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BEHIND THE LOG

by

E. J. PRATT

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To
Lorne Richardson

FOREWORD

This is mainly a statement of exposition and acknowledgment. In the spring of 1945 my friend, Professor Lorne Richardson (then a Commander of the Royal Canadian Navy), asked me if I should like to spend some time at sea in order to gather material and atmosphere for a poem. He said that his suggestion had met with the approval of his colleagues, and he felt sure that arrangements could be effected. In due time the invitation was ratified by Vice-Admiral G. C. Jones and I was granted every facility to go out with destroyers and corvettes, and collect from officers and crews facts, stories, moods, technical terms and the ever-maturing crop of nautical idioms.

I began searching for an action which would combine dramatic intensity with the eternal tedium of convoy—something in the early phase of the War when the Atlantic sinkings far outpaced the building of ships and when, after the fall of Paris, Churchill's frank and audacious admissions sobered Britain to a sense of her peril. U-boats were multiplying fast and moving ever farther westward to concentrate on Atlantic shipping. Convoys were being located and trailed across the ocean with a climbing ratio of loss, which sometimes came close to annihilation. Much has been written during and since the War upon the slimness of the margins between victory and defeat, and the failure of a given convoy to get through at this most critical phase could mean general catastrophe.

The story of those ships comprising the Royal Canadian Navy and "the fourth arm of the Fighting Forces", the Merchant Navy, is now a part of the history of Canada's growth as a sea power, for at the close of 1942 Canada had become responsible for more than half of the convoys moving towards Europe. Those two arms of the Forces worked

with the finest co-ordination, and in the spirit of mutual faith which was never betrayed, but rather reinforced, by the exercise of the democratic right to grumble—the antidote to the Fascist lockjaw.

One episode in the six-year-old drama of the waters, which possessed practically all the elements required for my special task, was the struggle of convoy S.C. 42 for survival. It is significant as being the record of the first display of "wolf-pack" strategy directed towards Atlantic shipping, and hence the experience of this convoy became invaluable in the subsequent working out of counter-measures. The odds against survival were tremendous—twelve U-boats (it was estimated) with the possibility of German surface raiders coming in for the kill. The target was sixty-six ships crawling at eight knots and protected by an all-Canadian escort of one destroyer H.C.M.S. *Skeena*, and three corvettes, *Kenogami*, *Orillia* and *Alberni*, which were later joined by *Moose Jaw* and *Chambly*. Had the faster *Skeena* been destroyed, all the heroism imaginable would not have availed against the U-boats, which had a surface speed of three or four knots more than that of the corvettes.

Another feature of the drama was the harnessing of physical science to human effort. Only two or three decades past, captains were blowing their ships' whistles to determine positions by echoes. It was always a wonder to us, as schoolboys in Newfoundland, how captains of coastal steamers and skippers of "fore-and-afters" could find their way into port through darkness or thick fog. A succession of blasts and even of shouts, striking cliffs and rebounding, would give them the rough basis for their calculation. Our wonder was more than a mere tribute to the practical skill of navigators. It was partly rooted in mystery over a dimly apprehended process of science working through an instrument, whether a whistle or a voice. We were constantly wavering between a sophisticated pose before a blackboard demonstration of an echo and a half-abashed acceptance of a scent or a sixth sense, supposed to be shared equally by mariners and Newfoundland dogs. And then as soon as the superstitions were hammered out of our heads by the schoolmaster's pointer, a new flock surprised us with the announcement of another scientific discovery. There are many of us who are ever standing on the thresholds of workshops, looking and listening, never completely rid of the feeling that one day a spirit will enter and planet-strike the machines.

To a layman, anti-submarine detection (asdic) looked like a miracle. It is true that its sensational performance in 1941 was in a year or two to be eclipsed by radar, as shattering to human credulity as radio and wireless were in their day, yet the physics of sound, or rather supersonics, seemed then to have reached the highest pitch of technical accomplishment. The picture, actual or imaginary, of such a mechanism in operation, especially in a life-and-death crisis, could be a source of eerie dramatic tension. The operator was the heir of a long promise. He came late in the line of the sentries and the coastal skippers with their calls and answers, but when he did come he had a range far beyond their voices, and when he challenged, the foe replied from under the sea.

Further acknowledgements are due. For his kind co-operation and for his final authority to use the files at Ottawa and to gather more recent information from a most obliging personnel, my thanks are offered to Admiral H. T. W. Grant, C.B.E, D.S.O., R.C.N., Chief of the Naval Staff. For the use of his Log and the Report of Proceedings, and for his personal narrative, I am deeply indebted to the commanding officer of H.M.C.S. *Skeena*, Captain James C. Hibbard, D.S.C. and Bar, R.C.N., who as senior officer of the escort was in command during this sixty-hour action off Cape Farewell. For securing access to officers, ratings and sailors generally, for checking data, for many courtesies on and off the ships, and for sharing so generously with me the wealth of his experience, I am very grateful to Commander William Sclater, author of *Haida*.

The names of the ships are authentic but the personal names in the story are fictitious. The Convoy Conference is synthetic, pieced from the *Forms* and *General Instructions*, from accounts of Masters and N.C.S.O.s present at various convoy conferences, and amplified a little. Apart from a few minor transpositions and enlargements for dramatic effect for which official indulgence is requested, the record follows the incident.

E. J. PRATT.

There is a language in a naval log
That rams grammar down a layman's throat,
Where words unreel in paragraphs, and lines
In chapters. Volumes lie in graphs and codes,
Recording with an algebraic care
The idiom of storms, their lairs and paths;
Or, in the self-same bloodless manner, sorting
The mongrel litters of a battle signal
In victories or defeats or bare survivals,
Flags at half-mast, salutes and guards of honour,
Distinguished crosses, burials at sea.

Our navigators trained their astrolabes
And sextants on the skies in lucky weather,
Or added guesses to dead reckoning,
Hauled up their lead, examined mud or shell
Or gravel on the arming—fifty fathoms,
Now forty, thirty, twenty-five, shallowing
Quickly! "Engines, astern, reefs, keep your lead
Going. Have plenty of water under you."
They did not wait till miracles of science
Unstopped the naked ears for supersonics,
Or lifted cataracts from finite vision
To make night and its darkness visible.
How long ago was it since sailors blew
Their sirens at the cliffs while nearing land,
Traversing channels, cocked their ears and waited?
"Where did you hear that echo, mate?"

