

**Toronto Telegram, November 25, 1944**  
**Schooner Days DCLXVIII (668)**  
**By C.H.J. Snider**

## **DAMP CHRISTMAS UP HAMILTON WAY**

BOUND for Oswego with a full night approached. Very cold last cargo of the golden grain of the new western wheatfields, the three-masted schooner, *C.G. Alvord*, of Detroit, encountered a heavy gale in the second week of December, 1867 – navigation was open late that first year of Canadian Confederation – and turned back for shelter at Port Dalhousie or under Toronto Point.

The *Alvord* was an old but staunch vessel. A gold rush forty-niner, for she was built in 1849 and was christened the *California* of Sacketts Harbor.

She was rebuilt and enlarged in 1863 by Louis Shickluna in his St. Catharines shipyard. Her new measurement was 308 tons register and her insurable value was \$10,000. She was renamed after her new owner, C. G. Alvord, and passed from his hands to those of E. W. Hudson, of Detroit.

### **Driven up to Hamilton**

In the heavy snow and zero temperature of the December night the schooner became quite unmanageable and drove helplessly before the wind and sea, her sails filled with frozen snow, the rigging and ropes controlling them thickened with frozen spray until they were stout and stiff as cordwood sticks. It was impossible to steer her into the shelter she might have had at Hamilton by entering Burlington Bay between the piers, and in the blackness of the morning she struck on the shore east of Burlington Beach, near the foot of Stoney Creek road, in what is now a war target area. Stoney Creek was a target area, in the War of 1812, too, you may remember. At the foot of Stoney Creek road used to be a loading place, with two grain storehouses and cribs for wharves. It was 4 1/2 miles southeast of Burlington piers.

What followed is well told in the diary of Peter S. Van Wagner, J.P., on whose farm the wreck came in:

“1867, Dec. 13th. Friday – Yesterday continued rough, blowing heavier as night, blowing and snowing. About 7 o’clock this morning, was alarmed by word being brought that a vessel is ashore just above us – fast in the ice – those on board calling for help. Started with our team, intending to take our boat up to the wreck, but found Jont Corey and David Armstrong were pushing another boat out over the ice.

“The sight was frightful in the extreme. A large number of people soon came and by using boards and ropes the crew were brought ashore. She proved to be the *C.G. Alvord*, of Detroit, laden with wheat, bound for Oswego, George C. Rogers commander. I drove him to Hamilton to telegraph to her owner, E. W. Hudson, Detroit.

“(Marginal note added later) – The thermometer stood that morning 6 degrees below zero

with a heavy wind and sea from the eastward. Seven men and one woman were rescued from the vessel and billeted on the nearest neighbors, Edmund Williams and Captain Rogers at our house. Williams left by rail Monday. His feet were badly frozen. The rest of the crew left directly for their homes.

“An attempt was made to get the vessel photographed as she lay in the ice and snow with her lines as thick as stovepipes, but the charge would be ten dollars and was foolishly abandoned. Captain Rogers took up his abode with us.”

### **Stripping the wreck**

Next day the storm died down, the ice-massed schooner lay quietly in her sand bed on the snowbound shore and a thaw set in. Visitors thronged to see the wreck but the \$10 photographer was not among them. The insurance agent was. Magistrate Van Wagner drove the captain to the customs house to get permission to strip the vessel and land his belongings.

Three men went to work unbending the frozen sails and gear as mild, rain thawed them out and these, with her provisions and outfit, were hauled to the Van Wagner carriage house. Quackenbush of Port Dalhousie undertook the job of salvaging the cargo. She had not leaked so much that all her cargo was wet, her deck and hatches being sealed by the ice. The dry wheat was heaved out on deck for lightening and Mr. Van Wagner wrote to A. E. Carpenter to come and buy the grain that had got wet.

### **Unloading on the ice**

On Dec. 18th the tug *Lion* passed by and hopes were entertained of dragging the vessel off the sand when she had been lightened. It froze hard next day and teams could drive out to the schooner and load the wheat.

On the shortest day of the year Dec. 21st, Mr. Van Wagner reported “making \$8.50 for cargo” by using his boat and three men running passengers to the wreck and bringing grain back. Certainly a modest salvage charge. At noon the wind came in heavy from the eastward again, and evening set in rough with snow. There was a great crowd of men on the shore. It blew hard all that night, and the next day, Sunday, and the next day it chopped around to the northwest, typical Ontario December weather.

The schooner had been driven nearer the shore and settled down a foot deeper in the sand. The cabin had been burst in and the deck was broken. A steam pump arrived on Christmas Eve, probably by the tug *Lion*, but could do no good.

