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## ACROSS THE ISLAND

### Retired Master Tells 1942 'Torpedo' Story

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A RECOMMENDATION that several officers and men who served on the SS Prince Edward Island during a wartime submarine attack should get recognition, is contained in a letter from John R.B. Maguire, retired senior master on the Borden-Tormentine ferry service.

It is apparent from Captain Maguire's letter that these men contributed in great measure to maintaining a carferry steamer for the Borden-Tormentine route during the grim years of World War 2. The SS Charlottetown, sunk in 1941 enroute to drydock. It was not until the summer of 1947 that the MV Abegweit was made available.

Had the Prince Edward Island been put out of action all that would have been available would be the Scotia. It would have provided very limited train ferry service in the ice-free months. But it would have had to tie up during the months when an ice-breaker was needed. The situation would have really been grim for this province.

The letter, which is reproduced here, gives some of the most interesting details of the escape of the SS Prince Edward Island from an enemy submarine on a voyage down the St. Lawrence from a refit at Lauzon, Quebec in September, 1942.

### Escape Story Is Colorful

Capt. Maguire continues:

"I was in charge of the ship on that occasion and she did not have ships of the convoy around her.

"We were in the front line of the convoy and on the starboard side as we were to leave the convoy about five miles from North Cape, P.E.I., and to proceed down the Northumberland Strait on our own.

"The first torpedo hit a Greek ship, about 400 feet on our port side, and they immediately began to launch their boats.

We were proceeding on four coal-burning boilers – at that time only two boilers had been converted to oil. The other four were not converted until 1946, Capt. Maguire explains.

Bruce Stewart and Company, Charlottetown had started to convert two boilers to oil in the winter of 1941-42, and during all of that winter the ship was more or less crippled, as with only four boilers under steam she was lacking one-third of her power.

Those two oil-burning boilers had been completely converted to oil when she was in for the refit at Lauzon, Capt. Maguire explains.

Getting back to the encounter with the enemy submarine in the St. Lawrence, Capt. Maguire says:

### Ship Escaped Under Full Power

“Immediately the action of the submarine began, the two oil-burning boilers were cut in to serve it, and due to the manoeuvrability of the ship with full power, we escaped two torpedoes aimed at us.

“The phosphorous in the water was so bright”, Captain Maguire recalls, “we on the bridge could see the torpedoes coming through the water, and although the ship was manoeuvred to escape them, they passed very close to us!

“Realizing that there was not at that time any other ship which could take over on the Borden-Tormentine run, and supply service for P.E.I., the airports at Summerside and Charlottetown” – there was a full-scale military airport here then run by the RAF, and later by the RCAF – Capt. Maguire explains “as we did not have a weapon of any sort, I decided to save the ship if possible, so I rang for full speed ahead, got out of there and headed for Borden.”

The Master didn’t break silence on the radio telephone “which at that time was only of frequency for 50 miles, and for Borden station.”

“If I wished,” the Captain explains, “I could not have asked for permission to leave the convoy, so our whereabouts was not known until we were sighted from Borden”, he recalls. And what an anxious few hours that must have been for the people who were responsible for maintaining that cross-strait service.

#### Four Men Win Special Praise

THE RETIRED Master explains that he wishes to give credit to four men for their action on that occasion.

“The ship travelled at 18 and three-quarters knots while at full speed. Her bearings had all been “white mettled” – similar to putting new bearings in a car,” he explains.

“The work had been supervised by R. A. MacPherson, chief engineer, and the late Frank Dalziel, Sr. The work had been done so efficiently under the careful supervision of these men that not one of the newly-installed bearings became hot under the full-steam ahead conditions, Capt. Maguire recalls with appreciation.

“There are two men to whom I wish to give credit,” adds Capt. Maguire. “Capt. H. G. MacKenzie was quartermaster on watch at the time, and the chief engineer came and asked for permission to go down in the furnace room.”

But, explains Capt. Maguire “H. G. MacKenzie who was at the wheel, and had heard the remark, spoke up ‘Captain, put a man at the wheel and I will go down and trim coal’, which he did, and along with him went Clarence Waddell. A man was put at the wheel. There was no other volunteer.”

“THESE MEN SHOULD GET SOME RECOGNITION FOR THEIR BRAVERY IN ACTION”, Capt. Maguire emphasizes.

In contrast to the reaction of these men, the former master explains “Many others started to lower the lifeboats, and I had to send Capt. John G. Dirks of Georgetown, P.E.I., who was mate on watch, with a club to drive them from the boats.” The men would have been drowned, Capt. Maguire explains, with the ship travelling at that speed.

I thank Capt. Maguire sincerely for his most interesting letter and commend to the responsible people, the recommendations that the men singled out for their bravery

under fire, should receive some award. Most certainly they earned recognition. Most certainly they merit the thanks of a grateful people. The only regret is that the recognition has been so long delayed.

#### Alternative Almost Unthinkable

IT IS impossible for present generation people to realize just how much anxiety Island people felt concerning the cross-strait service when a single incident, enemy action or some other cause, could have cut us off from the mainland at any time.

Capt. Maguire modestly passes on all of the credit to the others, but I suggest that this man must have played a large part in the successful attempt to elude the submarine's torpedoes and get his ship back safely to Borden.

Capt. H. G. MacKenzie referred to is now senior master on the ferry service at Borden.

I'm serious about that recognition suggestion. Our own province could recognize them suitably, if no federal department is interested. A suitable certificate could be prepared by the province, and presented by our Lieutenant-Governor, or by Premier Shaw himself, depending entirely on what the premier and his government might decide.

#### Sincere Greetings, Best Wishes

Once again the Christmas season is here, and that's the signal to extend most sincere wishes to everyone who reads this column. I wish the season could be gay and merry for all of you. Unfortunately that is impossible, some are too near to deep sorrow from the loss of loved ones – this applies, indeed, to some of my closest neighbours and friends.

To these, and others like them I hope that the 'Source of all comfort' will bring ease from your burdens, and somehow show a hopeful ray of light ahead.

There is also a recognition on my part of the splendid support and co-operation from so many, many readers. If it were not for your continued interest, and your helpful suggestions, this column could not possibly be maintained at the high standard which your informed comment and suggestions have made possible.