"Right off

The starboard quarter, Captain. Took ten seconds."
"That's Gull Rock there a mile away. Where now?"
"Two seconds for the echo from port bow."
"That's Porpoise Head I reckon—Hard a-port!"
With echoes everywhere, stand out to sea.
But when the winds deafened their ears or cloud
And rain blinded their eyes, they were shoved back
Upon their mother wit which either had
To find the exits to the runs and round
The Capes or pile their ships upon the reefs.

And of that lineage are the men today.
They still are calling to the rocks: they get
Their answers in the same hard terms: they call
To steel gliding beneath the sea: they pierce
Horizons for the surface hulls: they ping
The sky for the plane's fuselage: even
The moon acknowledged from her crater sills.
But though the radio bursts and vacuum tubes
And electronic beams were miracles
Of yesterday, dismissing cloud and rain
And darkness as illusions of the sense,
Yet always there to watch the colours, note
The V-break in the beam's straight line, to hear
The echoes, feel the pain, are eyes, ears, nerves:

Always remains the guess within the judgment
To jump the fire perfection of the physics
And smell mortality behind the log.

As weird a game of ping-pong ever played
Was on the sea—the place, off Cape Farewell,
With the back-curtain of the Greenland ice-cap:
Time—'41 autumnal equinox.

The crisis was the imminence of famine
And the cutting of the ganglia and veins
That vitalized the sinews, fed the cells
Of lungs demanding oxygen in air.
The wicks were guttering from want of oil,
And without oil, the bread went with the light,
And without bread, the will could not sustain
The fight, piping its courage to the heart.

Grey predatory fish had pedigreed
With tiger sharks and brought a speed and power
The sharks had never known, for they had been
Committed to the sea under a charter
Born of a mania of mind and will
And nurtured by a Messianic slogan.
They were not bounded by the parallels.
They found their habitats wherever there
Was open sea and keels to ride upon it.
Off the North Cape they had outsped the narwhals,
The sawfish off the Rios and the Horn.
They did not kill for food: they killed that food
Should not be used as food. They were the true
Expendables—the flower of their type.
They left their mothers for self-immolation,
The penalty the same for being on
Or off the target—for the first to join
Their own combustion to that of the ships,
And for the second, just to go the way
Their victims went—a drunken headlong spiral,
Shunted from an exhausted radius
Down fifteen thousand feet or more of sea,
Engines, propellers, gyros, rudders, dead.

The S.C. 42 was being groomed
To match a new suspected strategy.
The sleuths till now had surfaced, stabbed and dived
In lone attack. This convoy had to face
The risk of concentrated ambush, meet it
By leaving beaten sea-lanes, east and west,
And in the ambiguity of the wastes
To seek the harsh alliance of the ice
And fog, where Arctic currents were more friendly,
And long nights blanketed the periscopes.

In the Conference room the language dripped with brine.
Veterans, who nearly half a century
Ago had flown their flags on battle cruisers,
Were busy grafting some new sprouts of Gaelic
And Newne-Irish on an English stump.
They had saluted Fisher as cadets,
Heard Open Fire under Jellicoe,
Outridden typhoons off the Solomons
And at the Falklands cancelled Coronel.
'Twas time they had a spell of garden peace,
A time to trim their briars and colour Meerschaums.
Those old days were the real days—now, by God,
They had to tread the decks of merchantmen,
From flagships to dry cargo-ships and tankers.

The Naval Control Service Officer addresses the Masters.

"Good morning, gentlemen. It is a pleasure
To see familiar faces here today.
To such of you who have commanded ships
In earlier convoys what I have to say
Will be just dishing up the old instructions.
But since to many it is the first adventure,
I know you'll pardon me if I should cover
With some precision the important points.
Let me begin by saying that your convoy
Has, in its Commodore, one of the most
Renowned men in the Service. It is not
For me to talk at length about his fine
And honourable record. It is known
To all of you. He has of his free choice
Issued from his well-earned retirement
To place at the disposal of the Allies
His knowledge, skill, and practical seamanship.
Here at this table, gentlemen: Rear-Admiral
Sir Francis Horatio Trelawney-Camperdown!

"The Senior Naval Officer will have
Escort and convoy under his command.
An able and distinguished officer,
He is through long and personal experience
Well-versed in enemy tactics, and your safety
Will be the escort's first consideration.

N.C.S.O. thumbing the pages of "General Instructions"

"Being in all respects ready for sea,
The ships will have steam up and hoist pennants
At daybreak. Note—The Commodore will sound
A prolonged blast. The ships will leave anchorage
In single column and at intervals

W/T silence must always be maintained
Along the route. Occasionally it's broken,
Not wilfully indeed but carelessly,
By operators fresh from the radio school,
Whose fingers have not lost the itch to tap
The keys to break the tedium by listening
To crackle on 500 kilocycles.
A random da da dit dit dit might be
An invitation to the U-boats ready
To accept it. They are ever listening
In on our frequencies and you know well
The manner the Direction Finder Loop
On a surfaced U-boat will follow a signal.
It's like a human ear alerted, which
Will turn to the source of a sound to get a bearing.
You must remember that the enemy
Will not relax his efforts to pick up
Those waves, that German D/F stations even
As far away as Occupied Europe
Are taking bearings, plotting out our ships.

"Now, gentlemen: here is the Commodore."

Sir Francis Horatio

"Gentlemen: I shall be very brief and I hope
To be as brief after we get to sea.
I shall keep my signals to a minimum,
But when a hoist does go up I shall
Expect immediate acknowledgment.
Many of us have sailed together already,
And gone through several trying situations.
But our success, such as it is, has sprung
From absolute obedience to instructions
And from endurance which must be assumed.
While it is true that for the navigation
Of his own ship each master must be held
Responsible, there is but little room
For rugged individualists. Elsewhere
Perhaps the Nelson touch may be applied,
And a captain's intuitions exercised,
But not within the stations of a convoy.
(Chuckles amongst the older masters.)

"The N.C.S.O. has referred to the matter
Of showing lights. A match, lit on deck, has
Been spotted by an escort at two miles,
And last crossing, a thoughtless biped left
A port open and failed to notice the signal
From a destroyer. It required a burst
From a machine-gun to close it. I am sure
We shall require no such emphasis
In this convoy but I should urge each master

To make the business of lights a top concern,
Particularly at the change of Watch.
Men dropping in to a stuffy galley to make
A mug of tea before going below
Are the principal offenders.

"Do not wait

Till you are deep in fog before you stream
Your fog-buoys. That is generally too late.
Your next astern by that time has lost touch.
Good seamanship and team-play should prevent
Avoidable collisions in thick fog.

