



# Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF  
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

w w w . c m h s . c a

September Extra #1, 2020

## Ready Aye Ready

### THE SINKING OF THE FIRST GERMAN U-BOAT BY THE ROYAL- CANADIAN NAVY

On September 10, 1941, off the coast of Greenland, the crews of two Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) corvettes, Her Majesty's Canadian Ships (HMCS) *Chambly* and *Moose Jaw*, were able to locate and sink *U-501* as the U-boat lay in wait to ambush Allied Convoy SC-42, sailing from Sydney, Nova Scotia, with supplies for Great Britain.

The two corvettes were to take part in training exercises at sea, so that their crews, largely made up of recruits, could become familiar with anti-submarine warfare. In the face of the growing threat from German submarines, the two vessels quickly ended their training to reinforce the Allied convoy.



H.M.C.S. Chambly



H.M.C.S. Moose Jaw

The newly commissioned ship (HMCS *Moose Jaw*) still on its training cruise is sent out St. John's to defend a convoy. It has no fresh provisions. It is short crew members. It is manned by an inexperienced crew that are seasick and many are incapable of carrying out their duties.

Moose Jaw's Commanding Officer, F.E. Grubb, R.C.N., was mentioned in dispatches for saving lives. His official report of this action, [PAGE 3](#)

**Sabretache**

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE  
CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
The SOCIETY

is a non-profit registered society  
which fosters the study of the  
military and the police, and the heritage  
of  
Canada, the British Empire, and the  
world  
as well as the preservation of military  
artifacts and records.

The CMHS meets once every calendar  
month at: Petty Officers' Mess  
HMCS Tecumseh  
1820 - 24th Street SW  
Calgary AB T2T 0G6

Contact Editor: David Gale  
david@sunnyspotservice.ca



*Lieut. John Allan Helped Blast U-Boat*

**Share In Sea Victory Rewarded**

(By The Canadian Press)

OTTAWA, March 3.—The navy announced Monday night the award of decorations to five members of the Royal Canadian Navy in connection with the successful encounter with a Nazi submarine by the Canadian corvette Chambly, announced last November.

The decorations, approved by the King, were:  
Distinguished Service Order: Acting Cdr. J. D. Prentice, Halifax and Victoria.  
Distinguished Service Cross: Lieut. Edward T. Simmons, Victoria, and Lieut. John A. R. Allan, Winnipeg.  
Distinguished Service Medal, Chief Engineerroom Artificer W. Spencer, Sarnia and London, Ont.  
Signalman Hugh E. Tobin, Hamilton.  
Mentioned in dispatches were: Mate. A. F. Pickard, Halifax and South Forecupine, Ont., and Able Seaman L. P. Lehtu, Sioux Lookout, Ont.



LIEUT. JOHN A. R. ALLAN  
D.S.C. winner.

At the same time the navy gave out additional details of the sinking of the German submarine U-501 which was forced to the surface by depth charges from the Chambly.

"While engaged in independent manoeuvres with another corvette (the Moose Jaw) Cdr. Prentice's vessel came upon the German U-501 lying in wait ahead of a

heavily attacked convoy, carrying out the well-known wolf-pack tactics," said the navy.

"Depth charges forced the enemy to the surface and a running pursuit developed. Gunfire from the Canadian corvettes and the danger of torpedo discharges from the stern tubes of the fleeing German enlivened the chase."

Lieut. John A. R. Allan, 23, is the son of Mrs. E. Roberts Allan, and grandson of Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Andrews, of 749 Wellington Crescent.

Born in Winnipeg, Lieut. Allan attended Ashbury College at Ottawa and following graduation attended United College here for one year.

Prior to enlistment in the navy, soon after the start of the war, he was employed by the Imperial Bank.

In October, 1941, following the engagement with the Nazi submarine, he was promoted to lieutenant. On the Chambly he was anti-submarine officer.

At present he serves on another corvette.

Active in all sports, he played hockey for the college at Ottawa.

Corvettes HMCS *Chambly* and *Moose Jaw* were sent to reinforce SC-42's escort when it was discovered that the convoy was headed for a concentration of U-boats. Within 48 hours on September 10th and 11th SC-42 was repeatedly attacked: 15 merchant ships, 40,000 tons of cargo, and 160 men were lost.

*Moose Jaw* was a newly commissioned corvette still in training with *Chambly* when they hurriedly left St. John's on September 5th, 1941. *Chambly* was under the command of highly experienced Commander J.D. Prentice, R.C.N.

