

## **Heroic mine disposal by Royal Canadian Navy**

By Sub-Lieut. Frank A. Healy, R.C.N.V.R.

**An Eastern Canadian Port** – One of the Battle of the North Atlantic's most heroic sea sagas – it will not be fully written until after the war – is the part played by the Royal Canadian Navy in mine-disposal operations off Canada's eastern coast during the enemy's recent unsuccessful attempt to bottle up Halifax Harbor with high-explosive mines.

Security has prevented full details from being announced, but officials today released the story of the perilous missions performed by a sub-chasing motor launch in recovering intact two live enemy mines 15 miles at sea.

The ship – on two different occasions – took the mines in tow and beached them for disposal by a navy mine-disposal officer. The crew faced all the dangers of mine-infested waters and worked at top speed to land the mines before their timed mechanism blew them all to the bottom of the sea.

The sturdy little ML was under command of Sub. Lieut. George Schuthe, R.C.N.V.R., of Vancouver, and was manned by an all-Canadian crew who “did all in their power to aid in carrying out speedily and efficiently their extremely dangerous job”.

The ship slipped quietly from its berth here early one morning and followed in the wake of a flotilla of R.C.N. minesweepers. All available hands stood on deck and scanned the sea for anything resembling a mine floating on the surface.

Aboard was Lieut. George H. Rundle, R.C.N.R., of Montreal, highly trained in mine disposal operations, and entrusted with the nerve-wracking job of rendering the mine safe before it exploded.

Suddenly, a dark object was spotted off their port bow. It was a mine cut from its anchorage by the paravane of one of the minesweepers. That was their signal for action.

Speed was their immediate thought, for once a mine is cut loose and floated, its mechanism automatically starts working and is timed to explode at a certain set time. It could be five minutes or two hours.

“We approached the mine within a few hundred feet,” Schuthe said, “and stopped the engines. We lowered Lieut. Rundle and Gordon (Leading Seaman Bill Gordon, R.C.N.V.R., of Sarnia) over the side in a sea boat. They disregarded all danger and rowed to the mine.

“Gordon secured a tow line to the mine while Rundle kept the tiny boat from knocking against it,” Schute continued. “The least thing could have set it off. We kept our distance and gradually backed toward them. We kept as many of the crew as possible up front to afford some protection should the mine explode.

“With the line securely tied, Rundle rowed back and handed us the tow line. We hoisted the sea boat and began the breathtaking 15-mile trip to the nearest shoreline. We kept the mine about 90 feet astern the ship and were afraid to travel more than 11 ½ knots – and the time was getting short.

“The crew was pretty excited and tense, but it was amazing in what matter-of-fact fashion the job was done. And they were a green crew.”

Fortunately, the sea was calm, but the trip took them through perilous mine-infested waters. When they reached shallow water and had approached as closely as possible, they lowered the sea boat again. They transferred the tow-line to it and Rundle and Gordon towed the mine into shore.

Gordon then took the boat back to the ML and made another trip with six more men to aid in hauling the mine onto the beach. By this time they were racing the minutes. He landed back on the beach with L/Smn. Percy Young, R.C.N.V.R., Winnipeg; Sto. Bill Carder, R.C.N.V.R., Stettler, Alta.; A.B. Bill Balmer, R.C.N.V.R., Toronto; O/Smn. Jack Lancien, R.C.N.V.R., Regina; O/Smn. Sam Snobelen, R.C.N.V.R., Chatham, Ont.; and a U.S. naval officer.

“All but Rundle and Lancien took cover behind a cliff when the mine was beached,” Schuthe continued. “They didn’t want to, they were ordered. But if the mine had exploded they still wouldn’t have had a chance. Rundle and Lancien sweated over the mine while everyone watched tensely. We didn’t move a muscle until Rundle finally removed the detonator. Then they all pitched in and gave him a hand. Everyone felt like cheering.”

Recovery of the second mine a few days later was similar to that of the first. They towed the mine approximately the same distance but were hampered slightly

by a choppy sea. Sub Lieut. Joe Adam, R.C.N.V.R., of Vancouver and Victoria, and L/Smn. Harold Simpson, R.C.N.V.R., of Montreal, took over the job of attaching the tow line to the mine. When it was successfully beached, they were met by Rundle, who removed the detonator.

“We were old veterans at the game by this time,” Adams said.

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