"If you are new to convoy you may be
Tempted to flash on at full brilliancy
Your navigation lights when another ship
Closes you. DON'T. You are as visible
To him as he to you. Keep closed up. Keep
Lights dimmed except in an emergency.

"I shall say little here about the stragglers.
The record of the losses says it much
More clearly, and the escort cannot help
You if you leave the family. They are good;
They can work wonders but not miracles.

"And now if you're uncertain of anything—
Emergency turns, for instance—come and have
A chin with me at the close of the conference.
And to repeat, we're in this business all
Together, and in it up to the neck:
For my part, I am bloody proud of it.
Good morning, gentlemen, and a good voyage.'

N.C.S.O.

"Questions?"

Chorus

"Plenty."

Harvey Butt

"I'm in the wrong position.

Too far astern. I have a 12-knot ship.
I want a place in first or second line
To save me bumpin' into 6-knot tramps."

Jim Burdock

"This convoy got no tramps."

Butt

"Well, all I know
The last one had 'em, and I knocked the sterns
Off three of them, and I was always goin'
Full speed astern to save my goddam neck."

"John Knox" O'Flaherty

"I could make 8 knots if I didn't have
Such lousy coal. The bloody stuff won't steam.
A half of it is gravel—wouldn't boil
A kettle: looks like salvage from a wreck
Picked up from sweepings left on Sable Island."

Charlie Shipline

"And I don't like my place—gummed up between
A couple of tankers. God, if I'm not fished
I'll be run down."

Jack Doucette

"Why should I be back there?
Never did like the stern of columns. Suppose
I'm in there just for picking up survivors.
What do you take me for—an ambulance?"

Jerry Payne

"8 knots would tear the guts out of my tub.
I haven't had a refit for three years.
Can't execute a turn of forty-five degrees.
We'll be colliding every fifteen seconds."

Robert Fitzsimmons

"My pumps were out of gear when she was built;
Still out of gear; complained a hundred times,
But can't get any action."

Michael Saltaway

"I have this
To say. I only got one boiler workin';
And that one's on half-time—the other half
Is restin'—and I've only half a crew."

Norwegian captain, leaning heavily on native speech

"I kan ikke forstaa fordommt ord.
How in helvete tink dey dat I kan
Faa 8 knots ut of my old vaskelbalja.
Har ikke hatt fullt mannskap for two year.
I lar mig fan ikke fortelle what I
Skal do. You go helvete alle mann."

N.C.S.O.

"What did he say?"

'Arry Stubbins

"'E says the bleedin' hinstructions
Are fine and quite clear to 'is hunderstandin'."

Robin MacAllister

"Nae, nae, he canna' thole thae English turrms.
He'd ken a' richt, gin you gae him the Gaelic.
I wad respectfully suggest the wurrds
O' the Generral Instructions be convairted
Into a ceevilized tongue so that a chiel
Micht hae nae doots. Noo, let me spik mi thochts."

(Voices: "Now, what did *he* say?" "Noo's the day
and noo's the hour." "Is this St. Andrew's Night?"
"Pipe in the haggis.")

A Danish captain

"No, no. He sess he do not *ikke* know
One word. His vaskelbalja—tub-tub, washtub,
Das iss he mean his ship, can't make 8 knots.
No crew *mannskap* full up for long long time.

Ship had no refit since she left Bergen
In 1894. He tol' me dat
Himself. He not quite clear. He sess ve can
All go to hella. Don't care damn.

I got

Complaints also. Want get dem off my chest.
Goddam nuisance, I seh, dose para-a-vanes.
Muss up de vurks. Crew don't like dem damn bit.
Dey seh put hex on ship—a buncha Jonahs.
And more also I seh. No compass checks.
Dose D/G coils play hell wid compasses.
De gear get loose on deck. Dey come adrift."

Cyrus Bumstead

"I don't want anyone to tell me how
To run my ship—been in the Services,
Merchant and Navy, nigh come forty years.
I was a Master when the most of them
Were spottin' patterns on their diapers."

Mark Knee to Cyrus

"I squeezed the Atlantic from my mitts before
Those Juniors had their birthday buttons on."

Captain, The Honourable Guy Brimblecombe

"Well, sir, you needn't worry about *my* ship.
She went through this before: she'll go again.
She's in good trim. I have a splendid crew.
Signals will be acknowledged to the letter,
And in the sea tradition, I assure you."

N.C.S.O.

"Now, gentlemen, since it is quite apparent
That we are all in utmost harmony
On the main grounds, it is just left for me
To wish 'good-luck'. Never have I attended
A Conference where there was such fine feeling
Combined with insight and rare technical grasp
Of the problems of a convoy operation.
Let me congratulate you. May I now
Invite you, on behalf of a great friend
Of the R.C.N., to the Periwinkle Club
At Lobster Point where you may hoist a couple
to take the chill from the September fog."

* * *

In a few hours from the time the blinds
Were drawn upon the jags and the last lisp
Against the universe and things marine
Was but a reminiscence lapsed in rum,
Those men were on the Bridge peering through fog
And moving towards their ordered rendezvous.

* * *

One half a million tons were in the holds,
Cramming to the last precious cubic inch
The slow-keeled merchantmen—the sixty-six.
No longer were those ships an industry
Run for peacetime returns upon investment.
They took their line positions for defence.
Against them mainly was the warfare waged—
Bulk cargo carriers with box-like sections,
Ship side to ship side and the main deck to keel,
Carrying their gross of ore and coal and grain;
The ships with 'tween decks running the full length;
Tankers equipped with special pumps for oil;
Refrigeration ships, holds insulated
For storage of the perishable goods;
And hybrid types that had their bellies full
Of oranges, aluminum and lint.

How desperate the strait which would commit
A treasure of this price to such a journey!
Where find a steward who would risk his name
To close the page of such accountancy
When every mile along the ocean highway
Was calling for protection, and in calling
Demanded life and life's expenditure?
And here the call was answered with a guard
Whose substitute for numbers was its courage—
Four terriers slipped from the Canadian kennel:
But one destroyer, *Skeena*; three corvettes,
Kenogami, *Orillia* and *Alberni*.