On its first escort mission, **Moose Jaw** went through a severe storm, participated in an attack which resulted in the first U-boat kill by the Royal Canadian Navy, and rescued survivors from torpedoed ships. *Moose Jaw*'s Commanding Officer, F.E. Grubb, R.C.N., was mentioned in dispatches for saving lives. This is his report.



H.M.C.S. "MOOSE JAW"

St. John's, Newfoundland.

November 6th, 1941.

Sir, I have the honour to forward this letter of proceedings for the period 5th September-17th September, 1941.

1. Instructions were received on the 4th September to sail with H.M.C.S. *Chambly* on a cruise on convoy routes at noon Friday, 5th September, returning to St. John's, Newfoundland, on, approximately, 15th September.
2. At the time of sailing the ship was short in complement one leading seaman, Q.R.III, one H.S.D., one coder, and one ordinary seaman, as there ere no reliefs available.3. The fresh provisions demanded were not sent to the ship with the result that the dry provisions had to be broached three days after sailing.4. Most of the ship's company was seasick for the first four days at sea, some of them being quite incapable of carrying out their duties. The officers suffered least from this malady.
5. On September 7th *Chambly* and *Moose Jaw* were ordered to join S.C. 43. *Chambly* was to detach *Moose Jaw* who was to proceed with the convoy.
6. On September 9th *Chambly* and *Moose Jaw* were ordered by C.C.N.F.'s 1858Z/9 to join SC 42 with despatch.
7. At about 2100 on 10th September, flares and star shell were sighted ahead on either bow.
8. Hands went to action stations at 2130.
9. At about 2200 *Chambly* signalled that he was about to blow a depth charge, and altered course to port. At the time the two ships were in line abreast, *Moose Jaw* disposed to starboard.
10. I altered course to port in a wide sweep in order to keep clear of *Chambly*, and to place myself in an advantageous position to carry out a depth charge attack.

11. A few minutes later I saw a submarine surface between Chambly and ourselves, which appeared to be stopped. (A good echo was reported by the A/S operator just before I was the submarine). The submarine made a series of "I'S" on a small lamp just abaft the conning tower. It got under weigh at this point, and I gave chase, opening fire with the 4 inch gun as soon as it was clear of Chambly. Only one round was fired (which fell over), as No. 2 at the gun jammed the second tube in the lock. The gun is not fitted with a loading light and it is considered essential that this be done at the earliest possible opportunity.

12. The submarine appeared to be moving at about 13 knots. It attempted to place me dead astern, altering course to do so each time I tried to alter out of it's wake.

13. I ordered the 10 inch signal projector trained on it. This disclosed the crew on the upper deck. They appeared to be so demoralized that I did not believe them to be German and remarked to the navigating officer that they must be Italian. Considering this state of "panic" I thought there might be some chance of capturing the submarine.

14. The next few minutes was spent in chase, the submarine attempting to get directly ahead of me, and I trying to keep on his quarter in case he fired torpedoes. At one time four of the submarine's crew made a determined move to the after gun. As our own gun was still jammed, no action could be taken except to increase speed and try to ram before they could fire. This I did, although the chance was small, but, fortunately, someone on the conning tower ordered them back. The .5 inch machine guns were bearing at the time, but when the trigger was pressed, they failed to fire. A subsequent check showed no defects, so I assume that in the excitement the crew failed to cock them.

15. I managed to go alongside the submarine, starboard side to, and called on her to surrender. To my surprise, I saw a man make a magnificent leap from the submarine's deck into our waist, and the remainder of her crew move to do likewise. Not being prepared to repel boarders at that moment, I sheered off. The submarine altered across my bows and I rammed her, increasing to 185 revolutions to do so, and altering course in order to hit her forward diving rudders, so as to prevent her submerging.

16. After the impact she moved across my bows at reduced speed. The gun being cleared by that time I opened fire again. The crew jumped into the sea as soon as the first round went, and I ordered fire to be stopped. I subsequently learned that the shell had passed low enough over the conning tower to knock down the men who were standing thereon. The submarine was then on my port beam.

17. Chambly at this point signalled, "Where is submarine". He was coming up astern at the time. He closed the submarine and, as there were survivors around my screw and so many of them in the water that I feared for the safety of any boat I might lower, I asked Chambly to send a boarding party.

18. The man who I had seen jump on board turned out to be the submarine's commanding officer. He was badly shaken and when he was brought to me on the bridge appeared to be worried at the amount of light we were showing in order to pick up survivors.

19. As soon as I considered the water clear enough of men to allow the boats to be lowered without danger of swamping I dropped both skiffs.

20. Chambly ordered me to get underweigh and patrol around him as an A/S screen. This I did as soon as the screws were clear, leaving both boats to continue rescue work. I made one circle and then picked up the boats, after which I was ordered to take station ahead of the convoy. I could still hear men calling for help on the starboard quarter but left them and closed the convoy.