The diary continues:

“Tuesday, Dec. 24th – Steam pump came but it did no good. Crowds of people after the wheat. Soft weather

“Wednesday, Dec. 25th – A damp Christmas. Quite a heavy sea from the east, no such thing as getting to the vessel.

“Thursday, Dec. 26th – On board the vessel, buyers in profusion for the wheat, our horses and wagons in the service.

“Friday, Dec. 27th – The captain stripping the vessel.

“Saturday, Dec. 28th – Fine day. The vessel nearly stripped. The tug has returned to Port Dalhousie. Brother Townsend worked himself and team taking ashore booms, etc. Our horse and wagon also in service.

“Tuesday, Dec. 31st – Finished stripping the vessel just in time, for a storm is brewing from the eastward.

“January 1, 1868 – The main mast of the wreck has fallen this morning. In the afternoon I drove Captain Rogers to the railway station at Hamilton for Detroit.

“Thursday, Jan. 2nd – The wheat trade is gradually dying out.

“Friday, Jan. 3rd – Captain Rogers is back from Detroit

“January 6 th, Monday – The schooner’s rigging was brought up to city by Carl, Albert, Townsend and Ruppell. Captain has gone to Detroit again. Some relics of the *Alvord* have been left behind.”

### **Relics still there**

Through January the worthy magistrate was busy running what he called the “wrecked wheat” through the fanning mill and sending the dried grain for flouring, his man Rupell going to the mill with the grist. Buyers fell off as it turned colder and the hold of the vessel filled with ice to the water level, but ere the month was out he sold 42 bags.

The wreck lay on the beach, breaking up with every easterly gale, until she was nothing but splintered and spike filled firewood. For twenty years – as late, at any rate, as 1885 – the schooner’s rudder and one of her masts lay half buried in the sand. Chester B. Hamilton, Jr., president of the Hamilton Gear and Machine Co., Toronto, played by them as a child. Peter Van Wagner was his grandfather. And still, in the old carriage house near Stoney Creek road, which stored the gear and grain from the wreck seventy-seven years ago, and became a garage in time, is to be found some of the “relics” mentioned in the diary – a pair of peak halliard blocks, used for years on the farm in rack-lifting in the hay harvest, and a curved name board with the inscription:

C.G. ALVORD of DETROIT

*(Caption) WHAT SHIP? WHAT PORT? – This shouldn't be such a hard one, even if there is no \$64 in it. A. Easson, manager of the Oakwood Theatre, says he is still a young fellow, just a real honest to goodness motor boat bug, but he was in this harbor overnight and took the picture of the three-master with her donkey engine snorting. She has just finished unloading a coal cargo into the shed, all shored up on the port side against the pressure of its contents. If*

*that, and the schooner; isn't a clue, how much more do you want? The answer isn't the C.G. ALVORD, although she looks something like her. Nor is the port "up Hamilton way."*

## **PASSING HAILS**

### **ONE OF JOHN BULL'S GRANDSONS**

Five years ago – time of the Easter crisis in 1939 – Schooner Days being then overseas, cabled a story of John Bull's grandsons.

One of them had just come twenty-one. A week after his birthday conscription, calling boys of twenty, had been sprung in England. This John Bull, Jr., was not affected, for he was already a qualified civil servant. But he volunteered for the army. The best he could get was eight hours a day duty on the volunteer fire brigade, after his eight-hour civil service day.

By great persistence he got into the navy as a volunteer recruit, after war was declared. By D-Day the persistent volunteer was a lieutenant commanding a small escort vessel. All night he shuttled across the English Channel protecting invasion convoys. Next night he was back in England and started out again to shepherd reinforcements across. They were almost there when enemy E-boats were sighted, eleven of them, concentrating on the convoy.

For the moment the young lieutenant was a Lord High Admiral. He ordered the convoy on, and slammed his little craft across the course of the E-boats, firing as he came. The odds against him were eleven to one, but the eleven had to put that one down before they could go after the convoy.

For an hour and fifty minutes Johnny Bull, Jr., slashed through the group and circled around them. Four he sank by gunfire or ramming. Seven still remained. His ship was on fire and sinking from injuries received.

“Make smoke!” ordered Johnny Bull, Jr.

The remaining E-boats could not face the fury of that invisible fighter in the opaque blackness. They beat it. He could trace their course by their receding propeller throbs. He fought fire and water aboard his own ship, collected the convoy, got them to the invasion harbor and then limped home for repairs.

Last Tuesday Lieut. John Cryer Lewis, son of Mr. and Mrs. G. Vinson Lewis, Watford, Herts, England, was gazetted “for conduct during D-Day landings, safeguarding passage of troops and supplies.” He has been called to Buckingham Palace to be presented to the King and receive from his hands the Distinguished Service Cross.