Upon their vigil hung the life of all,
Of ships and men. Of sleeker, faster breed.
The *Skeena* ranged a far periphery
At thirty knots, now out of sight and now
Closing the convoy as her nose tried out
The dubious scents in narrowing ellipses.
The slower guards kept closer to their broods,
Pushing their way within the column lanes,
Emerged to pace the port and starboard flanks
Or nuzzled with a deep strategic caution
The hulls of those whose tardy engine beats
Brought down the knots of faster ships and made
The gravest risk and worry for the fleet.
They kept a special watch upon the tankers.

No ships, no aeroplanes, no jeeps could stir
Without this source of power and lubrication.
Even the merchantmen must flank these ships,
Herded like buffalo young inside the ring.

* * *

Commodore to signalman

"Signal to pennants 73, relay
To pennants 103, Stop Pouring Smoke!"

Internal murmurings

"Look at it tossin' like a Texas twister.
That smoke is blacker than an Afghan's whiskers.
I'd like to tell that Captain of the Heads
He should have stayed at home with the kind of job
That suited him—housebreakin' his Angoras."

Official

"And pennants 114 is out of station."

Unofficial

"That flappin' penguin from the Auckland Islands
Has been a week on route, yet needs more time
To get rid of that Newfie-Crowsnest screech.
He'll lose it when he's doused. Get back in station,
For if you don't, the canaries will stop singin'."

The Master's thoughts

"I told those sculpins at the conference
I couldn't make that eight—a half a knot
Above a six would blow my stinkin' boilers.
I haven't had a cleanin' for a year,
And there's a beach of sand inside the gears,
And yet that bargee yells—GET BACK IN STATION!"

Commodore

"And pennants 74 by the Diet of Worms!
He's waddlin' like an old barnyard merganser.
Another hour by the way he's goin'

He'll be out on the flanks duckin' his feathers,
Or lost in fog and stragglin' back to Sydney.
Keep pumpin' Morse into his ruddy blinkers.

The Master in question

"I've got a twisted rudder—like a corkscrew,
And if that poopin' punk there on that flagship
Imagines he's Paul Bunyan or the devil,
Tell him put on his shorts and straighten it."

P.O. to galley-boy

"Gallagher, did your mother tell you nothin'
On the way home? Stop pitchin' gash in daytime.
Handin' the convoy on a platter to the subs.
As bad as smoke to give the trail away.
Just one more bad tomato over there,
And all the ships will quit this lovely Service,
And you'll go with the galley, do you hear?"

Gallagher

"Why won't that windpipe slitter tell me what
I got to do with all that mouldy gash?
'Twas gash when it was brought aboard, 'twas gash
When it was crated: now its maggoty.
Can't eat it and can't burn it and can't dump it.
I'd like to foul his beak in those tomatoes."

North of the sixtieth, they had, it seemed,
Found refuge in a sea-berth where the foe,
Finding the chill enter his crop, might seek
More southern fodder. Least of all the hazards
Were winds and waves: for these the ships were built.
Their bows could bull the heavier seas head-on.
Their hulls could stand the shock beam-to. The keels
Had learned the way to bite into the troughs:
Such was their native element. The acts
Of God were taken as their daily fare
Received alike with prayers or curses. These
Were as the dice fell—whether luck of devil
Or luck of God spilled on a shifting floor
Close to the steady fringe of the Arctic Circle.

For seven days and nights without attack!
The asdic operator in his hut
Had sent his ultra-sounds out and reported
Echoes, but only such as might return

As the dull, soft reverberation notes
From seaweed or low forms of ocean life
Or from a school of porpoises or whales.
His hearing was as vital to the ship
As was the roving sight in a crow's nest.
His ear was as the prism is to light,
Unravelling meanings from a skein of tone.
Each sound might hold a threat, a Bremen slur,
An overture to a dementia
Of guns and rockets and torpedo hits
Competing with the orders from the Bridge.
He had to know that threat and not mistake it.
For that his body was a sounding-board.
Even his knees must feel it and his face
Become a score for undetermined notes,
As if a baton in his cortex played
Wry movements on his neurones fiddle-taut.
Twitched his reflexes into spasms, narrowed
His pupils, kicked his heart into his throat.

He had an instrument in his control
Attested by the highest signatures of science.
The echoes had traversed wide spans of time:—
Helmholtz and Doppler tapping to each other
Through laboratory walls, and there was Rayleigh
Calling to Langevin, he to Fresnel,
The three hymning Pindarics to Laplace,
And all vibrating from their resonators
Salutes to Robert Boyle, halloos to Newton.
And here, his head-phones on, this operator.
Sleeve-rolled mechanic to the theorists,
Was holding in his personal trust, come life,
Come death, their cumulative handiwork.
Occasionally a higher note might hit
The ear-drum like a drill, bristle the chin,
Involving everything from brain to kidneys,
Only to be dismissed as issuing
From the submerged foundations of an iceberg,
Or classified as "mutual interference".

The hopes were running higher the farther north
The convoy steamed. Would this one get its break?
The Arctic pressed into the human service,
The Circle which had caught the navigators—
The hardest in the annals of The Search,
Willoughby, Chancelor, Hudson, Bering, Franklin—
Impounded them, twisted and broken them,
Their ships and crews upon its icy spokes:
This time through the ironic quirk of War
Changed to an allied *cordon sanitaire*.

The evening of the eighth day and a moon,
High-sailing and impersonal, picked out
The seventy ships, deriding the constrained

Hush of the blackout. Was the latitude
Itself not adequate watch? The sea was calm,
Although with a beam swell the wallowing rate
Was but five knots. The moon illuminated
The *Empire Hudson*, leader of port wing,
Loaded with grain, the *Gypsum Queen* with sulphur,
The *Winterswyck*, the *Garm*, the *Scania*,
Muneric (iron ore—sink like a rock
She would if hit), *Bretwalda*, *Baron Ramsay*,
Gullpool, the *Empire Panther* and *Macgregor*,
The *Lorient*, *Arosa*, *Hampton Lodge*,
And others with the same high names and pennants,
Carrying at the load-water line their freight—
Twelve columns of them in their blueprint stations.
A half an hour to dusk the bo'sun's mate
Had piped his strictest order—*Darken Ship*.

Thousands of sailors under decks were sealed
As in vast envelopes. They ate and worked
And slept within a world self-quarantined
Against the pestilence of light by bolts,
Bulkheads and battened portholes, for each cell
Was like a tumoured brain, danger within,
Danger without, divided from the world
By an integument of iron bone.
What chance for life the moment when a shell
Trepanned the skull? What would release the pressure
Of that stampede to reach the for'ard hatch—
That burial hole in the deckhead—and come up
When the plates buckled in the lower mess?

