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Of all the great and small allied ships keeping hourly vigil over the invasion supply lines to France, none is doing a better or more dangerous job than the motor torpedo boats of the Royal Canadian Navy.

You have heard a lot of these two Canadian flotillas of M.T.B.s during the last few months – the remarkable records they have on operations against the E-boats, R-boats, armed trawlers and gun coasters along the French Channel coast. Occasionally they even tangle with destroyers in their nightly task – the task of stopping the movement of German shipping along the French coast, and keeping German warships from striking into the great, slow lines of merchant shipping plying back and forth constantly between the stockpiles of Britain and the new and growing allied stockpiles in Normandy.

Danger is with them always – the sharp, precise whacks of air-pounders, the deadly red curve of tracer, the chatter of smaller automatic weapons. Often they operate on the fringe of German minefields. Recently they lost one boat to a mine, and most of the crew will never board one of these skittering, powerful small craft again. The losses hurt, but the score is still well in our favor. The Jerries have suffered much at the hands of the M.T.B.s.

All these operations are carried out under conditions of intense hardship, because the M.T.B.s are too small for any comfort. The Canadians manning them come back after 48-hour operations – such operations as preventing German evacuation of Cherbourg – tired, red-eyed with lack of sleep, hungry for hot food, jittery from the constant strain of motion. But after a good sleep and a couple of good meals they go again, and again, and again.

These deadly surface skimmers carry light gun armament and two or four torpedo tubes,

and one of their best weapons is their great speed – 40 knots. They come in two classifications – the shorts, and the "D"s. The shorts stretch to 70 feet and the "D"s come a little larger, 115 feet. But when you picture them plowing through seas that toss even destroyers from wave to wave and make the most veteran sailors sea-sick, little variance in length and tonnage doesn't make much difference. For both, the sea is their worst enemy.

You need only to make one operational trip in an M.T.B. to get the feeling and spirit of coastal forces men. The boats lack almost everything found in other Canadian ships, and seldom is the channel quiet enough for them to sleep. There's a galley aboard, but it doesn't mean much. Try cooking on a stove rocking back and forth on a 45-degree angle! And the pitch is even worse. The bow dives powerfully through the waves, more often below water than above, throwing up crazy patterns of salt spray and leaving white, frenzied trails of surging water in its wake. A few muffled curse words form the only complaint when spray saturates the men from hand to foot, the salt nearly blinding them. But they don't "beef". Instead, they have become some of the happiest, proudest and most devil-may-care fighting men in the Royal Canadian Navy.

Their hectic work tempo since D-Day is taxing their endurance and stamina, but many of them will miss it when Jerry is routed right out of the Channel and they need no longer head out on patrols, night after night, with little sleep; and come back to port, their eyes swollen, red from lack of sleep; nerve-wracked from enemy shells and tracers flying perilously close to their sea-soaked bodies.

I have made several operational trips with the Canadian Flotillas. I had my first glimpse of the invasion shores of France and the mighty Allied armada from the bridge of one of the "shorts" in Lieut. Commander Tony Law's Flotilla. Tony, who has been mentioned in dispatches

twice, is from Quebec City and Toronto. He is a well-known Canadian artist, and is fast becoming famous for his amazing successes against the enemy. On D-Day and the following night, he led his litter into to actions with brilliance; kept German warships out of the Allied supply lines; and didn't lose a man. The second action was his 20th Naval engagement. In command of the other Canadian Flotilla operating in another section of the channel is Lieutenant Commander J.R.H. Kirkpatrick, D.S.C., of Kitchener, Ont., whose name rapidly is becoming legend with that of Law.

For two long, tense days before the invasion, these two Flotillas sat and waited and watched, waiting impatiently for that one word that would throw them at the enemy to make full use of all the offensive experience gained in months of hit-and-run tactics along the darkened French coast. Now, with invasion operations at hand, surely everything the Germans had would come charging out. Many of them felt they probably would never get back – almost every navy man who took part in the invasion felt the same way – but they knew they'd raise hell first.

