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“KISS IN THE FOG” And Another For H.M.C.S. TORONTO’S BOYS OF ’44, FIRST H.M.C.S. TORONTO, 1799 - AND HER REPUTED BONES ON THE ISLAND SHORE, 1932

THAT was a cracking good mystery thriller B. E. Howard, skipper of the R.C.Y.C. ketch *Bernice* and long one of her owners, told to the Shell-backs this week, and the strangest part about it was that it was all true.

“A Kiss in the Fog” was Mr. Howard’s title, and his veracious account of the osculatory adventure of the crew of six, backed by the ship’s log and a promptly paid insurance risk, is this:

They were drifting across Burlington Bay for Oakville on Sunday, Aug. 8th, 1943, in a fog. At times they had steerage way, at times they had not. The fog was so dense they could see only a few yards. All were completely cased in their rubber “oilskins,” expecting heavy rain. They had altered their course for the exit to Lake Ontario in order to avoid an anxious freighter, and drifted on in a calm.

Suddenly the top of a hydro tower appeared overhead slightly abaft the beam. Mr. Howard saw a section as thick as his wrist. The *Bernice* had lost steerage way. She gradually edged towards the wire, touched it very gently with some of her upper rigging. There was a sharp bang, and the wire was gone in the fog. The *Bernice* moved with a little breeze rising.

Some of the crew had seen the wire, some hadn’t. Some didn’t notice a shock, but the chief engineer, who had his engine apart for cleaning, had got a burn on his foot resting on the cylinder-head. Mr. Howard went aloft in the boatswain’s chair and examined the rigging. He could only find the mast blackened as with soot, and one wire halliard injured. It was stranded so badly that it parted in his hand.

The *Bernice* sailed on to Oakville when the fog lifted and the crew left her there, being in haste to get home. When they came back for her they found she had settled on the bottom. There was a lot of water in her. She was leaking.

That was the second item of damage discovered. Others revealed themselves when they docked her for repairs. Sixty wooden plugs over the bolts fastening her chain plates to her sides had been blown out under water. No wonder she leaked. The bronze bolts were split, snapped off, burned or crystallized. The eyes of the wire rigging on the masthead, eight or nine pieces, were nicked as with a file. This was only discovered when the service covering all the splices was removed. The service itself was merely blackened. There was a burn on the wood of the hull near the deck. Two holes had been burned in the funnel of the gasoline tank, but the gasoline was undisturbed. What a fire and explosion there might have been!

Hydro towers cross Burlington Bay, near the end in an out-of-the-way place, with their

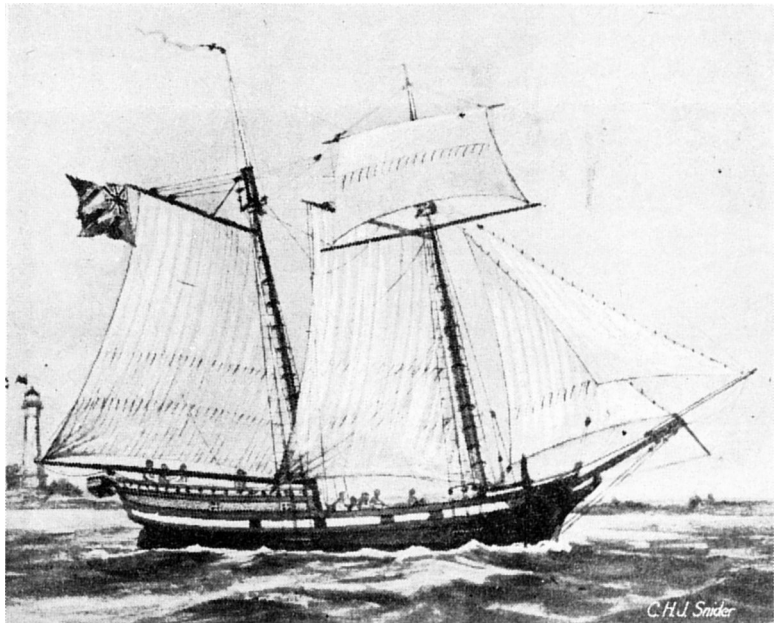
feet on shallow water and their wires supposedly 110 feet above the surface. No craft ever approaches them normally, for they are out of all channels. But on August 8th, 1943, there was this opaque fog, and the water was phenomenally high.

It was not high enough to lift *Bernice* up to the wires, so they must have sagged or been broken to hang down to her kiss. The wire Mr. Howard saw must have been less than 50 feet from the water level.

