During the mid sixties - early seventies, Cachalot, Cdr David Gibbons RD RNR served as a junior officer in the stone frigate HMS WILDFIRE. One of his commanding officers, who David went on to succeed, was Ralph G. Sheffield OBE VRD RNR . Ralph sadly died in the '80's and during a recent clear out David came across this account of convoy SC 94 which Ralph had written in '77. We don't believe that it has been published before and in no way do I think that I should edit it down from its original 19 pages. So I shall bring it to you in serial form in the hope that the anticipation of reading the next edition will compensate for the frustration of not being able to do so in one go.*
Ralph appended a two page glossary of RN nautical terms and any that I think may be unfamiliar to you I will insert in the appropriate place. - Ed

THE BATTLE OF SC 94

By

Commander R G Sheffield OBE VRD* RNR

PREFACE

SC 94 was a slow convoy comprised of 34 merchant ships bound in August 1942 from Halifax, Nova Scotia to the United Kingdom at a speed of seven knots.

During the battle one third of the convoy was sunk, two escorts were damaged and put out of action and three U-boats were destroyed, one by aircraft on the last day. Hundreds of lives were lost and over 500 survivors rescued. At its height 23 U-boats were estimated to be in contact with the convoy. The report of proceedings covers many pages. Sir Winston Churchill devotes one short sentence to it in his extensive history of the Second World War. Thus is demonstrated the true measure and extent of the Battle of the Atlantic.

INTRODUCTION

Now, almost 35 years later, I am going to try and tell what happened. For reference I have only a short article I wrote many years ago for the Naval Club Magazine, based upon Admiralty records made available to me at the time. Those records were complete, extensive and exhaustive: hence the preciseness of some of the detail. In them I found copies of signals sent at the time and the original report of proceedings written by my Commanding Officer; it was all there, a complete story of death and disaster made less by determination and, above all, by the courage and guts of the Merchant Navy.

To supplement that, I have memories that are now like a dream, interspersed here and there by some sharp never-to-be-forgotten recollection of a moment of time, a fleeting glimpse of a face, a remembered name, bravery and fear, humour and sadness, and a large collection of fading photographs which recall the hour but none of the action because we were otherwise engaged; with hindsight we could have done better, but then we did not know how nor have the means. Overlying all there is some vast, indistinct picture of five and a half years with convoys, shrouded by the mists of time and age, and a lasting memory of the sea with its ever-changing moods - hated, loved and always respected.

I know as I set about this task, things that I thought I had forgotten will come back to mind and inevitably they will appear when I remember them. In reading the story, understand I can only tell it as I saw and remember it, and, as you do, appreciate we in the corvette *HMS PRIMROSE* were but a speck on a vast stage; others present at the time will have their own version of the tale as they saw it. With much of what happens at sea, only those who were actually present in a particular place will know exactly what happened there, for in war there is only time and space to tell of what has importance and relevance to the main issue.

What is told here when compared with today, and with hindsight, is a tale of bows and arrows, and the terminology used is like some ancient language; for those who are not old enough to understand it, there is a glossary at the end, but modern terminology will be used when it makes no difference.

I should be willing (if the body can take it) to do it all again and, if ever I have to, I shall be a damn sight better at it because I have remembered and learned the lessons. Unfortunately, they will have to be learned all over again by another generation. The enemy as a man is no better nor no worse than we are - but does he know how as we know how and have done since the days of Drake? I doubt it. Make sure of it by reading your history and remembering your heritage.

Lastly, take note that convoying is no story of great battles with the thunder of guns. It is a matter of competence, both ashore and afloat, unremitting watchfulness and constant readiness and wakefulness, immediate reaction to events as they happen, the whole overlaid with increasing tension like the string of a bow as the arrow is drawn back, only to be relieved by a short burst of action when the arrow is fired.

1942

By now many of us had been in the Atlantic since the end of 1940. Ashore, we were gay, carefree, confident, and generally rather ignorant about everything except when it came to our job. At sea, we were tough (you had to be to survive in a

corvette), hard and callous, often frightened, and took no chances. We shot first and asked questions afterwards if there was anyone left to question. Life was less complicated when there were none. In fact, particularly if you were young, unmarried and free of feminine attachments, life was completely uncomplicated provided you accepted that the Navy ordered and you obeyed.

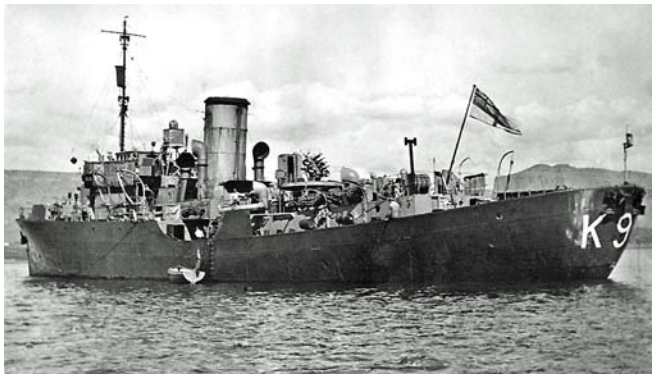
To us one convoy was the same as another. Like the weather, it was sometimes good and sometimes bad - and sometimes bloody awful. We knew the Atlantic and all its moods. We knew our ships, and nothing the sea could do would stop them even if it bent them, for corvettes were the best sea-keeping vessels the Navy ever built. Living was mostly uncomfortable, wet and cramped. For the ratings it was far worse, except they got more sleep and had less responsibility, which gave them more time to be frightened. They saw life as their officers did; all of us were very young, confident of winning the war, although it did not seem much like it at the time (we left that to our elders to worry over while we concentrated on staying afloat -literally!)

We knew the German submariner. He was brave, good at his job and ruthless, but on even terms we could tan the pants off him. Few could eat much of the last meal before sailing, and most went about preparing for sea and making ready for war with butterflies in the stomach. Having a hangover made it worse unless you happened to be beyond feeling; then you just felt more sick and queasy when you got to sea. The receding shore was another world sliding behind and slowly disappearing into the horizon, which put your heart into your boots with homesickness just for the land. But a meal under your belt, and a short sleep behind you quickly brought back our world of a warship at sea settled down to its familiar routine with a job to do, a job that was supposed to be the same but never ever was.

So it was when we sailed from St. Johns, Newfoundland in the forenoon on 3rd August, 1942.

HMS PRIMROSE

PRIMROSE was commanded by Lieut. Cdr. A Ayre DSO RNR. For officers he had three seaman Sub Lieutenants: myself, First Lieutenant, second-in-command and the eldest at 22; in addition I was gunnery officer, damage control officer and doctor (most of my patients either died or cured themselves from sheer fright of being treated by me): Number Two was "Flossie" Forber, who was also A/S officer, *(Anti-submarine - sonar (ASDIC))* with radar thrown in for good measure; he held the ship's record for reaching the crowsnest in the shortest time: lastly came Harrison ("the small cunning man") who was pilot -(navigator to you) at sea, the pusser in harbour, and in charge of communications all the time. How the other jobs got done I do not remember, but there was a doctrine that if paperwork was left long enough it was always overtaken by events - or sunk. In addition to our trio and travelling, as he said, "to roust out the dud communicators in the Group" was the Signal Bosun from the Signal School in St. Johns. It was well for us that he was taking passage with us when he did, for his expertise in communications was invaluable.



