

RELEASE DATE MONDAY 31/7/44

A BRITISH PORT: In a dramatic display of team work, two Canadian Motor Torpedo boats braved heavy shelling from enemy shore batteries in the English Channel to remove the crew of a third Canadian M.T.B. which had been hit and take the craft in tow to a safe beaching point. The rescued boat was the lead boat in the Flotilla and was commanded by Lieut. Cdr. C.A. "Tony" Law, R.C.N.V.R., of Quebec City and Toronto, the Flotilla Commanding Officer.

The Flotilla was sweeping a few miles off the enemy coast when shore batteries located their position and began straddling them. A direct hit by a six-inch shell blew a hole in the engine room of Law's boat, killing two ratings, injuring one and leaving the boat in a sinking condition.

The two men killed were Petty Officer Motor Mechanic Charles Dawson of Calgary and Stoker John McMahon, Melford, Sask. Stoker Gilbert Anderson of Frontier, Sask., suffered only very slight shrapnel wounds. A fourth Engine Room rating, Stoker James Roberts of London, Ont., escaped uninjured.

This action followed closely on the heels of a successful engagement the previous night when the Flotilla chased three E-boats back to Le Havre, leaving one of them a mass of flames.

"We were heading in closer to shore on this last operation," Lieut. Cdr. Law said, "but had to stoop when aircraft dropped flares over us. We started in again and were suddenly straddled by shore battery salvos landing very close. Then my boat received a direct hit in the engine room on the starboard side just aft of the petrol tanks and began settling immediately, stern first and on an even keel."

Following closely behind in line ahead formation, two other boats, commanded by Lieut. Barney Marshall of Victoria and California, and Lieut. Joe Adam of Vancouver sped to the aid of the disabled craft just as the order was given to abandon ship, and the result of their coolness and quick action drew highest praise from their Flotilla leader. It was Adam's first action in command of an M.T.B. and "he came through like a veteran."

Marshall nosed into the scene and brought the bow of his boat to the bow of the stricken M.T.B. while the stern was filling with water and settling fast. The crew passed safely from bow to bow while four remained to attach a tow line. All this time Adam swept up and down between the two boats and the shore line laying a heavy smoke screen and dodging more shells from the coast. He kept laying a screen until Marshall had all the crew off and the boat in tow.

"Shore batteries were now illuminating the area with the star shells and only Adam's smoke saved the three of us," Lieut. Cdr. Law added. "They kept up a continuous fire until we were out of range. Then tracer came at us through the smoke screen, most likely from E-boats which had been sent out to intercept us."

Marshall told of the suspense of trying to get out of range with their speed reduced to only a few knots and the possibility of the craft in tow sinking any moment.

"We kept praying that Adam's smoke would hold out long enough," he said, "because had anything attacked us, we wouldn't have had a chance."

Lieut. John Shand of Toronto and Montreal, Law's First Lieut., was in the chart house when the shell hit and was one of the last to leave the boat.

“Aircraft had been over us just a few moments before,” Shand said, “and when we were hit I thought it was a near miss from a bomb. Then almost immediately I felt her go down astern. I yelled to the sparker to get off. Then I grabbed a flashlight and ran aft to the engine room to see if I could get any of the men out. It was hopeless. I put my head into the hatch and all I could see was smoke and fire. There was nothing I could do.”

On the previous night the three boats had been operating on a defensive patrol in the same area when they attacked E-boats, poured more than 2,000 rounds of ammunition at them and set one afire. In the hurry to get away the E-boats passed right across Law’s bows and Law led his boats between the second and third E-boat in line, all guns blazing.