21. The three German officers rescued, (the Commanding Officer, Executive Officer, and Second Lieutenant) were placed in my cabin under guard. The remainder of the prisoners were placed in the after cabin flat. I learned several days later that there were two midshipmen amongst the ratings, but decided to leave them there at the request of the German captain, as I considered that it was then too late to prevent them instructing the captured ship's company on their behaviour should they wish to do so.

22. All prisoners were well behaved and gave no trouble. There was genuine affection between officers and men. I found them almost unwilling to talk on Service subjects and, as I was unable to see them for two days after their capture, I decided not to question them. This decision was endorsed by the Intelligence Officer from the Admiralty, who later interviewed me. The officers appeared secretly glad that they would no longer be actively engaged in hostilities. They were most interested in corvette construction and performance generally, and asked a good many questions on the subject. On the occasions when I reduced to the speed of the convoy they appeared to be most uneasy and commented on the danger of so slow a speed. They considered our food inferior to theirs. This is hardly to be wondered at, as the only food remaining in the ship consisted of tinned beef, vegetables, potatoes, and ship's biscuit. They informed me that the German Navy issues tinned bread of excellent quality which keeps indefinitely. They also stated that all ships carry various vitamin tablets, which have been found of great use. These tablets are made from secret formulas held by one firm in Germany. They were convinced that Germany had ample oil and food reserves for continuation of the war, but did not appear certain of the war's final outcome.

23. The total number of prisoners taken from the U-501 was three commissioned officers, two midshipmen, and twenty-four ratings.

24. The Commanding officer, Commander Hugo Forster, is a man of thirty-five, and was born in Berlin. He was quiet, well-mannered man, and I saw no signs of the Nazi influence.

25. The Executive Officer, Lieutenant Werner Albring, age twenty-six, was born in Wessel. I believe that if it had not been for the example set him by his Commanding Officer he would have given trouble, as he appeared to be a Nazi type.

26. The Second Lieutenant, Lieutenant Has Sittenfeld, age twenty-four, born in Kiel, was in manners and attitude, like his Commanding Officer.

27. All three officers spoke both English and French but none of the ratings appeared able to speak any language but German.

28. As I neared the starboard wing of the convoy, star shell fired by a destroyer, whom I believe to have been Skeena, passed close overhead. I switched on dim navigation lights until fire was ceased. The time was then approximately 2345.

29. At 0050 I was ordered by Skeena to proceed to the starboard quarter of the convoy.

30. At about 0145, 11th September, whilst completing the inward leg of a zig-zag, I observed a ship stopped and closed to investigate. She was the SS "Berury", and was sinking slowly by the head. There were several boats near her, and a good many men in the water. I picked up three lifeboats with survivors, and dropped both skiffs for the men in the water. There was considerable debris floating. A large number of the men in the water were dead, most of them must have belonged to a tanker which had been torpedoed and bad blown up at about 0040.

31. Alberni and Kenogami joined in the rescue work and also acted as an A/S screen.

32. Both skiffs were hoisted by 0410, and thirty-eight survivors, none of them hurt, were disposed about the ship.

33. The energy and initiative of Mr. Herbert W. Ruddle-Browne, Mate, R.C.N.R. (temporary) was outstanding. It became evident to me in the early stages of the action that the Executive Officer, Lieutenant John M. Todd, R.C.N.V.R., (temporary) was unequal to the task confronting him, and I therefore sent Mr. Browne from the bridge to assist him. It is chiefly due to this officer's efforts that so many men were saved and accommodated with a minimum of confusion. His care in keeping me informed of the situation materially assisted me in manoeuvring the ship to be best advantage, and I consider his general conduct worthy of rewarded.

34. Sub-Lieutenant Harold E.T. Lawrence, R.C.N.V.R., went away in the boats in general charge, and many of the survivors, in my opinion, owe their lives to his initiative and ability.

35. The Captain of the Berury informed me that he had not destroyed his confidential books. As there was then too much sea running to place a boat alongside her, and she was obviously beyond salvage, although carrying a cargo of lumber, I suggested to Alberni that we should sink her by gunfire in order to prevent the papers from falling into enemy hands. Alberni ordered me to carry out this duty, and I opened fire about 0430.

36. thirty-three rounds of S.A.P. and thirty-three rounds of H.E. were fired. The ship was then well on fire and several degrees further down by the head. I therefore ceased fire in order to conserve ammunition, and turned to rejoin the convoy, taking station on the starboard quarter at 0930.