Corvette HMS Primrose

Picture courtesy of John Firmin, whose father, also John, was an Ordinary Seaman on Primrose, but maybe not on this convoy. He went on become a Lieutenant in command of various landing craft, mainly LCT617

The senior rate in the ship was the Coxswain, a vast and burly Chief. For the upper deck, the Buffer (a petty officer) and three killicks. In the engine room there was another Chief and three killicks, with a similar quartet in the boiler room (the Chief Stoker was only seen when emerging for pay or when announcing no more fresh water). The communications staff consisted of a Leading Signalman and three, and a Leading Telegraphist and three. Then there was another petty officer (Jack Dusty) who fed and clothed us; a Leading Torpedoman who looked after the depth charges and all things electric; another petty officer who looked after the radar (which meant it was usually in pieces) with three able rates to operate it; a sonar team of a killick and three (who never took it to pieces if they could help it because, whilst the radar was new and did not work well, the sonar did, being tried and trusted). The rest, about 40 or so able and ordinary rates, manned the guns, depth charges, engine and boiler rooms, and did all the odd- jobs that constantly need doing in a ship. Most people knew how to work other things not their concern and all knew how to work the armament, both being part of the art of survival.

In all, very thin on the ground to ran an escort group and get a convoy across the Atlantic. The ship's best asset was the CO: a calm, brave man and a superb fighting seaman who saved our necks many a time. On occasions I must have been a sore trial to him, for my panacea for any ill was to shoot at it, whereas he preferred the sneaky approach with a well-placed pattern of depth charges.

3rd August 1942

The Escort Force (the Group) under the command of the Commanding Officer of *HMS PRIMROSE* (corvette) consisted of the destroyer *HMCS ASSINIBOINE* and the corvettes *HMS DIANTHUS, HMCS ORILLIA, HMS NASTURTIUM, HMCS CHILLIWACK* and *HMCS BATTLEFORD*, the latter being the new boy to the Group and "canteen boat".*(Vessel commanded by the most junior C/O in the group. Usually first out and last in!)* For that honour she had been sailed earlier to find some ships from the Belle Island Strait which were to join the convoy.

BATTLEFORD was new to the Group and to the Atlantic scene. The rest of us were well acquainted, were familiar with each other's drinking habits, and knew as part of a team how each ship would react in any given circumstances; we had been together for some time, but this was to be the last time.

The Group was due to rendezvous with the convoy in a position 10 miles south-east of Cape Race. It soon ran into fog. Fog in those parts could last for a week; it could stay put in a gale; the look-out in the eyes of the ship could be invisible from the bridge but the look-out in the crowsnest could be in brilliant sunshine with nine miles' visibility; you could see damn all, but the guy in the next column could see for miles. When it became cold there could be icebergs about. The U-boats liked it and we hated it, but it was handy for hiding a convoy if you did not mind it ending up spread over anything up to 900 or more square miles of ocean when the fog cleared?

However, on this occasion, with the aid of radar (which happened to be working) the convoy was found and taken over from the local escort by R/T -all very chummy and we could hear each other well. So could the Germans in a hole somewhere under Berlin! The convoy was nicely spread out in lumps and heaps extending for 30 miles or more, so *ASSINIBOINE*, having the most knots, was sent chasing off to round up the stragglers and to find *BATTLEFORD* with her batch of merchant vessels.

Taking over in the fog was always a hairy business. The rules were simple. The merchant ships maintained course and speed and the escorts kept out of their way whilst taking up their allotted positions on the screen. Communication was by going close alongside and shouting with a loud-hailer or flashing by signal lamp, and the convoy Commodore made his wishes known by sound signal. All any one knew was that, hopefully, all were steaming in the same direction, but over how many square miles of sea could be anyone's guess. All we could see was fog, so we just had to keep the eyes at work, hoping the radar was doing equally as well, whilst listening to the monotonous 'ping' of the sonar and the thrash of some ship's propeller close by.

At 1800 course was altered by sound signal which *NASTURTIUM* and *ORILLIA* on the port beam of the convoy, together with five ships in the port column, failed to hear; they did not rejoin until dusk on 5th August. For the rest it was a night in the fog steaming along in close company hearing, but not able to see, those around, with only the clang of a shovel or other shipboard noise to break the silence and add to the tension.

4th *August* 1942

Presumably the sun rose at its appointed time, but we did not see it. Somewhere a dog barked - that sound carried a long way. Occasionally there was a hoot of rage from some siren when the owner of another got too close. Speed was slow and a steady course was made all day; unplanned alterations were never made in fog except in an emergency, because every alteration meant more ships losing the convoy. During daylight the tension eased, but as it began to grow dark, it gradually increased to another night of anxiety and strain. No W/T signals were made; there was no chat on the W/T; shouting and loud talk were forbidden; the object was to get as far as possible unseen and unheard while the fog lasted. When it cleared there would be a lot of sheepdog work for the escorts.

Before sailing, intelligence had reported a suspected U-boat in the area. Unknown to us he had joined the convoy somewhere and was no doubt calling his chums to join the party, as was intimated by Admiralty in a signal received just before, midnight. For the benefit of the uninitiated, Admiralty could always fix the approximate positions of U-boats by monitoring their W/T signals and then passed the information to HM ships in the area of those positions; all warships kept a constant listening watch whilst at sea for all Admiralty signals.

5th *August 1942*

The day started just like the preceding one. It was again greeted by the noisy dog, whose joyous clamour of greeting to the early morn suddenly ended with a yelp. As the sun came up, the fog cleared slightly and we began to get glimpses of other ships whose masts could be seen clearly from the crowsnest, which we could also see from the bridge for the first time since we entered the fog. The game started at 1718, when *ORILLIA* reported by R/T that one of her ships had been torpedoed by a U-boat on the surface, which had made off in the fog before a counter-attack could take place. After a fruitless search *ORILLIA* returned and managed to pick up a few survivors. Since radio silence had been broken and the enemy was in contact, the SO signalled by W/T to tell everyone where he thought we were and reported the convoy's estimated position to Admiralty; even if we did not know precisely where that was, the Germans knew where we were and continued to do so for the next seven days until eventually driven off by air cover from Iceland and the UK. In the meantime, we were in the gap where there was none and the Germans also knew that.

By magic, the fog cleared at about 1800, convoy speed was reduced to four knots, and the Group set about collecting the convoy into its proper shape, while the SO passed the time of day with the convoy Commodore and told him to strike one ship off his list. *BATTLEFORD* and her party joined up, to be followed at dusk by *NASTURTIUM* and company. As soon as everyone was where they ought to be, speed was increased to seven knots and we settled down to enjoy the last warm rays of the setting sun, whilst waiting for it to get dark enough to make the usual evasive alteration of course to shake off our shadowing U-boat.

