

FOR RELEASE: 10 AM, E.D.T., Monday, March 28, 1943

HEALY

A French Canadian did yeoman work in saving lives after the corvette's boiler burst. He was Ordinary Seaman Joseph Rene Guerette, R.C.N.V.R., of Sherbrooke.

"Guerette," said Able Seaman W. Ritson-Bennett, R.C.N.V.R., of Calgary, started off his good work early. We were together on an Oerlikon gun, and just over the explosion. I was knocked out cold, and if he had not slapped me into consciousness I would have been there yet.

"Then he managed to get to one of the rafts. Men, half dazed from the explosion, were bobbing up all around him, and he would lean over, collar one and then another and drag them in. One chap said 'I'm finished', and just as he was slipping off, Guerette wheeled around and nabbed him."

Another Quebec rating, A.B Roger Tremblay, R.C.N.V.R., of Coaticook, had a narrow escape. He was in the crow's nest, and saw the torpedo coming. It was dropped so close to the ship, however, that although he warned the bridge there was no time to change course.

"Getting down was a bit of a problem," he recalled. "The ladder broke away and I had to come down hand over hand on a lanyard. That made me one of the last over, but I was all right."

For A.B. John J. Charlton, R.C.N.V.R., of Montreal, the greatest thrill came when one of the merchant ships in the convoy – the Louisburg had been sweeping the bows of the convoy when attacked – ran close by the Carley float he was on.

"We thought for sure they were going to run us down," said Charlton. "It was a very dark night, and she passed only 12 feet away from us. But she had seen us, and her men lined the rail, tossing us life preservers and lights to attract the rescue destroyers. We wished them good luck on the rest of the trip, and the boys on the raft cheered and started to sing."

Later all the men on the raft had another thrill. Hoping for rescue, they would show their lights and shout, and then listen. It seemed they could hear the hum of another aircraft, growing louder and louder..."but suddenly a destroyer loomed over us and the hum turned out to be her intake fans. What a relief!"

Both Charlton and Guerette had high praise for the ship's "subbie", Sub-Lieut. W.R.Wright, R.C.N.V.R., now in hospital in Algiers. He was at the Oerlikon gun with them when the torpedo hit. His jaw was broken and he was badly battered.

"When we came to," said Guerette, "he was trying to get his Carley float away. He called, 'Come on, fellows, let's toss this float over.' That must have taken some intestinal fortitude."