller”, “Woodstock” and “Camrose” and several others weighed the scales heavily in favor of the Canucks.

The work of the Royal Canadian Navy, not only during the past year, but since the outbreak of war, will go down in the annals with those of Nelson, Drake and other gallant naval men who sailed the seas in wartime to defend the shores of the British Empire.

Officially Canadian sailors have destroyed eight U-boats. Unofficially they may have destroyed and damaged many more. They have many “probables” to their credit and many a German undersea raider has crawled back to port suffering the sting of the mighty Canadian corvette.

But it’s teamwork among the ship’s crew that sinks the U-boat and the corvettes have proven that. A “classic example of submarine fighting” was the phrase attached to the victory of H.M.C.S. “Regina” under the command of Lt. Cdr. H. Freeland, R.C.N.R. of Halifax, after she sank an Italian submarine while on Mediterranean convoy last March.

The trim little corvette, carrying an all-Canadian complement, sank the submarine in a running gun battle after bringing her to the surface with depth charge attacks. As they fought the U-boat every man on the ship proved his efficiency and the success of his barrack training by manning his post like a veteran sea-fighter. Twenty-one prisoners were captured.

Wherever the war is found will be found the men of the Royal Canadian Navy, toughened from bitter service in the icy waters of the North Atlantic. They range abroad, too, to the Mediterranean Sea, Dieppe, North Africa, Sicily, Murmansk and unnamed ports all over the globe. But until the war is won, Hitler’s U-boats in the North Atlantic will know that this is the home stomping ground of an anti-submarine fleet – the Royal Canadian Navy.