Image courtesy of Tony Jones, www.rhiw.com

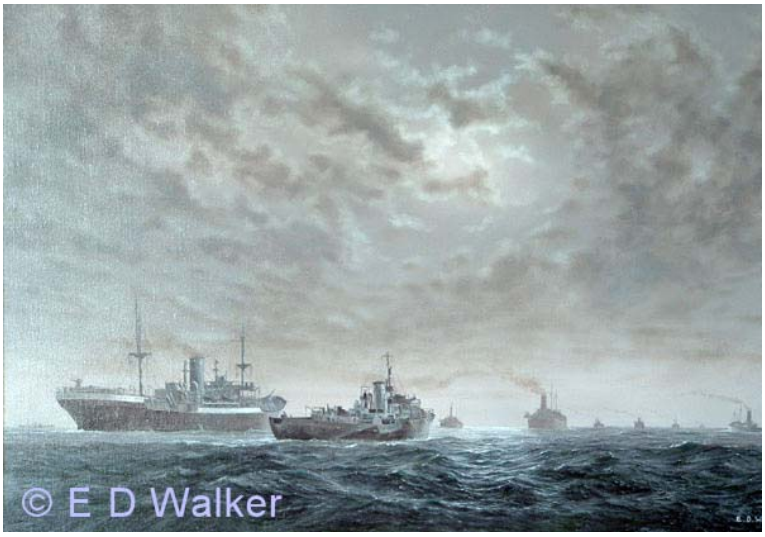
Part 2 of the account of the corvette HMS Primrose on wartime escort duties in the North Atlantic.

THE BATTLE OF SC 94

By

Commander R G Sheffield OBE VRD* RNR

6th August 1942 The following morning visibility was poor and there were patches of fog about. Admiralty cheered us up by informing us that there were now possibly three U-boats in our area, and since there is nothing like patches of fog for catching a shadowing U-boat or two, *ASSINIBOINE* was despatched to search 10 miles astern of the convoy to see what she could stir up. The best speed of a corvette in those days, with all the stokers pedalling, was about 16 knots, but *ASSINIBOINE* could clock up 28 without even trying, which was why she was detailed. Down went her stern, up came her bows, a puff of smoke, and she was off!



This evocative painting of a Flower class corvette on escort duty is reproduced here with the kind permission of the artist, Ted Walker.

Later in the war the escort force (called the "close escort force") always stayed close to the convoy, passing an attacking U-boat from one escort to the next, each giving it a thump with a pattern of depth charges on the way down the line, whilst the hunter-killer groups did the chasing. But at this time, if the enemy was known to be about we went looking for him, which often left the convoy with little protection, not that this one got much even when we were all there.

Things began to hot up. At 1227 *ASSINIBOINE* reported one, possibly two, radar contacts classified as "submarine" 15 miles astern of the Commodore's ship, so *DIANTHUS* was ordered to join her for the hunt. The remainder of the escort force re-disposed itself around the convoy with *PRIMROSE* and *CHILLIWACK* in the van. At 14 00, both sighted U-boats on the surface at 7 miles and opened fire, with 4-inch guns, increasing to full speed to give chase, while the convoy made an emergency turn to starboard. No one likes to be thumped with a 4-inch shell, so the U-boats dived and in the fullness of time both diving positions were treated to a full pattern of depth charges apiece and the hunt was set up, but to no avail other than to drive off the attackers and get the convoy past a dangerous piece of ocean. With submarines you had to get them down and keep them down where their speed was too slow for them to catch the convoy; of course, we preferred to sink them.

This kind of jaunt takes time. While we were going 7 miles out to our submarine's diving position, the convoy was steaming away from it at 7 knots, plus a bit of bonus on the speed occasioned by the noise. It was going to be several hours before we rejoined, provided we knew where the convoy was; radio silence was never broken unless it was absolutely vital or it no longer mattered, either because the enemy v/as already in contact or because we were too far away for a fix made in Germany to give away the position of the convoy. On the way back, at 1710, another U-boat popped up between *PRIMROSE* and the convoy at a range of about 4 miles. The convoy, or 'rather, its smoke, could be seen upon the horizon and the Germans were clearly deeply interested in this so we were able to give them a surprise. The gunlayer had plenty of time to take aim and he was a dedicated and earnest lad; his first shell must have parted the German captain's hair and the second landed where the U-boat had dived, to be followed in the fullness of time by a couple of depth charges for good measure, set deep since no contact was found

As that particular U-boat could do the convoy no harm until it could surface and chase after it during the night, we did not linger, for it was essential to be back with the convoy to fend off a possible dusk attack by his churns, and for the usual evasive alteration of course after dark. So that I do not need to repeat it, evasive alterations were always made either side of the mean course after dark and before dawn, depending upon an estimate of where the enemy was most likely to be. The further north the convoy got, the less effective these evasive tactics became, because of the shortness of the nights and the slow speed of the convoy; in clear visibility some smoke was nearly always visible hours later because some of the ships were coal-burners and so shadowing U-boats could always spot the convoy by its smoke -in any event at 7 knots it would not get far in four to six hours of darkness. Remember also, we had no air cover to drive off shadowing submarines. Other emergency alterations of course were made when necessary to avoid known points of danger, i.e. away from sighted or reported U-boats, and towards torpedoes fired at the convoy to attempt to comb the tracks. With this convoy there was sometimes nowhere to turn, so we just plunged straight ahead, funnels belching smoke, every ship steaming at its best speed, like a herd of stampeding cattle. It often paid off.

While I am about it, I should explain we normally liked to work in three watches, but at the first sign of trouble we went into two-watches, working "the dogs". However, during any action or hunting the whole crew was closed up, often for hours at a stretch. Not only did we go without sleep, we also went without food except for "wads" and "brews", provided the cook could spare the time from his own looted, personalised weapons, which consisted of a stripped Lewis gun and a brace of Hotchkiss. Throw in "Action Stations" every time anything went off bang, stand-to at dawn and dusk, plus panic stations when something went wrong in the convoy - such as a ship breaking down or having busted steering gear - and you get some idea why sleep and food were conspicuous by their absence. That is all called a "state of readiness" in time of war!

Lastly, before turning to the business in hand, let's talk about stragglers. There was always some clot who lagged behind; sometimes he could not help it, but other times it was at the end of the watch when the stokers in a coal-burner were getting tired and leaving the next watch to stoke up the fire. Either way, if he was not chivvied back into place, he usually got the chop. A (strictly forbidden) dropped depth charge astern of any straggler would get him going like a speedboat. If any ship showed a light (and they did) and we could not get it put cut by shouting at him, we shot it out. That always caused ructions and much abuse next morning.

