

Motor Gun Boat Flotilla

November 1943

Healy

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

A British Port – For four long years young Canadian sailors and their tiny sub-chasing motor launches have been patrolling the waters off Canada's eastern coast – their tedious yet important jobs unknown and unsung.

Today a large number are about to put that training and experience to a severe test by taking over a Canadian Motor Gun Boat Flotilla to fight from Britain's shores with ships of the Royal Navy's famed "Mosquito Navy".

The men arrived here recently, after volunteering back in Canada, primed and ready to join the thousands of other Canadian sailors who are fighting with the Royal Navy in Combined Operations. They will receive further short but extensive training in Britain before taking over the flotilla.

The request for Canadian sailors – trained in small craft anti-submarine warfare – came not long ago from the British Admiralty.

Their flotilla will be commissioned as H.M.C. craft but the R.N. will assume complete responsibility for their operation, administration and maintenance.

Their arrival here brought little comment from naval officials but the operation of a Canadian flotilla with ships of the mighty Royal Navy was seen as more evidence of the esteem held for Canadian sailors and seamanship. It is not the first time, however, that Canadian sailors have operated as single units with the R.N. In the invasion of Sicily two complete Canadian Landing Craft Flotillas helped land the British Eighth Army. And at Dieppe, North Africa and other war fronts where the R.N. played an important role, few ships were not manned by some Canadian naval personnel.

These sturdy, speedy little motor gun boats, designed for the task of combing coastal waters for enemy aircraft and surface raiders, played a heroic role

in the Battle of Britain. The job they perform is one of the war's toughest, for riding the swells in choppy weather at high speed is head-cracking, bone-breaking, stomach-turning work for the 10-man crews. The ships are well armed and pack a wallop against the U-boats with their depth charges. Their armament is tough, but their best defensive quality is their high speed and maneuverability – which make them a difficult target to hit. After service in Canadian M.L.s, the Canadians will be well adapted to their new craft.

Capt. J.A. Heenan, R.C.N.R., the man in charge of Canada's Motor Launch Fleet, was responsible for organizing the new Canadian flotilla, and now, back in Canada, he is faced with the job of replacing the volunteers to keep his fleet of motor launches at sea.

"It makes it rather hard losing a bunch of your men like that," he told the men before they left aboard their troopship. "But we have men to take your place and we'll keep every one of our boats manned.

"The formation of a Canadian flotilla with the Royal Navy," he added, "is a tribute to the Royal Canadian Navy insofar as we have the trained personnel to send over – men who have done an extremely good job on this side."