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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Cardigan Captain's Exploit Recounted

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I HAD a story several years ago in this column on Captain Dan McDonald, formerly of Cardigan, P.E.I., now of Vancouver. It came through George Thompson, a former manager of Associated Shippers Inc. here. The story told how the skipper hit a German U-boat commander a poke in the jaw, back in the First Great War and thus escaped an enforced stay in a German prison camp.

An Alma friend has sent me a clipping from a Vancouver newspaper column in which Capt. McDonald tells his own story of that incident. I do not know the name of the newspaper but it is in Norman Hacking's column.

McDonald was master of the schooner John G. Walters of Saint John, N.B. Hacking uses a New York news clipping of May 8, 1918 and the old story said:

"He wears no decoration on his pea jacket and he has no fancy initials after his name; but Skipper McDonald, in today from England on an American steamer, floored a German submarine commander with a blow under the chin, left him sprawling on his own deck, and escaped to tell the tale.

Packed Terrific Wallop

"One of those tough Prince Edward Island men of the sea is Skipper McDonald, gnarled and weathered as the oaken 'knee' of a Truro-built schooner. He carries a shrewd brain in his skull and a terrific wallop in his right arm."

The John G. Walters was bound for Le Havre to Cardiff for a cargo of coal, when she was hailed off Lundy Island in Bristol Channel by a surfaced U-boat.

Here is Captain McDonald's first person story as he told it in 1918, and as he vividly recalls it today.

"On March 24th one of these latest type of subs, with guns fore and aft, bobbed to the surface and fired a couple of shots across our bows. There was nothing to do but to heave to and wait to see what would happen.

"The first shot hit the foremast head and took the foremast out of her. A 300 gallon gas tank caught fire and set us ablaze in the forward end. The next shell hit the aft house. I was in the poop and was wounded in the leg. They next aimed at the water's edge.

"I gave orders to launch the lifeboats and the whole crew escaped over the side just before the schooner rolled over bottom up.

"The sub hailed us to come alongside and I was ordered to come aboard by the commander. I had no choice, for I knew it was customary for the captains to be taken prisoner.

"I think a little trip to Germany will be nice for you,' the U-boat commander said in pretty fair English.

"The submarine must have known there was a British patrol boat in the vicinity, for suddenly preparations were made for a crash dive. I was standing on the deck of this

bloody pirate boat when the commander ordered me to climb into the conning tower and go below.

“I didn’t like the way he said it. So I took a chance and caught him under the chin. He went down on the deck, and I dived overboard. I didn’t wait to argue.

Escaped In Dense Fog

“I swam round until I reached a hatch cover and held on to that for two-and-a-half hours until I was picked up by the British patrol boat P-42. I was bleeding badly from a very nasty wound but the salt water stopped it some.”

George Thompson likes to talk about the “Victory Chimes” and I believe he told me that Capt. McDonald was sent to Cadiz, Spain to take command of that schooner that had been seized by the Spaniards on what was termed “a trumped up charge”. He was sent by Senator John A. MacDonald of Cardigan, though he was not senator at that time.

But the Cardigan veteran was abrupt and practical. After he found argument useless he got his ship out of the harbor and with all his sails in action he was on his way. A Spanish patrol ship couldn’t overtake him and the Spaniards branded him as a pirate. But he took back the schooner and this successfully completed the errand on which he had been sent.

The colorful veteran of the sea is now 86 years old according to the Vancouver column. He still carries the marks of a shell splinter which struck his leg back on that eventful March 24, 1918 when he socked the German on the jaw, jumped overboard and swam to safety.

Captain McDonald sailed many a day after that episode. I’d like to meet this colorful veteran and have a talk with him.

Picture OF ‘Victory Chimes’

I HAVE a picture of the “Victory” Chimes sent to me by Captain Percy White of Murray Harbour.

Information on the picture – it’s a post card – indicates ”the Victory Chimes is still in service and is offering week-long vacation cruises along the Maine coast. The Victory Chimes is known far and wide for its comfort afloat, and especially for its meals. The largest of the vacation ships, the Victory Chimes is the only three-masted schooner still registered under the American flag. Sailing from Rockland, Maine each Monday the ship puts into a different port each night. It is owned and operated by Captain Frederick B. Guild, Maine Coast Cruises, Rockland, Maine.”