HMCS ASSINIBOINE

Visit www.junobeach.org/e/2/can-eve-mob-gol-asb-e.htm *to read the COs report of this action.*

To return to *ASSINIBOINE*. Several hours of searching in and out of patches of fog with *DIANTHUS* resulted in *U.210* being sighted on the surface at a range of 1,000 yards. Lovely! The Canadian opened fire with main armament, but the U-boat avoided that by crash-diving into a well placed pattern of depth charges, which blew it to the surface on an even keel somewhat the worse for wear. The German captain was tough; he attempted to make off on the surface hoping to be lost in the fog. *ASSINIBOINE* went in to ram and discovered at the same time she was so close that her 4.7-inch guns would not depress sufficiently to enable them to be used. The German evaded the second attempt at ramming and, getting inside *ASSINIBOINE's* turning circle, opened a deadly and accurate fire with short range weapons, which caused a number of casualties, both dead and injured, hit her wheel-house, and exploded her upper deck petrol stowage which set the ship on fire. The ship's short range weapons prevented the German from manning his big guns, and *ASSINIBOINE* eventually managed to draw away and bring her main armament to bear. While the U-boat was making a belated attempt to submerge,, it was hit by a shell abaft the conning tower which killed the captain, then rammed smartly in the stern, and despatched to the bottom of the sea with depth charges. *DIANTHUS,* frantically roaring around in the fog trying to find the fight, finally turned up in time to pick up 38 German survivors who had lost all enthusiasm for the war. *ASSINIBOINE,* holed in the hull, black with burnt paint, and an upper deck looking like a pepper-pot, was ordered to return to harbour. *DIANTHUS was* ordered to rejoin the convoy at best speed, equipped with the problem of looking after 38 prisoners.

With our only destroyer gone, we all felt strangely alone and the sea, glistening in the evening sunlight, suddenly looked dangerous.

The alarms for the day were not yet over; at 2114 *ORILLIA* sighted a submarine and was able to deliver a good pattern over the diving position, contact being maintained until 0015 on 7th August, when it faded. Escaped or sunk? -

who knows? Blood, guts, bodies or prisoners were usually the only acceptable acceptance of a sinking by depth charges; wreckage, debris, oil, etc. could be faked and often was.

PHOTO: LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA—PA115352

A May 1941 view of HMCS Orillia, taken from the deck of HMCS Chambly.

7th August 1942 At 0130, just over one hour after *ORILLIA* had stopped her private fight, *CHILLIWACK*, ahead of the convoy to starboard with *PRIMROSE* ahead to port, detected a submarine by H/E *(Hydrophone Effect. To hear underwater noise, e.g. U-boat engines or other noises, viz squeaky rudder, whales, etc.)* at the same time as *PRIMROSE* picked up a good radar contact at 3,000 yards. Both ships fired starshell and a very surprised U-boat was observed on the surface. All hell let loose! Some trigger-happy merchant was fairly impartial about it and far too dangerous for comfort. *CHILLIWACK* gained a good A/S contact and delivered a full pattern as the submarine crash-dived, going deep and making for the centre of the convoy under which it would be safe since sonar and H/E are useless in a gaggle of ships. Escaped or sunk? Again, no one knows. There was always the hope that "tail-arse Charlie" (position Sugar astern of the convoy, as it was known then) - *BATTLEFORD* at the time - might pick him up and give him another clout.

Firing starshell at night shows up the enemy, but it also shows up the convoy and escorts. Therefore, the drill was to light up the whole area because our chum could have been a decoy intending to get some light for his pals. Hence my reference to impartiality; every ship in the convoy and the other escorts fired off anything that would make a light (including Snowflake parachute flares) which turned night into day. Inevitably someone will see something that is not there and shoot at it, so you can envisage the position of the escorts round the perimeter of the convoy. Actually, the shoot out was good for the morale of the chaps in the merchant ships, and there is no doubt that a night pack attack failed at the expense of a few unwanted holes here and there.

By now Admiralty was constantly signalling an ever-increasing number of U-boats estimated to be in the area of the convoy (my recollection is 11 at that time). A further complication was the weather; it was perfect with maximum visibility, no moon but a cloudless sky full of stars and a flat, calm sea. It stayed that way for the next few days.

At 0400 *NASTURTIUM* obtained a good radar contact on the starboard bow and fired starshell. Again the whole assembly joined in and some enthusiast lit us up beautifully with five nicely placed and evenly spread starshell, which was just as well, as he might have followed it up with something more solid had he not been quite sure what we were. That cost *BATTLEFORD* a lot of gin! *NASTURTIUM* got a good A/S contact at 0441. (See? 41 minutes hunting around - that was how the time was spent and where the sleep went!) She bashed away with depth charges until 0925, when the target faded, and she was reluctantly recalled to the convoy screen.

The rest of the day passed peacefully in beautiful warm sunshine with the odd sighting of a U-boat on the horizon which was treated to the usual bombardment, more in hope than anger. All were too far off to chase, which would have meant leaving an even bigger hole in the already too thin screen, or drawing an escort into a trap. Admiralty kept the ball on the move by increasing the number of enemy suspected to be in our area, but by that time we were taking the view that the more there were the better chance we had of sinking one! So we sunned and dozed, but only a fool would have taken his clothes off or had a wash; he would have been gassed by the smell of the rest of us - a smell composed of dried sweat resulting from fear, exertion and sleeplessness, and stinking old boots and clothes reeking of cordite and unwashed bodies.

To be continued

John Firmin has unearthed some more photographs of life aboard HMS Primrose and has identified the chap standing behind the gun on the right as his father, Reg John Firmin. From other photographs of named individuals that he has found (and I hope to use to illustrate future editions) we can safely assume that Reg was indeed on HMS Primrose at the time of SC 94.

Part 3 of the account of the corvette HMS Primrose on wartime escort duties in the North Atlantic.

THE BATTLE OF SC 94

By

Commander R G Sheffield OBE VRD* RNR

8th August 1942 Dawn brought the welcome news by signal that HM Ships BROKE and CASTLETON and the Polish destroyer BLYSKAWICA (soon to be christened "Blister Me Whiskers") had been sailed from Londonderry in support. I never did find out why they turned up when they did and I do not remember whether CASTLETON ever did, not that any of that matters so far as the tale is concerned. I suppose we were about half-way across. That day was the most perfect summer day I ever remember in the Atlantic, with a warm breeze and a beautiful, blue sea sparkling in the sunlight. That glorious morning, which betokened a day of perfect bliss at sea, turned into bloody disaster and, incidentally, was the day in which I did the most bloody stupid thing I have ever done in my life - but that came later.

Despite radar, we still went in for masthead look-outs and at 1115 the look-out hailed torpedoes approaching the convoy from the port bow. Quick as lightning the Signal Bosun, whose efforts ever since we set out had been prodigious, hoisted an emergency flag signal for an alteration of course 45 degrees to port and sounded two warning blasts on the siren. Like one ship the convoy turned to comb the approaching torpedoes, which rattled and growled in our A/S loudspeaker as they came and passed on their way without hitting anything. No contact with the firer was made and the convoy's course was altered 90 degrees to starboard, out of the frying pan into the fire!