37. At 1015 the Chief Engineer reported that he had run out of water feed for the boilers, and that it would be necessary to stop for about half an hour. I informed Skeena of this and Westskiwin was sent to screen. At 1030 the ship was again under weigh. Enquiry into the matter showed that the Chief E.R.A. had forgotten to distill during the excitements of the night. It is considered that he should have done so during the previous day at the latest. This rating has shown himself inefficient throughout the entire cruise, with some signs of improvement lately.

38. Two ratings were found to be drunk on board during the night. C. Faulkner, Leading Stoker, R.C.N., ON-3114, was seen to be drunk whilst the ship stopped to rescue the submarine survivors. C. Macdonald, Stoker Petty Officer, R.C.N.R., On-A4481, was seen to be drunk whilst the ship was shelling the "Berury". Neither of these ratings would state where they had obtained the liquor. They were both punished with ninety days detention.

39. At 1230 a good echo was received and a counter attack delivered. Contact was lost shortly afterwards, the asdic set being out of order, apparently due to the effects of ramming. I was ordered to rejoin the convoy.

40. At 1130 on 13th September I was ordered to assist Chambly in hunt for contact she had made. At 1150 the stylus contact became so faulty that the set could not be used. Sub-Lieutenant Lawrence managed to rectify this fault after a fashion by tying down the contact with string, and sweep was continued. At 1215 the hunt was broken off and we rejoined the convoy.

41. For some day I had been suffering from acute pain in my chest and stomach and was unable to keep down any food. At 0530 on the 16th September I reported to Douglas that I was ill, and requested the services of a medical officer. A medical officer was sent, who advised that I should be hospitalized as soon as possible, and I was ordered to proceed to Loch Ewe with St. Croix.



42. At 1525 16th September St. Croix reported that he had a contact. Our set was broken down and therefore we heard nothing. St. Croix attacked at 1536. The hunt was broken off at about 1630.

43. At 0900 17th September, I secured alongside an oiler in Loch Ewe, and was sent to the hospital ship St. David.

44. At 1630 on the 17th September the ship proceeded for Greenock under the command of Lieutenant J.D. Todd, R.C.N.V.R., (temporary).

45. Throughout the entire voyage the keenness and attention to duty of the three submarine detector operators was outstanding. The energy, initiative and professional knowledge shown by the senior S.D.O., E. Thomas, Ordinary Seaman, ON-V13460, was particularly worthy of note.

I have the honour to be,  
Sir,  
Your obedient Servant,

(Signed) F.E. Grubb,  
Lieutenant, R.C.N.,  
Commanding Officer



Two unknown crew member posing in front of the 4" gun on HMCS Moose Jaw



Port side looking forward - Depth charge launchers on HMCS Moose Jaw K164. Sailor is unknown.



## H.M.C.S. CHAMBLY

An RCN expert in anti-submarine warfare, Commander James D. “Chummy” Prentice, *Chambly*’s captain and Senior Officer Corvettes, quickly decided that the best option would be to move ahead of the convoy to surprise any German submarines. The navigation skills of Mate A. F. Pickard made it possible for the two corvettes to reach the area identified by Prentice in less than six days.

At about 21:30, *Chambly* got an ASDIC (better known by its American name, “sonar”) contact. Quickly, *Chambly*’s crew began releasing five depth charges. Despite a few mistakes owing to inexperience, the first two charges caused enough damage to force the submarine to surface close to *Moose Jaw*.

Surprised by the appearance of the U-boat, the crew of *Moose Jaw* was unable to open fire immediately with either their rapid-fire naval gun or the machine guns. Lieutenant F. E. Grubb, commanding officer of *Moose Jaw*, rapidly gave the order to advance on and ram the submarine. Far from being a complete improvisation, this was a manoeuvre often attempted by Canadian corvettes. At close range, it was the best option for sinking German U-boats which, at night, in rough seas, presented a small moving target.



Before the initial charge, Lieutenant Grubb was astonished to see the German captain abandon the submarine to leap onto *Moose Jaw*’s deck! However, it was only after being rammed by the corvette, under fire of its naval gun, that the U-boat halted.

A boarding party from *Chambly*, led by Lieutenant E. T. Simmons, attempted to take possession of the submarine. The attempt had to be abandoned, because the U-boat was sinking rapidly. One member of *Chambly*’s crew, William Irvin Brown, drowned during the operation. Like the more than 200 crew members of the 15 merchant ships in the SC-42 convoy sunk by German submarines, the Toronto native, father of a one-year-old daughter, gave his life to supply Great Britain and the armed forces protecting it. Many

other Canadians also lost their lives during the Battle of the Atlantic.