Danger within? Could not the magazines
By a raffle flirt of fate be made to turn
Against the convoy, striking through the escort,
With final undeliberated measure,
When the oil tanks would join the magazines
To the last ton, to the last gram of blunder?
The fires that warmed the galleys could cremate:
For oil and fulminate of mercury,
Nitrated cellulose and T.N.T.
And the constituents of our daily bread,
Fresh water and fresh air, could by a shift,
Sudden and freakish in the molecules,
Be transubstantiated into death.

Added to this might come the blows where friend
Struck friend with utmost shoulder energy—
Blows just as murderous as torpedo hits
Where in the darkness, executing turns,
Or in the fog, the convoy ships would find
Their plates as vulnerable as cellophane:
Or from excess of their protective zeal
The fighting units with their double rate
Of convoy speed might plough their sinuous way

Up through the narrow lanes and turn too sharp,
Presenting their full beams across the bows
Of leading merchantmen. Lucky they were
If they escaped with nothing but a blast
Of roaring basso from the Commodore's lungs—
"Those lousy, noisy, nattering sons o' badgers,
Where do they think they're going—to Miami,
Harpooning porpoises or flying fish?"

The Silent Service never won its name
With fairer title than it did this night.
Evening at half-past nine and a fresh sound,
An instant octave lift to treble pitch
From the dull datum of "reverbs" startled
The ear. "An echo bearing green four-O,
Range 1500."

"Hold and classify."

The ping-g-g with its death's head identity!

C.O. to Officer-of-Watch

"Increase speed 250 revolutions."

*(Officer-of-the-Watch repeats, calls down voice-pipe to
coxswain who sets engine-room telegraph to speed. The
Engineer Officer-of-Watch acknowledges. His chief
E.R.A. swings wheel-throttle-valve open to make
required revolutions. Engine-room telegraph confirms
to wheelhouse and coxswain calls up
voice-pipe—"Wheelhouse-Bridge: 250 revolutions on, sir."
Bridge Officer-of-Watch repeats to captain.)*

The *Skeena* heeled to port on "starboard ten"
To keep the target on the bow. "Steady
On *two-four-seven*." (Harry one at the dip.)
"Left cut on *two-four-six*.... Right cut
On *two-five-three*." (Reporting Doppler)
"Echo high and inclination closing."
The range 1200. "Target moving right:
Centre bearing, *two-five-five*."
One thousand yards: "extent of target—*ten*."

Not ice this time but moving steel submerged—
Two hundred feet of longitudinal plate.
Forged at the Krupp's and tested in the Baltic,
Were answering the taps.

"Stand by depth-charges."

Captain to Chief Yeoman

"Take an emergency report to shore:

'In contact with classified submarine'."

(Chief Yeoman repeats to W.T. office.)

A crackle of Morse, and in bare space of seconds
The warning goes to Admiralty, from there
To allied ships in threatened area,
And on the walls in *Operations*, where
The swastikas and shadows of the U-boats
Follow in replica the Atlantic movements,
A red peg moves along the chart to plot
The first of the disease spots that would pock
The body of the S.C. 42.

Whatever doubt the eye might have imposed
Upon the ear soon vanished with the signals.
Jedmore reported two torpedoes passed
Ahead. *Muneric*, fourth ship in port column,
Attacked, dragged instantly, sank with her iron.
The Commodore—"Saw U-boat on port bow."
Kenogami in contact with another,
A third, a fourth. Suspicions which had wormed
Their way along the vine were proved. The first
Wolf-pack engagement of the Atlantic War
Was on! A fifth ... a seventh! They had trailed
The ships to Greenland waters. Moonlight full,
Without the mercy of clouds, had turned
A traitor to the convoy, cancelling
The northern length of nights. Like teal not yet
Surprised to wing, the silhouetted ships
Awaited leisured barrels from the hunters,
And the warheads drilled them as from open sights.

Orillia, detailed to sweep astern,
Picked up the few survivors, took in tow
The S.S. *Tachee*, badly hit but still
Afloat: rockets were seen in midst of convoy:
A signal from the flagship—"Empire Hudson
Torpedoed on port side." The triple task—
To screen the convoy, counter-attack, and then,
The humane third of rescuing the sailors,
Seemed far beyond the escort's hope or effort.
To save to kill, to kill to save, were means
And ends closely and bloodily allied.
Hundreds of sailors un-lifejacketed
Clawed at the jetsam in the oil and water.
Captains and Commodore were well aware
Of how a lame one in a chase could spatter
With blood the entire herd. High strategy
Demanded of the brain an execution
Protested by the tactics of the heart.
And there was only half an inch or less
Of a steel skin upon the escort's hulls—
Not for self-safety were those ships designed.
Just here the log with its raw elements

Enshrined a saga in a phrase of action.
The *Empire Hudson* listing badly, crew
And officers were disembarked. Someone
Reported—"Secret papers have not been
Destroyed, mersigs, swept-channels, convoy route,
And codes, the CODES!" And as there was a chance
The steamer might not sink, *Kenogami*
Was ordered to embark an officer,
Return him to the listed deck to find
And sink the weighted papers—*which was done.*"
This stark undecorated phrase was just
An interlinear item in the drama,
Three words spelling a deed unadvertised,
When ships announced their wounds by rockets, wrote
Their own obituaries in flame that soared
Two hundred feet and stabbed the Arctic night
Like some neurotic and untimely sunrise.
Exploding tankers turned the sky to canvas.
Soaked it in orange fire, kindled the sea,
Then carpeted their graves with wreaths of soot.
The sea would tidy up its floor in time.
But not just now,—gaskegs and rafts and mops,
Oilskins, sou'westers, sea-boats, duffel coats
Drifted above the night's burnt offerings.
Only the names remained uncharred—*Muneric,*
Ulysses, Baron Pentland, Sally Maersk,
The Empire Crossbill, Empire Hudson, Stargard—
Merely heroic memories by morning.