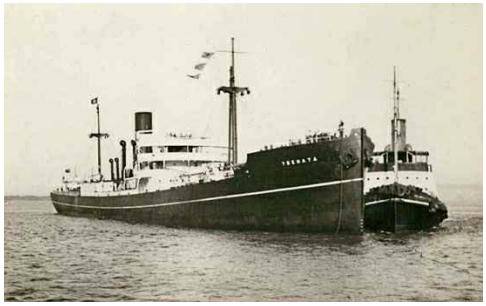
Shortly after the convoy had settled down on its new course, PRIMROSE and CHILLIWACK sighted a U-boat apiece ahead of the convoy at 6 miles. Both were promptly engaged by gunfire and both, not being much put out by the accuracy but disliking the quantity, dived. No attempt was made to hunt them because we knew we were surrounded; there was nothing to do but to charge through and hope for the best. The escorts closed in, zig-zagging between 2,000 and 4,000 yards from their allotted positions. As usual, the cook put the galley fire out and turned his attentions to his personal weapons - one for either door.

For a short hour all was peace. Then, at 1327, a submarine broke surface to periscope depth at 1,200 yards directly ahead of PRIMROSE. That must have been when he lost his trim immediately after firing a salvo of torpedoes. We counter-attacked immediately with perfect A/S contact. When the periscope was about 15 yards away, fine on the starboard bow, as the A/S recorder trace showed fire and the navigator's voice came up the voice-pipe, "Over by plot", the firing buzzers were pressed. They failed to ring! The traps jammed! A yell from the bridge got the throwers off - late! The submarine dived deep, untouched!

The subsequent enquiry absolved the ship. The buzzer cables had burnt out and an unauthorised modification to the traps made by some clever warrior in Newfoundland who had never been to sea, on the grounds that the depth charges rattled about too much in rough weather, was all to blame. We were also to blame. We should have known: we should have tested the buzzers more often. That submarine was a "sitter" and it should have been blown sky high. It was a bitter blow, the more so since the Germans who did all the damage escaped without the retribution we were in the most perfect position to mete out; as it was, there must have been more than one submarine to have inflicted the damage that was done.

The next moment all was a shambles - a picture snapped by the eye like a still photograph and thus it remains in the mind for ever. When we looked, we should have cried, but we had forgotten how. As the torpedoes struck home our depth charges went off ahead of the port column adding to the confusion and chaos, since those in the lead had no idea what had caused the explosion.

The Commodore's ship, a vessel on its maiden voyage, was steaming itself under, its masts and funnel still going through the water, leaving a wash; as it went down some heroic soul on the bridge was still signalling with an aldis lamp which was suddenly extinguished. There were no survivors.



The Hain's ss Trehata was the Commodore's ship

Close by, three more ships were sinking and two more were drifting down the line out of control. Suddenly, somewhere in that convoy, one of the sinking ships carrying ammunition blew up! Few escaped unscathed as the thunderous, crashing roar deafened and disorientated all in the vicinity; the smoke obscured the daylight and the air was full of flying debris; we were stunned by the blast. Through it all plunged the surviving ships, belching smoke from their funnels, weaving and swerving to avoid sinking ships, wreckage and drowning seamen. Dante might have painted that inferno had he lived then.

In the mêlée, *PRIMROSE* went down the port side of the convoy, not without the danger of collision, hoping to make contact with the missed U-boat, leaving the other escorts and the convoy to thrash their way out of it, every ship going much faster than ever the designers dreamed. . Who picked up lots of the survivors I do not knew - certainly some merchant ships stopped to do so as did some of the escorts; I seem to recollect we had 98 who lived, comprised of 12 different nationalities.
At the start, we simply did not know where to begin, because there was *so* much wreckage, oil. and so many surviving seamen in the water waving their arms. Amid it all about six small landing craft bobbed up and down, empty; they must have been the

upper deck cargo from one of the sunken ships. I remember my CO decided since we were there we should get on with it and first we passed four men standing on a raft, yelling for help. My CO said, since they seemed so full of life, they could wait while we attended to those in the water. He ordered me not to send any boats away, so that meant scrambling nets and heaving lines. On these occasions it was never necessary to tell the ship's company what to do, but none liked the order "no boats". We came to a stop in a group of survivors, with dead or unconscious men floating among them.

At this time our youngest signalman took it upon himself to go and darn a hole in the Ensign before the hole could result in it being torn to tatters, probably because he had nothing else to do at the time, but also because we never changed our Ensign at sea if it could be avoided; it was reckoned to be bad "joss" to do so. I was down aft watching oil-covered men being helped up the scrambling nets; some of our sailors were in the water with one hand on a net and the other stretched out to grab whoever managed to struggle close enough. Lying on his back supported by his life-jacket, about 15 yards from the ship, was an injured man, quietly moaning. By him were others, dead or unconscious. You cannot rescue that kind with scrambling nets or heaving lines. I remember that and wondering what to do. Because I did not have the courage to leave him there I stripped off, went in over the side in my birthday suit, and as I went, I was aware of ten or a dozen sailors following the idiotic example I had set.

Lt Cdr A.Ayre DSO, the CO

By the time I reached the injured man I realised the sea was very cold and it felt so very deep; the ship looked a long way off - and I got cramp in the legs. A well flung heaving line saved my bacon and the bloke I was hanging on to, although he died later. Also, all the crew in the water returned safely to the ship with more of the injured. The next thing I remember is standing shivering, once more in what passed for my uniform, in the shambles aft, quite incapable of making any further contribution. The Buffer gave me a strange look and took over my job.

Slowly the ship got under way and as it did I was piped to the bridge. There my CO said to me, "I see you have been bathing. Never leave the ship again without my permission! Now, go and get ready to receive those two boats pulling towards us over on the port bow - and sink the boats when you have got the men out; I'm going to take the ship over for those four still yelling for help on the raft." He never mentioned the subject again.

Coxswain O'Connor

Just to finish the incident, very much later that night the Coxswain asked to see me in my cabin. When he came in he said, "Some of the crew think you are a bloody hero. I think you are the biggest bloody fool I have ever met. You left the Captain without a First Lieutenant and ten of his seamen. You know he might have had to steam away and leave you all, and you kept us all hanging about, stopped like a sitting duck, until we had got you all back. Sir!" He put on his cap and left. When I next saw the Buffer he simply said, "I hear you have had a word with the Coxswain, Sir. You won't let us down again, will you!" No question, just a statement. That was how the regular senior rate taught junior officers their jobs. Neither ever mentioned it again, nor did their loyalty to me ever lessen or waiver. I made damn sure I never ever let them down again. I might add one or two other senior rates made a point of letting me know they also agreed with the Coxswain. We all had to learn that sometimes men had to be left to die.