Our sailing orders came at 1400 hours – that's two p.m. o'clock – on D-Day. An hour later, we were heading out into the channel, four of us, leaning from wave to wave in follow-the-leader fashion. It was thrilling to speed up through the convoy lines, and we were proud. We passed slow, laboring landing craft and troopers, loaded down with troops and vehicles of every description. They cheered at us and hailed us in the old thumb-in-the-air hitch-hike fashion. On the port side of the convoy were steady streams of empty ships coming back for more men and supplies. Some of them were battered, some having difficulty in manoeuvring, but it was a mighty, impressive sight. They hailed us, too. I nearly waved my arm off. Every time I became over-enthused, the bow of our tiny craft would slap a wave and then the wave would slap me. I was soaked from head to foot. A towel around my neck under my waterproof "goon suit" was

supposed to stop water from trickling down my back. I kept taking it off and wringing it out.

It didn't take long to cross the channel. We were a mile off the invasion beaches in early evening. We expected shore batteries to open on us. We expected dive-bombers to strafe us. We expected anything but what did happen. There were ships, thousands of them, large and small, sitting there – just sitting there – peacefully. We could see no sign of the enemy. There was smoke on the beaches and every once in awhile, as we pulled closer, a warship would let go with a salvo, the shell screaming over the beaches and landing miles inland. That was all. No one said a word. Then Lieutenant Barney Marshall of Victoria said (if you can talk with your mouth wide open): "My God, it's unbelievable. Where's Jerry? I must be seeing things." He was merely expressing the thought of every man who arrived there after the first few landings were made. Jerry was not among those present. We relaxed for the first time since we left England.

Our first job was to seek out our mother ship for orders and instructions. With so many ships dotting the shores, that was a job. But we found her – the huge Royal Navy cruiser acting as headquarters ship. Her guns were playing a big part in silencing enemy gun emplacements on the shore.

"Healy," Tony said to me, "tonight we are taking on the biggest job we have ever been asked to do. If we come out alive, we'll be lucky." Then he told me what our job was. We were to be the first line of defence, so to speak. They knew the enemy would try to sneak into the convoy lanes that first night, try to hamper our operations and landings. We were to patrol an area off Le Havre, parallel to the convoy channels. Behind us would be a line of frigates, then a line of destroyers. We were told to seek out any enemy attempt to break through. If they got past us, the larger ships would be there to tackle them or come to our aid. To add to our mental discomfort, we were to operate right by a known German mine field.

We entered enemy waters about 11 p.m. as darkness was setting in, and started our patrol – every eye straining for enemy ships or aircraft. In the distance, tracer fire and star shells illuminated the sky as allied ships off the coast battled it out with aircraft. We came to our rendezvous – we'll just call it X – then shut off our motors and waited, no one talking above a whisper and everyone tense, especially our radar operator. We were just four little shadows bobbing around in the water, almost close enough to touch each other. The suspense was almost unbearable.

Then it happened. A few thousand yards dead ahead, star shells lit the area, and night suddenly became day.

"This is it!" Barney yelled, and Tony gave us the speed up signal, and we charged into the fray like stampeding cowboys in a wild west thriller. As we drew closer, shells were flying back and forth to right and left of us as British M.T.B.s were battling it out. I remember thinking, "Good Lord! Are we going to head right into the thick of that?"

It was the first time I had seen action. The tracers and criss-cross fire petrified me. Closer and closer we roared, the boats tremoring under the strain of nearly 40 knots. As we closed, we could see the enemy was being chased, so we veered sharply to starboard and went in for the kill.