Some children in a boat told them: “We saw lightning and it must have hit the Hydro wires for the linemen are down fixing them.” Whether the “lightning” preceded *Bernice*’s contact and broke a wire loose, or whether the lightning was the contact itself, there can be no doubt that the ketch took 110,000 volts of Niagara power without any further human casualty than one scorched heel. As Mr. Howard said, it was providential that they were all insulated in their rubber oilskins, donned needlessly for the rain that never came.

The electricity jumped from the wire she blindly touched, down her rigging to the chainplates, and out through her bottom into the water. It might have blown her to splinters with her whole crew.

Mr. Howard has five sons commissioned in the fighting services, two of them in the navy, and if it is not too tight an Immelman turn, this number is from here on respectfully dedicated to obtaining seagoing comforts for the whole ship’s company of H.M.C.S. *Toronto*, to the command of which another well known *Toronto* sailor, with three years’ fighting experience, has been appointed.



The first HMCS Toronto and her reputed bones on the Island shore, 1932



The first H.M.C.S. Toronto was this schooner built in the mouth of the Humber here, 145 years ago. That is another reason why Schooner Days accords hearty support for comforts for the 113 ratings and 7 officers of the frigate which is the namesake of an old time schooner as well as of a great city. There will be more about both Torontos, the one of 1799 and the one of 1944, next week.

Mayor Conboy tops a committee that are guarantors that everything contributed will reach the crew. Other names are Gordon C. Leitch, president of the Ontario Branch of the Navy League, and well known business men, C. W. Bourke, D. C. MacLachlan, David Gibson, N. L. McLean and Col. W. A. H. MacBrien. Officers and men alike deserve all the comforts the Royal Canadian Navy will supply, and all the further comforts the citizens of their name port can supply. The boys can do with everything from chocolate bars to grand pianos, and they ought to have them.

Fighting ships like the frigate *Toronto* may be the last word in speed, efficiency and fire power, but it is to be hoped they are also the last word in hard-lying, which is the official term for uncomfortable living. Their very speed, efficiency and firepower make them the reverse of yachts or luxury liners or freighters or fishermen for comfort.

All that can mitigate the hardship of life in all weathers on a large tin can knocked about like a baseball or a hockey puck will be gratefully received by the crew of *H.M.C.S. Toronto* – every man, remember, a volunteer.

They know what they want and here it is:

LIST OF EQUIPMENT FOR H.M.C.S. “TORONTO”

- 1 – 2 pianos (1 for Mess Deck and 1 for Ward Room).
- 2 – 6 loudspeakers with moderators. Radio phonograph would be very desirable. Midget radio set.
- 3 – 1 or 2 spray guns – 2 if available.
- 4 – Small electric welding set. If this were available it would cut down the time the ship would have to be in for repairs.
- 5 – 2 large toasters – restaurant type.
- 6 – 2 hot plates.
- 7 – 1 electric grill – large.
- 8 – 1 coffee urn – 10-gal. size.
- 9 – 1 thermos jug (kind with tap on bottom – unbreakable type).
- 10 – Electric irons – type used by pressing establishments; 1 foot-operated – an electric mangle type, for shirt sleeves, etc.
- 11 – 2 hand sewing machines.
- 12 – Washing machine – of larger type than ordinary family size.
- 13 – 8 or 10 electric razors – .1 for each mens deck.
- 14 – Sports gear – softballs, footballs, etc.
- 15 – 1 bicycle for the mailman.
- 16 – 1 bugle.
- 17 – Clocks (not electric) for the messes – alarm clocks.
- 18 – 2 or 3 typewriters – portable type.
- 19 – Rugs. (Commander Hill will check for size.)
- 20 – Electrically bottled cooler – to be used for keeping soft drinks cold – Coca-Cola, etc.
- 21 – Slot machine for the canteen. Profits go to the canteen.
- 22 – Several stop watches.
- 23 – Electric mixers – Mixmasters.

24 – Electric potato peeler.

Mayor Conboy indicated that the Academy of Dentistry could be responsible for contributing all necessary dental equipment, which would be accompanied by a book of instructions, so that the doctor on board would therefore be able to administer aid along these lines.

CANTEEN AND WARDROOM FUND

In addition to the actual material things such as electrical gadgetry, etc., it is very desirable that a fund of \$4,000 be provided to stock the canteen and the wardroom properly, so that the ratings can buy what they wish at much better prices compared with having to start the canteen from scratch. It is the intention, and the case, in any well-run canteen and ward room, that both shall produce a profit, which goes back to the men.

This ought to give everybody a chance to contribute, from the godfathers and godmothers of Stalingrad down to these who can only send a packet of cigarettes or a Toronto postcard to the crew.

You'd think "the government" would supply all this. Well, they don't. Except that "the government," after all, is just you and me. So let's.