PO Clements, the Buffer

The last man to be hauled up over the side was a huge 19-stone man, covered in oil, and it took four hands to get him inboard, by which time two of his ribs had been broken. I felt somewhat ashamed when he told me this was his third go at getting back to the UK from America, but now he was in an HM Ship he knew he would make it this time!

The two boatloads represented the entire crew, less one man, of a Greek ship, which they only abandoned when they were certain she was done for without a tug to tow her to harbour. Never have I seen such a villainous lot, each armed with a knife, butcher's cleaver or axe, and the master and mates with a pistol apiece. After a certain amount of gesticulation the whole lot were disarmed. The First Mate's revolver had one round fired - which might have accounted for the missing man and the excellent discipline he exercised. They turned out to be a splendid bunch; it was really quite extraordinary how they fitted themselves into the ship's routine and lent a hand, taking over the galley completely where, for the first time since the ship was commissioned (whilst the flour lasted), very edible white bread, was made. Our own cooks never managed to produce anything better than substitutes for bricks, both being electricians in civilian life! The last we saw of that desolate place was the Greek ship stationary and abandoned, floating in company with the screaming and feasting seagulls.

Thanks to John Firmin for the photos on this page

To be continued

The concluding part of the account of the corvette HMS Primrose on wartime escort duties in the North Atlantic.

THE BATTLE OF SC 94

By

Commander R G Sheffield OBE VRD* RNR

8th August 1942 (cont) By 1600 all escorts had rejoined the convoy, which was once again steaming along in good order. Life on board was cramped, and in a couple of days we were down to hard tack, i.e. teeth-breaking ship's biscuits. The other escorts were no better off.

The *BROKE* joined in the "first dog", having spent the afternoon giving a submarine a pasting which had no doubt been caught napping looking in our direction. Although it was grand to have a destroyer back in the escort, she arrived with that usual superior look destroyers always put on when in company with corvettes, this one being particularly superior having a Commander in command. She raced over to the starboard bow and dropped a depth charge to impress everyone, and then sidled over to *PRIMROSE* for a chat and to take over command; as she did so a raucous voice from aft shouted, "Yer too late, mate - we dropped one in that corner last week!" A very pained looking Commander surveyed our scruffy, rusty looking vessel with its untidy crew of ruffians (of course, made more impressive by the Greeks) and loftily announced that all would now be well. Admiralty spoilt that somewhat by signalling 20 or more U-boats estimated to be in our area!

During the "dogs" four survivors had died. Just an hour before that they had been talking, warn and dry, under blankets in bunks. They just simply died from too much war. I remember watching three ratings, all from the *HEBRIDES,* getting them ready for burial aft on the deck just for'rard of the depth charge rails. The three men were quiet and dignified, and in that crowded ship, garbed and ready for instant action, it was a place of great peace. It is amazing how the Almighty takes a hand at times in the affairs of man. The bodies were laid out in a row, clean and naked; each corpse had cottonwool bandaged in place over the eyes; the arms were folded over the chest and tied in place with more bandage; solid shot (practice shells) were put between the thighs and legs and fixed in place with more bandage; then, carefully and neatly, each body was sown up into a hammock, placed on a plank and covered with a White Ensign. I gave no orders, for none were needed. I knew my job would be writing the letters. As I looked, without sentiment or sorrow, at a task that had to be done, I remember thinking, "This is me. What have I become?"

At 1800 the ship was stopped. None minded the risk being taken. I read the burial service, then the bodies were slid over the side from under the Ensigns as the inboard end of the planks were lifted and I watched them plummeting straight down into the clear, clean depths of the Atlantic until they were out of sight. For one very brief moment there was peace. Then the "carry on" was piped, the ship gathered way, and we went back to war without a backward look for four men who might never have existed.

At 1944 *DIANTHUS* sighted a U-boat on the surface and was despatched to attend to it. Almost immediately *PRIMROSE* sighted two more on the port bow of the convoy and was also detailed to deal with them. They had the sauce to make off on the surface, hotly pursued by 4-inch shells, but as it would soon be dark, we did not fall for that one and returned to our station. Since the enemy persisted in making his attacks from the port bow of the convoy, we assumed he wished to keep it, and us, between him and the sun. You will recollect that our mean course was easterly.

HMS Dianthus

DIANTHUS reported at 2146 she had sighted two more submarines and a little help would not be amiss. *CHILLIWACK,* having the most depth charges left, was sent to her aid. Then a slight lull ensued and most of the "Primroses" fell asleep where they were, since we had been stood down at action stations, whilst I had a talk with the Captain of the Greek ship (who had decided to make his quarters in the Wardroom bath) about the possibility of going back for his ship, to give it a tow. Then the Coxswain and I toured the ship to see who was where; practically every bunk, bed and hammock was occupied by the survivors, all of whom seemed most impressed by the fact that none of us seemed to need any sleep: and many of whom, were totally unaware they owed their lives to the unremitting toil and determination of the Buffer, using oxygen bottles properly belonging to the fire-fighting breathing apparatus, and his powerful arms, to make them live.

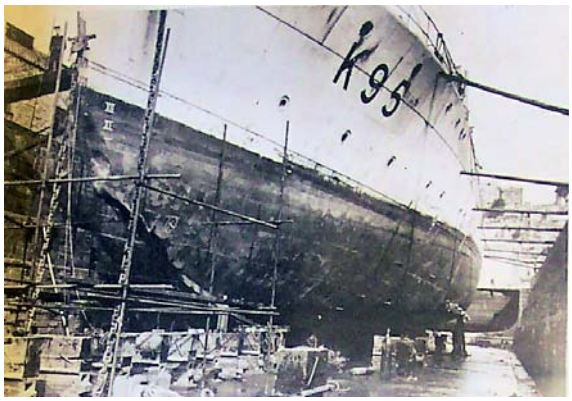
Strangely, you may think, the whole ship's company was very cheerful and the ship had never been happier. Of course, everyone knew his job and relatively few orders had to be given, because everything worked on the basis of quiet harmony, understanding and willing co-operation. I have not mentioned all the false alarms - even a seagull with his head in the water and his arse in the air could be mistaken for a periscope - but there were many of those, each one starting with the raucous ringing of the alarm bells, followed by a few brief moments of running feet clattering on ladders, the dull thuds of water-tight doors closing, the rattle of ammunition hoists being cleared away, the clang of a breech block, the noise of buzzers as positions

reported close up - and then the silent tension of readiness, with here and there a smile, and everywhere calm, watchful eyes in tired, strained faces. It is all called "a high state of morale"; those who shared in it will never forget it and think with nostalgia of the days when all were of one company.

That state of morale, which rapidly made me forget the physical and mental effects of my stupidity (not that I had much tine to dwell upon either), had a very marked effect upon the survivors who paid us many compliments, because for the first time many of them saw what the Navy was doing in its endeavour to protect them, even if outwardly it did not appear to be all that successful. For me, it underlined how important it is that the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy should each know all about the affairs and problems of the other. I fear that is another lesson a new generation has to learn all over again, unless someone has the wit to plan it now.