Our gunners were as calm as if we were just tearing in for a target shoot. Then the enemy lit us up with star shells and everything went crazy. There were six of the Jerries – R-Boats, slower than us but with twice the armament. We tore right in on them, up the port side, all our guns spitting fire. We raked them from stem to stern from our starboard side, and took everything they could throw at us. The sight of their tracers coming right at us and spattering all over the boat was horrifying. I kept ducking and dodging. It seemed kind of silly, but Barney and his First Lieutenant, Joe Bampton, and the coxswain all were doing the same thing. I felt better.

Someone muttered a few curse words and said, “We’ll never get out alive, but we’ll sink the ----- first.” I had often wondered what a person thinks of when he feels he’s going to be killed. I guess my mind was blank. I was too scared to think, but if I did have one thought, it was that I’d never be able to tell the folks back home.

The stuff kept flying past. One R-boat exploded, and just seemed to disintegrate. Our concentrated fire made a mess of three others. Able Seaman James Wright, our forward gunner, was having trouble with his gun. He climbed from behind the gun to fix it and a piece of shrapnel peppered his back, throwing him on his face to the deck. I thought he was killed. But he scrambled to his feet, climbed back in behind the gun, and fired more furiously than ever. When the fight was finished, we gave him morphine. We were told later his wounds weren’t serious.

Still we kept chasing them. It seemed hours had passed. Three mines exploded near the enemy – their own, and we knew we had turned the Germans away completely from the convoy. When the order came from Tony to withdraw, we sped away in a covering smoke screen. Nobody was more relieved than I. As we pulled away, feeling very victorious, I glanced aft. There on the deck, abaft the bridge, was one of our gunners, his face and hands spattered with blood but trying to get back to his feet. He was Able Seaman Thomas Haworth of Nipawin, Sask., and was one of the bravest kids in the crew. They told me afterwards what had happened. Haworth was port Vickers gunner. The action was all to starboard and with his gun on the port side of the bridge he couldn’t get in the fight. That just didn’t seem right, so he picked up a light automatic rifle and planted himself on the starboard side. With shells flying all around him, he stood without cover on the open deck and fired like mad. A shell had struck the aft end of the bridge’s super structure (less than a foot from my own head) and the wood splinters had flown into his face and hands.

As dawn broke, we were returning to our mother ship, happy but weary. Nothing would have pleased me more than an order to return to port. But there was no such order. We were told we would go back to the same spot the next night. As we lay alongside the cruiser, the big guns were booming and our boats trembled with each salvo. But I didn't hear them. I just slept. I knew we had another night of it ahead of us.

So we went back for more, but Jerry wasn't so dumb. This time he sent out two destroyers to get us. I wish we had known that in advance. Maybe we could have brought some destroyers with us. The night was much quieter and for awhile we thought we would see no action. If it's possible to be both glad and disappointed at the same time, that was how I felt.

Suddenly two starshells lit us up. I heard myself yelling "Here we go again!" and pulled my helmet down over my ears. We thought at first there was something wrong, that the destroyers were ours. We flashed our recognition lights, but the shells kept coming – and too close for comfort. We knew we were being shot at by big ships and thought they were our own. I heard Tony yell through the transmitter: "For God's sake, call them off! We're being fired on by our own ships!" In a few seconds the cruiser came back with: "They are not our own ships – they are two enemy destroyers!" That was enough. By this time the destroyer shells were plopping all around us, some landing so close that the boats felts as though they were being picked out of the sea and thrown roughly back in again. We were also targets for Oerlikon and machine gun fire, the range was that close.

We opened fire and sped away at full speed, our gunners working harder and faster than ever before. When we got out of their range of fire, we had led them so far off their course that they had to head for home before daylight appeared. Once more we had achieved our purpose, and without one casualty. At one time shells were passing so close over our heads that I could

almost have touched them as they passed overhead and about the bridge

We went home after that. We were be-fogged. Our eyes were red and swollen and our minds exhausted by nervous strain. We had set out on a 48-hour patrol, and had succeeded in a highly important job. We had been in the invasion, the greatest operation in the history of warfare, and had been one factor in making it a success. What more could we have asked for?

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