The early hours of daylight drove the subs
To cover though the escort knew that eyes,
As sleepless as their own but unobserved
Behind the grey-green mesh of swell and lop,
Were following the convoy's desperate plunge.
All knew that no restrictive rules would hedge
This fight: to the last ship, to the last shot,
To the last man, for fair was foul and foul
Was fair in that mêlée of strength and cunning.
Tirpitz and Fisher thirty years before
Had scanned the riddles in each other's eyes.
What was the argument about the belt
That drained the sophistry of principles
Inside a ring? "Hit first, hit hard, hit fast!"
Tirpitz had trumped him with—"Hit anywhere."
And here today only one point was certain—
Sailors above the sea, sailors below,
Drew equally upon a fund of courage.
No one might gamble on the other's fear
Or waning will. Commander Schmidt might flood
His tanks and dive when something on his mirror
Called for discretion, but in his own shrewd time
He could be reckoned on to blow the ballast
And frame that picture on the glass again.
He would come with Botterschult and Rickert,

Von Braundorff, Niebergall, Schippmann and Fritzsche.
They knew their crews would never fail the switches
Or rush the conning towers before the orders,
Though the depth-charges pounded the blood vessels,
Though combing rams just missed them overhead.
In what proportions did the elements
Combine to move those individual pawns
Of power in their massed flesh-and-nerve formation
Across a board? Grit human; bruinine;
Habits that would not heckle a command,
Obedience that sealed the breach of fear,
A frenzy that would spurn the slopes of Reason
Under a rhetoric of Will which placed
Before the *herrenvolk* historic choices—
To scramble up a cliff and vandalize
The sunlight or else perish on the ledges.

These were the enemies the convoy fronted:
Metal to metal, though in this arena
The odds lay heavily with the pursuers,
Even by day—for what were periscopes
At distance of three thousand yards, that reared
Their tiny heads curved like swamp moccasins?
What was their smothered wake compared with that
Propeller wash, that height and drift of smoke,
Those lines of funnels with their sixty hulls?
And so it was a safe bet on the sub
When at high noon one left her nest and sped
Her charge right at the S.S. *Thistleglen*,
Dead at the waterline and full amidships.
It took three minutes for the merchantman
To dock her pigiron on the ocean floor.

"There, there he is!"

Seven cables from the spot
Where suction swirled above the foundering,
The periscope light-grey—one minute only!
The *Skeena* carried out a pounce attack
Of ten depth-charges fired with shallow settings.
The asdic trailed the sub proceeding north
At three-knot speed. *Kenogami* confirmed
Echoes. Depth-charges with deep settings dropped,
The echoes ceased, and a great patch of oil
Surfaced, and a huge bubble like a blister
Broke, close to the position of explosions.
"This time for keeps we pinged his bloody hide, sir:
We've sent him down to join the *Thistleglen*."

With this by day, what could another night
Not call forth from the cupboard? Afternoon
Wore on till dusk with that dramatic lull.
Which acted like narcotics on the heart,
Yet put high-tension circuits in the brain.

"The *Sally Maersk* went down with bread enough

To feed an army for a month."

"But what

A job the corvettes did in rescuing
Them all—the fifty-four under that fire."

"Most of the *Baron Pentland* too."

"Her back

Was broken though her lumber kept her floating."

Could the same chance be taken the next night?

An hour after nightfall and the convoy
Had pierced the sixty-second parallel.
Twelve shortened columns tightened up their gaps,
All ships under instructions—(You will not—repetition—
Not break W.T. silence without deep suspicion of
U-boat presence.) Owing to moon
Rear ships of the port column were instructed
To drop smoke floats should enemy appear
On the port side. Each minute passed, each mile
Northward were credit items on a ledger.
And now quickening the heart, two friendly shadows,
Corvettes, steamed into shape—*Moose Jaw, Chambly*—
Two added to the four. But still the hope
Was on evasion—on the North—to kick
Them with their wounded heels and merge the spoors
Within the Greenland-Iceland ocean tundras.
And so the last night's vigil was repeated.
Although more ominous the silences:
More broken, too, the sleep as the ears buzzed
Still with the dental burr of the point-fives.
And the yellow cordite from the four-point-sevens
Kept up its smart under exhausted eyelids.
The average rate was lowered by three knots.
The *Tachee* was in tow of the *Orillia*,
Fumbling her rudder. From the *Chambly's* deck,
Two miles away, the ships seemed fated targets.
Silent and slow and dark as, clothed with crape.
They journeyed on like mourners, having left
The Saxon burial of their sister ships,
And bearing on themselves the same contagion.
The air was breathing out its prophecy.
So was the water. There was mockery
Within the sea's caress—the way a wave
Would clamber up the bow of the *Moose Jaw*, scout
Around the shadows of the foc's'le,
Tattoo the face of the Bridge and lazily
Slither along the deck and then hiss through
The hawse-pipes as the corvette dipped her nose
To the slow anaesthetic of the swell.
Mockery it was on face and lips and fingers,
For, after her reconnaissance, the sea,
As urging death with a forensic fury,
Would shed her velvet syllables, return

With loaded fists to thunder at the gun-shields,
Trying to crack defence before the battle
Was joined between the "patterns" and the "tubes".

Eleven-thirty, and the navigator,
His coat and boots on in his bunk, completes
A nightmare with a steady mumbling curse.
He thought the order was *Abandon Ship*—
It was an O.D. calling Middle Watch.
He wakes, turns over, and again turns over,
Yawns, stretches and turns out, proceeds to Bridge,
Peers through the blackout curtains, and in dim
Blue battle-light he squints and notes night orders,
The toughest order of the toughest Watch
(Maintain tail sweep from two to four thousand yards),

He focuses binoculars to range
The horizon arcs. "A lot of whales about
Tonight." The echoes picked them up. Four hours!
He has to fight that Middle Watch fatigue,
And as the minutes crawl he sucks life-savers,
Or cracks one on his teeth for company.
A line of spray leaps up above the dodger
And like rawhide cuts him across the face.
Then, too, that phosphorescence on the sea
Is easily mistaken in its darts,
Flashes and curves for what the lookout fears.
Two hours are gone: another two to go.
(That wrist-watch ticks off hours instead of seconds.)
His eyelids blink to ease the strain that falls
Like mist upon a telescopic lens.
A starboard lookout yell jerks back his senses—
"Torpedo bearing green-four-O." Lookout
Recoils from an expected blow that does
Not strike. "Damn porpoises: they always home
In on the bow."

*(The navigating officer wipes the sweat from
his forehead with his sleeve, tells the
sub-lieutenant to take over for a few minutes
as he wants to go to Heads. Then he calls to
a stand-by.)*

"Say, Spinney, what about
A mug of kye?"

"Yes, Sir."