The day was not yet over. At 2301 *DIANTHUS* radioed she was attacking another submarine 1,000 yards away. *CHILLIWACK* joined to assist, but the U-boat escaped and contact was lost. *DIANTHUS* ordered *CHILLIWACK* to return to the convoy, while she remained to snoop around a little longer in case the German decided to come up for air. Eventually giving it up, the ship set course to rejoin the convoy, only to come upon *U.379* on the surface at 2358: she succeeded in ramming the U-boat four times, finally despatching it with depth charges after a hot 15 minutes.

Corvettes were not good vessels for ramming, although we all liked the idea. Since *DIANTHUS* was in a sinking condition and already had over 200 survivors, including some Germans from *U.210*, she was only able to take aboard five of *U.379's* survivors, generously giving the rest in the water all the ship's carley floats and some food. She then left them to get on with it and made off at two knots.



The damage sustained by Dianthus in the ramming of U.379

Only superhuman exertions saved the ship from foundering as the lower forrard messdeck, cable locker and forrard fuel tank were flooded. By carrying everything aft, including cable and anything else moveable, the ship's company managed to get the bows clear of the water by daylight. What that night was like only those present can know. There were nearly 300 men aboard, including some Greek survivors who offered to cut the German prisoners' throats, which they insisted would lighten the ship when the bodies were thrown overboard afterwards. *DIANTHUS'* Commanding Officer said the best moment of the day was when he introduced the Captain of *U.379* to the senior officer of *U.210'*.

9th August 1942 About 0350 *BATTLEFORD* started her own fight and once again the rest joined in with starshell, Snowflake and the usual noise. Shortly afterwards *BROKE* reported D/F bearings of two U-boats ahead and Admiralty added to the fun by telling us of a few more. The pack was chattering as it collected again. *DIANTHUS* rejoined after daylight to a rousing welcome from both convoy and escort, to be safely esconced right in the middle of the convoy (not, mark you, that anywhere was particularly safe), and able to make 10 knots if required. Some rough weather might have saved some merchant ships, but it would have done *DIANTHUS* no good.

Later that morning the immense destroyer *BLYSKAWICA* joined, belting hotfoot through the convoy at over 30 knots, to investigate her own private D/F bearing. For the rest of the time she had a roving commission and made a lot of noise about it, but her speed and armament, plus her superb crew, must have turned the odds somewhat in our favour. No German wanted to find himself in the hands of the Poles. A surfaced U-boat seeing that ship coming dived deep very quickly indeed, and a deep-dived U-boat was a harmless one.

A siesta in the afternoon was spoilt by *ORILLIA* and *NASTURTIUM* contacting a submarine at periscope depth, sneaking up on the starboard beam of the convoy, but both had to give up after half an hour of plastering because depth charges were getting short, as was our fuel. After that, the rest of the day passed peacefully, but by that time no one could settle down, so we ate wads, drank a brew or two, and dozed while we waited for it to begin again.

10th August 1942 We were at action stations again by 0030 on the strength of two radar echoes ahead, as usual again to port. At 0034 torpedoes were heard coining our way. They passed close by down the starboard side and we waited for a bang astern. They hit nothing, but we found the firer and gave him a good belting with depth charges until the convoy was too close for safety. Next morning *BROKE* informed us she had also had a similar experience but had not found anything to belt.

By now all in *PRIMROSE* had a distinct dislike for the port bow position, but we were shortly to exchange it for an even nastier one. Dawn found us ordered to sweep 20 miles astern of the convoy to deter shadowers detected by D/F in *BROKE*. I personally felt that of all places in the Atlantic that was the last place to be, because it was there the pack would reform after its last night's abortive effort. But just the same, off we went, and by 0400 were well on our way, feeling extremely lonely and very exposed. The Coxswain, as he often did, came up to keep me company on the bridge accompanied by his own special brew of very fortifying "kai" (cocoa to you).

About 0630, just after the Bosun's Mate had brought me some tea, the masthead look-out reported a merchant ship on the horizon ahead. I peered through my glasses and saw what looked like the most enormous submarine ever built equipped with a gun appropriate to its size! No wonder the man up the "stick" thought he had seen a merchant ship! I pressed the alarm bells, when the CO arrived, took the shortest route to the gun platform by jumping off the front of the bridge and, with the aid of a couple of hands, got that gun going quicker than it had ever been roused out before. A round alongside the conning tower convinced the Germans that the decent thing to do was to dive, and when we arrived at the diving position it was treated to a couple of charges to discourage any ideas it might have had of coning up for a shoot out.

A sinister shape on the horizon, half a point to port.

Just as we were replenishing the upper deck stowage with ammunition, a yelp from the pom-pom gun's crew aft reported an even bigger and better submarine. Round went the ship. Bang went the gun. Down went the U-boat. Another yell from the masthead produced a third. We'd found the pack! Number three did not seem to have spotted us because he was obviously looking towards the way the convoy had gone and he was liberally plastered for his pains. The last shell landed smack on the place where his periscope was disappearing and I have always hoped he had to find his way back to Germany (if ever he did) without it. *CHILLIWACK* had been ordered to our aid and when she turned up we had a nice little hunt together, working the submarine over until 1023, when *BROKE* came up on the squawk-box to call us back because another four merchant ships had been sunk. There were a few comments about "all would now be well"!

On the way back an abandoned merchant ship left over from *BROKE's* forenoon party was sighted ahead, so we altered course to investigate as some lurking U-boat put a torpedo into it and sank it. *CHILLIWACK* gained a contact and dropped the last of her depth charges. We went in and found nothing. So we both then made off to rejoin the convoy and my CO exercised the privilege of rank by leaving me on the bridge while he nipped off for a nap. Just after he had got to "fifty fathoms down" a thunderous explosion blew the ship up in the air by the stern! Everything stood on its head! The survivors climbed into the boats and rafts ready to take to the sea again; my CO belted on to the bridge and blasted me for dropping depth charges without his permission (quite forgetting I did in fact have his permission to do so); steam and the Chief Stoker appeared from the boiler room to announce that every gauge glass was busted; the Chief Engineer ("Pluto" - so nicknamed because he always wore a hat with long ear flaps) arrived to say everything in his part of the world was groaning and squeaking; the steward arrived to report that every piece of glass in the officers quarters was shattered (the ship's company had long since been living out of empty bean cans) —and in that he included such vital things as bottles of gin and other succulent foods. We unbunged our ears, found we were still afloat, and still steaming at our best speed. Over the ship spread one big grin. This is refit stuff, said that grin! I have no idea what caused the bang, but I suspect it was either a near miss from a torpedo going off in our wake or, more likely, the abandoned merchant ship we had seen sunk, blowing up underneath us as ammunition in her hold exploded. We were not really fussy at the time.