Spinney had not
Yet found his legs. Less than six months before
He had been learning Latin and the class-
Room smell had not been kippered from his system.
To him the ocean was a place of travel,
A blue-green oriental boulevard
Round unknown continents—up to this year;

And even to last night the illusion stayed,
When for his benefit the Borealis
Staged a rehearsal of the Merry Dancers
Before the blood-red footlights till it paled
The myth upon a tracery of starshell.
He now goes to the galley, fills a jug
With kye, picks up a half a dozen mugs,
Stumbles, skates, splashes half of it on deck.
Some drops of rain and sea-foam tincture it.
Along the way a leading-hand of the Watch
And a rheumatic coder cadge a drink,
And by the time that Spinney finds his balance
On the bridge only a soapy seawash greets
The navigator's throat. "What in the name
Of all buck goats is this? Where did you get
This swill?" (He hands it to the sub to drink.)

"Go back and fill her up again,

And keep her clean."

Spinney steps down from Bridge,
Staggers, makes for the ladder, cracks the jug
Against the signal-box before he slides,
Reaches the galley and returns, tries hard
To wean his legs from the quadrangle walk,
Does a Blue Danube on the deck, and then
Revokes his quondam heroes (what a bunch
Of fools those ancients were to travel,
Aeneas was the biggest ass on earth!)
And flinging out his last accusative
At what is limned on the horizon, he
Remeasures his Virgilian cadences
In terms of stresses gliding queazily
Along the black ramps of the North Atlantic.

At ten to four Lieutenant Snell takes over,
And the two victims of the Watch slope down
With brains of fog and eyes of fractured glass.
Their legs go aft by instinct to their bunks.
Their minds well in advance entering a coma
Beyond gun-cotton shock or Gabriel's horn.

'Twas only in a stupor that O'Leary
Recalled his reprimand. When did it happen?
"Yeoman, you dropped no markers with that pattern.
That's standing orders now—smoke-floats to mark
Areas attacked. Ever heard it? Don't you know
Your drill? You'll be in my report in the morning."
O'Leary gagged upon his chewing quid,
Hiccapped, sending a spurt of nicotine
And hydrochloric acid on the sea.
"He said to me, said he, 'O'Leary, don't
You know your drill?'—Say, how the hell would I know?
Nobody tells me nothing in this Navy."

A bo'sun caught the Peggy with a fag.

"Gripes, do you want to bitch this midnight show?
That lighted butt is visible for miles,
And on the starboard wing, too. Don't you know
The one and only moral law of Moses
Is never light a fag on deck at night?
A law you got to learn while in the Service.
A light can be machine-gunned by the escort.
They'd ping your fag and teeth at the same time."

Peggy, out of earshot

"I didn't light it on the deck. I cupped
My hands and took three drags and that was all.
That jockey groomed for donkeys thinks he's got
The whole world by the tail in a down pull.
When I get back to Civvy Street, I'll call him."

O'Meara, Steele and Casey had a lot
To say. They'd gab it when the day came round—
The day the *Stargard* reached her port—but somehow
The water and the salt got in their throats
The moment when the *Stargard* took them under.

The dark was sedative and irritant.
How easy was it for an interval
To muffle the senses with a hushed blackout,
And the diminuendo of the run
Could well delude the reason. This was not
The rate that marked the fever of pursuit,
And nothing from the decks was visible
To show the way the trimmest escort unit
Could be in shackles to a lubber keel,
And have to be replaced in precious moments;
Nothing to show how gyros and magnetics
Could be ungeared by submarine explosions.
For this was information undiffused
Among the crew or countered by illusions,
Or by resumption of the normal tasks.
No one from the *Ulysses* lived to cite
The witness of the E.R.A.s and firemen,
Pounding the steel rungs in that inner trap
When the torpedo struck her gas and oil.

The drama of the night before was over.
No headlines would record as news the toil,
As stokers every hour took temperatures
Of bearings, scribbled them on pads, transferred
Them to the logs and then resumed their rounds
To watch for popping valves, to check the flow
By turning wheels when the full head of steam
Was hitting the square inches of the boilers.
There was no spotlight on the items when
A leading seaman of the watch reported

"The temperature of the sea forty degrees.
The lowering falls are clear, boats off the pins,
The watertight compartments are all closed."
No one would mould the linotype for such
A mass that might survive or not survive
Their tedium of watches in the holds—
The men with surnames blotted by their jobs
Into a scrawl of anonymity.
A body blow at the boilers would untype
All differentiations in the blood
Of pumpmen, wipers, messmen, galley boys
Who had become incorporate with the cogs
On ships that carried pulp and scrap to Europe.

Desire invoking for the memory
Amnesia for the nightmare that had passed,
It might have been a run in peaceful times.
The sounds seemed casual enough—lookouts
Reporting to the officers on watch,
Got back the usual laconic answers.
The turbine notes ran up from C to C
And down according to the scale of speed.
The scraps of speech from duffel-coated forms,
Huddled beneath the after-canopy,
Had by tacit agreement in the eyes
Nothing to do with present urgencies.
A rating "in the rattle" salved his mind
By giving his opinion of a buffer,
Casting suspicion on the buffer's birth
And pedigree. His *b*'s and *g*'s and *s*'s,
Delivered through his teeth in confidence
To the high winds and seas from A-gun deck,
Had all the symptoms of a normal trip.
Only the action-station gongs could jar
That gentle wishful thinking—and they did.

Horse-power to the limit on the engines,
Levied for scout assault and close defence,
Was routed quickly to defence, for short
Beyond believing was the interval
Between the echoes and torpedo hits,
Between them and the spotted periscopes.
The Commodore reported, "*Gypsum Queen*
Torpedoed and sunk." *Alberni* gets an echo.
Five hundred yards, *Kenogami* confirming.
Chambly and *Moose Jaw* get a definite kill
With prisoners, and then a "probable".

The peril of the night before was doubled.
This time the subs had dived within the convoy,
"Attacking from within the lines"—the fear
Above all fears, for, out to sea, the lairs
Might be discerned and the protective screens
Be interposed between them and the convoy.

But now the hazards of the fight were weighted
In favour of the foe. Seven or eight
Out of the estimated twelve were there
Inside or hanging on to flank or rear.
Even blindly they could not miss—on port
And starboard bow, amidships, on the quarter.

Upon the *Skeena's* Bridge the judgment fought
With chaos. Blindness, deafness visited
The brain. Through a wild paradox of sight
And sound, the asdic echoes would not fall
Within their ribbon-tidy categories.
They bounded in confusion from the hulls
Of tankers and corvettes: the ash-can sounds
Were like those of explosions from torpedoes.
Wake-echoes and reverbs, and *quenching* caused
By pitch and roll of a heavy following sea,
Had blended with the sharper pings from steel
To give the effect of a babel and a brawl.

But blindness was the worst. To find the foe
By starshell served indeed to spot the target,
But carved in white the escort's silhouette.
The need called for the risk. A megaphone
Informed the *Skeena* that a sub was seen
Between the columns seven and eight, its course
Marked by a steady hail of tracer bullets.
The *Skeena* tried to ram; the sub escaped
To an adjacent lane and turned right angles
In opposite direction to destroyer.
The shelter of the dark was now a threat
Holding collision as the convoy ships
Made their sharp turn of forty-five degrees.
Her fighting and her navigating lights
Were switched on to identify the *Skeena*,
Scratching the paint upon the merchant hulls.
As orders pelted down the voice-pipe, helm
And engines answering—"Full speed ahead ...
Starboard twenty ... Stop both ... Half-ahead port ...
Half-astern starboard ... Stop starboard ...
Half-ahead starboard ... Full ahead both ..."

This was infighting at its grizzly worst.
The issue grew more leaden as the night
Advanced, and what relief could daylight offer
Against the weary arithmetic count?
The *Winterswyck* blown up, sunk with her phosphate;
Stonepool torpedoed on both sides, gone down
With general cargo and a fleet of trucks.
And matching the confusion on the decks
Was the confusion in the ether, ships
Torpedoed, burning, sinking, hammering out
Their cryptocodes. What listeners could sort them,
Solve those recurring decimals of dots

And those long dashes when the operators
Screwed down the keys—their last official acts—
To give the drowning wails of instruments?
What rescuers could hurry to position?
Only the fighting ships—and they were fighting.

"Which one was that?"

"A tanker bad enough,
But not as bad as that; a flame that would
Frizzle a glacier."

"*Aviation gas?*"

"It could create that light but not that roar,
'Twould cause stokehold concussion miles away,
And wake up Julianehaab."

"'Twas ammunition."

The *Garm* and *Scania* with their lumber lost!
Rockets observed from *Randa* and *Benury*—
The signals ceased—both missing in the morning!

The fourteen sunk and others just afloat,
The remnant staggered on still north-by-east.

* * *

Last night, the second night, and must there come
A third? The ratio of loss had climbed
Beyond all normal fears. The logs themselves
Might not be legible on that third morning.
So far the tale was grim enough—but six
Saved of the *Jedmore's* crew; eight from the *Stonepool*;
Less than half from the *Garm*; six from the *Stargard*;
Two from the *Winterswyck*; and a great blank—
The fate of crew unknown—was logged for *Scania*,
The *Empire Springbuck*, *Crossbill*, *Thistleghen*,
Muneric and *Ulysses*. The third night
To come! Those hammerheads were off there still,
Hiding, biding. How many? How those freighters
Foundered! How fast? Minutes or seconds?

"Did

You see the way the *Crossbill* took her dive?
Her cargo steel, she went down like a gannet."

"The *Muneric* beat her to it. A life-belt
Would have no chances in that suction-hole,
Say nothing of a man. I saw her blades
Rise, edge themselves against the *Alberni* gunfire."

Why should those phobias of speed, colour
And shape belonging to the night alone
Return to plague the mind in open daylight?
Would those fires start again? A chemistry
That would incinerate its own retort

Raged round the *Stonepool* when she sank. Water
And fire, water and oil, blood, fire and salt
Had agonized their journey through nerve-endings
To char themselves upon a graphite-grey
Precipitate. Survivors from the *Stargard*,
Who would for life carry their facial grafts,
Told of the scramble from the boiler rooms,
Up canted ladders and the reeling catwalks,
Only to find their exit was the sea,
And there to find their only exit from
Its cauldron surface was its drowning depth.
Where find the straws to grasp at in this sea?
Where was the cause which once had made a man
Disclaim the sting of death? What ecstasy
Could neutralize this salt and quench this heat
Or open up in victory this grave?
But oil and blood were prices paid for blood
And oil. However variable the time,
The commerce ever was in barter. Oil
Propelled the ships. It blew them up. The men
Died oil-anointed as it choked the "Christ!"
That stuttered on their lips before the sea
Paraded them as crisps upon her salver.
This was the payment for the oil designed
To sleek the gears and punch the pistons in
And over Alamein and Normandy.
And blood mixed with the sea-foam was the cost
Of plasma safely carried in the holds
Across an ocean to a continent,
There to unblanch the faces on the fields,
There to reweave the vines for fresher fruits
In a new harvest on a hoped tomorrow;
And over all, the purchase of the blood
Was that an old dishonoured postulate,
Scrubbed of its rust, might shine again—*Granted*
That what the mind may think, the tongue may utter.

* * *

Three morning hours were gone and no attack.
Were the U-boats destroyed or shaken off
Or still awaiting night? What mattered it?
What mattered the rotation of the earth?
The clock had struck in seasons those two nights.
And Time was but a fiddler off his key.
Treading the youth through middle age towards death.

From the lookout a signal—*Smoke ahead!*
Was it a surface raider? This would mean
Extinction, still another word for sleep.
The smoke took shape—five funnels pouring it.
Binoculars from the crowsnests and bridges
Of all the ships, escort and convoy, swept
The horizon: dots turned into lines, the lines

To hulls and decks and guns and turrets—five
British destroyers making thirty knots.
This was the restoration for the hearts
Of fifty ships—the maimed, the blind, the whole.
Around them raced the fighters, plotting out
Suspicious zones whenever asdic sweeps
Reported doubtful contacts, searching far
Afield, then closing to resume position
On screen. And so the S.C. 42,
With mutilated but with fashioned columns,
Covered the lap across the Denmark Strait
With that same chivalry of knots which meant
Rescue for hundreds in the Greenland battle.
For with the battered *Tachee* still in tow
Of the *Orillia*, they reached the two
Most northern outposts of the Old World havens,
Rock-armoured Hvalfjord and Reykjavik,
Then took their southern stretch until the convoy
Sighted Inishtrahull and there dispersed.
And the fighting ships, miraculously unscathed,
Proceeded to Moville, to Lishahally,
Thence up the winding Foyle to seek their berths
Around the crowded docks of Londonderry.

* * * * *

BY E. J. PRATT

Newfoundland Verse
The Witches' Brew
Titans
The Iron Door
The "Roosevelt" and The "Antinoe"
Verses of the Sea
Many Moods
The Titanic
The Fable of the Goats
Brébeuf and His Brethren
Dunkirk
Still Life
Collected Poems

[End of *Behind the Log*, by E. J. Pratt]