We rejoined the convoy at 1300. The fuel situation was now a critical factor in whether or not we could fend off another attack. We had a few depth charges left for a final fling and not much fling left in ourselves. We received the glad news that air cover was laid on for the next day and that HM Ships *SKATE, SALADIN, SHIKARI* and *SABRE* had been sailed from Londonderry in support, ships famous for the fact that in rough weather only their funnels were clear of the water. Around midday air cover in the shape of a Catalina flying boat arrived and from then on was constant, although we did not see much of it. At about 1800 *HMS SENNEN* also turned up out of the blue to take off some of our Greek shipmates to go back and look for their ship in case it was still afloat. They volunteered to a man, but a towing party of only eight could be transferred by whaler because of the heavy sea running; the remainder of the Greek crew raised hell because they could not go as well, except for the Captain who accepted the vicissitudes of life and remained in the bath. No one envied them their job and each of the eight had to jump for it. The seamanship of the whaler's crew was superb and not an oar was broken. They were all brave men in that boat.

Late that night one further attack was driven off at 2300. It was not pressed home, but it was the end of our depth charges.

11th August 1942 After an uneasy night in a sloppy sea, which bounced us around, dawn broke cold, windy and grey, and it was wet on deck. Life below was uncomfortable because of the crowd of survivors, and it must have been far worse in the other ships which had many more. Gradually it began to dawn on us that perhaps the worst was over, although none could really relax; we just hung around feeling drained, tired and apprehensive - waiting with nothing to do in such circumstances really lets the reaction set in, especially if you happen to be feeling a little sea-sick. I applied the usual First Lieutenant's remedy and set everyone to work to tidy up the ship, which the Chief Stoker endeavoured to counter by emerging to say fresh water would have to be rationed as one of his evaporators (a piece of diabolical machinery which turned sea water into fresh water) was in need of a clean!

At 2000 the support force from Londonderry arrived in its usual cloud of spray and we settled down as the weather eased to wait for another attack. It did not come, because it was all over, although we did not know it.

12th August 1942 At 1000 five rusty, dirty, sea-worn corvettes escorting a sixth, with its grinning bows high out of the water, were despatched to proceed to harbour - and the fleshpots! There the story ends. The ship got its refit, my CO got a brand new frigate and I got accelerated promotion to Lieutenant; we all got drunk after we arrived in Londonderry except the Coxswain, who said he did not approve of it. (It wasn't that he did not drink: it was simply that he never got drunk, no matter how much he drank!)

JUST ONE CONVOY.... Sir Winston Churchill in his "Second World War" (volume IV, page 110) writes, "The main battle was by now once more joined along the great convoy routes of the North Atlantic. The U-boats had already learned to respect the power of the air, and in their new assault they worked almost entirely in the central section, beyond reach of aircraft based on Iceland and Newfoundland. Two convoys were severely mauled in August, one of them losing eleven ships. . . ."

There are no flowers on a sailors grave
No lilies on an ocean wave
The only tribute is the seagulls sweep
And the tear drop on a loved ones cheek
We shall remember them

So ends Commander Ralph Sheffield's account of convoy SC94. He wrote it some 35 years after the event without the help of such modern research aids and memory joggers as the internet and the world wide web.
The original document, as submitted by Cdr David Gibbons, was seventeen pages of typed text and in a quest for some pictures with which to illustrate the piece my first port of call was Google images. No picture of *HMS Primrose* but one of Cdr Sheffield as CO of HMS Wildfire *(Cachalot 34)* www.hmswildfire.org.uk/64-89/cos.htm .
No pictures either on the usual RN websites but when I tried the Gallery on the Ships Nostalgia site there was just the one photo. www.shipsnostalgia.com/gallery . It had been posted by a John Firmin whose father had actually sailed on the *Primrose*. When I contacted John for his permission to reproduce the picture it turned out that John, who came ashore after gaining his Second Mate's with BP, had several more shots taken by his father on board *Primrose*, including some of the Officers and POs mentioned in the account. That it was forbidden to take such photos during the war accounts for the scarcity of them and John Snr probably got away with it due to a more relaxed regime on the Flower Class Corvette when compared to the more senior vessels. Anyway, it would seem that John Snr served on *Primrose* during that trip and certainly on the one previous to it.

My search for further images led me to a site detailing the particulars of all the merchant vessels in the convoy and their fate, www.warsailors.com/convoys/sc94.html and then on to a picture of the Commodore's vessel, the *Trehata*, one of my old company's ships. www.uboat.net/allies/merchants/2014.html She was not on her maiden voyage but had been built as the *Nohata* in 1927 and renamed in 1936. She was on a voyage from Hampton Roads for Manchester with 3000 tons of steel, 1000 tons of tinned goods, 1000 tons of lard, 1000 tons of cheese and 1000 tons of manufactured goods, and had on board a crew of 41 and 8 gunners, as well as the Commodore and 6 naval staff . 31 died, including the Master, John Lawrie, DSO with bar, DSC, and the convoy commodore, Vice-Admiral D.F. Moir, DSO RN, and his six staff members. 21 crew members and four gunners were picked up by the Norwegian *Inger Lise.*

While trawling through the U boat pages I came upon the report of the interrogation of the survivors of U 379. (Again, contrary to Ralph's recollections, there were no Officers among the 5 survivors.) If your idea of a U boat commander is that of a steely eyed ace then be prepared to be amazed at the description of Kapitanleutnant Paul-Hugo Kettner, "a lazy, inefficient martinet". www.uboatarchive.net/U-379INT.htm

When I looked up *ORP BLYSKAWICA,* pictured here, there were even more surprises. One of the fastest WW2 destroyers, she was built at the E.Cowes yard of J.Samuel White in 1935-37. She happened to be back there for an emergency refit in May '42 when the town was attacked by 160 German low-level

bombers. She was instrumental in the defence of the town, her guns forcing the bombers to maintain a safer (for them) height. She also laid a smokescreen but even so there were over 70 killed and White's yard was badly damaged. (After extensive repairs the first vessel to be built after the raid was *HMS Cavalier.*) In recognition of the crew's courage on that night an area in West Cowes outside the Painters Arms was, in 2004, renamed *Francki Place,* after the CO at the time.
BLYSKAWICA went on to earn an impressive war-time record and is now a museum ship at Gdynia. The local council intend to receive her back in Cowes in May 2012 to mark the 70th anniversary of the raid and celebrate the vessels 75th birthday. www.iwight.com/home/news/bl2.asp

Ralph Sheffield, seen here in another picture from John Firmin, went on to see service as First Lieutenant of HM Corvette Amarathus and also HMS Kildwick (a KIL Class frigate). He was Commanding Officer of HMS Lady Elsa (A/S Admiralty Trawler). After the war he became a member of the RNV(S)R and was promoted Lieutenant Commander in 1960. He was Executive Officer of HMS Wildfire in 1973 and on promotion to Commander in 1974 he succeeded to Command. He was awarded the OBE (Military) in 1977 in recognition of his service to the RNR and HMS Wildfire in particular. After retiring from his duties as the Secretary of Hambros Bank he spent his time variously as a Director of the White Ensign Association and as a Governor of the Royal Naval Girls School. He went aloft sometime in the '80s.