

# THE CARIBOU HUT

Margaret Duley



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# THE CARIBOU HUT

*The Story of  
A Newfoundland Hostel*

MARGARET DULEY

This book was sponsored by the St. John's War Services' Association, and written in the early part of 1949, the year that Newfoundland gave up her independent status to become the tenth Province of Canada.

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*To*  
NEWFOUNDLAND

“To that loved land—and dearer still—the  
memory of the past.”

*Cover design, “The Narrows, Entrance to St. John’s Harbour,”  
by Darroch Macgillivray*

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## CHAPTER I THE NEWFOUNDLAND BACKGROUND

“There lies a land in the west and north  
Whither the bravest men went forth  
And daunted not by fog and ice  
They reached at last to a Paradise.”

P. E. GOLDSMITH

Is it a Paradise, this Newfoundland that is rock-lipped, high-piled and washed by a greedy sea?

Though Paradise is a relative state there always existed the romantic illusion that Newfoundland might be the real thing. But if it was not Heaven, we hope it was a haven to the numberless soldiers and sailors who came during the Second World War, to stay and rest awhile before returning to battle on the land, in the air, on or under the sea. What Newfoundland heart and hand could do was done, but now, in retrospect, in the fateful year of 1949, the Caribou Hut, the hostel of which we write, seems to express the bones and blood of old Newfoundland, to speak of her salty spirit, to illustrate her dogged devotion to a cause, and to point to something that truly typified “the good old days.”

As a separate entity Newfoundland is dead, but now that she has become the tenth Province of Canada and accepted a lower political status; now that she must merge her rugged individualism in the group spirit, she can review the time when she lived her largest period of history, when she was peacefully invaded.

Newfoundland has always been solitary with a tempestuous history that was fathered by rock, wind and sea, but a decade ago she was jolted from her isolation. She was re-discovered, overrun by a stream of humanity that sooner or later found its way to the Caribou Hut, the hostel which stood a stone’s throw from the sea, and at the foot of the ascending land-terraces that form the capital town of St. John’s.

The Caribou Hut became a complex, exciting venture to Newfoundlanders. It was a bit of lively history; life pouring out “the rich, red wine of youth.” It was a service that often walked the extra mile, and quite literally gave its cloak also. Every visitor who came to the Hut seemed like a story written in blood-red ink. Every hour at the hostel was saturated with interest, pathos, energy, and vicarious adventure for the local people. Every volunteer who served, glimpsed a more unselfish way of life.

And it happened in Newfoundland, the North Atlantic Island that has been called so many names: the Ancient Colony, the Oldest and Smallest Child, the Empire Cinderella, Helluland, the Land of Naked Rocks, the Fish-and-Fog-Land, the Graveyard of the Atlantic, and once in a bitter piece of journalism it was called the Imperial Slum.

Immediately from the names one glimpses a contrast of opinion. So what is the background of this rock-indented land? Old Sagas tell of Norsemen grown heady and drunk with the new-world beauty of pointed evergreen in the forests of spruce and fir, and the plentiful skinful of fruit in the luscious blueberry.

Cabot, at his first landfall, is alleged to have made rapt comment.

“Buena Vista!” (Oh, Happy Sight.)

Pioneers coined nostalgic names for the bleak spots on which they settled, and Newfoundland is dotted with Heart's Delights', Desires', and Little Heart's Eases'.

In harsh contrast to romantic over-statement one notices that a pioneer road in Newfoundland was named Burst Heart Hill, so it seemed as if one early name had to abandon the fantasy world in order to speak realistically of an uphill climb towards colonization.

The writer who covered the Atlantic Meeting between Churchill and Roosevelt in Newfoundland waters, in 1941, spoke gloomily of the approach to the rock-ribbed shore.

[1]“We saw,” he said, “a wavering coastline of desolate little beaches and coves, behind which the country rose in mournful hills—it looked to me like perfect Red Indian country.”

Is there any truth between these extreme opinions?

As a commonsense answer one could insist that it was all in the point of view.

Newfoundland could be Paradise to the native, “the livvyer” as he is sometimes called in the vernacular, because home is where the heart is, but just as one begins to visualise the native, happy at home, he contradicts himself in no uncertain terms.

All Newfoundlanders know of the historic entry regarding John Cabot in the Privy Purse expenses.

“To hym that found the new isle, £10.”

When the native Newfoundlander becomes exasperated with his moody land he swears that John Cabot should have received ten years.

It is indisputable that few people speak of Newfoundland moderately. Appraisal frequently resembles the bit of brutality in the Shavian character who wanted a thick pair of boots to kick with, and a thick pair of lips to kiss with.

That is the Newfoundland touch—the extreme attitude towards a bleak heritage—the veering opinion that changes with the winds. But the basic characteristic of Newfoundland is drama. Climatically the country is deranged, flouting the calendar most of the year. Sometimes it likes a touch of spring in January, and frequently winter in June. If it likes to change its temperature forty degrees in a day, that is just Newfoundland. One has to be tough to be a resident. But how magnificent the country can look, how big and bold, and how strong of light.

There is rich fullness and bleak emptiness—rock like geological skeletons. There is delayed spring, suddenly made delicate and beautiful by the drifts of white pear-blossom flushed by the stalky Rhodora. Indigenous bloom comes from the shining Blue Flag, the Iris, that could so rightfully be called the fisherman's orchid. There is the purple-blue smudge of the blueberries, whose low, speared leaves redden in autumn to stain the ground blood-red. On blueberry ground, autumn looks as if it had really murdered summer.

And the livelihood of the Newfoundland folk?

There is a primitive story of the daily bread wrested strongly from the sea, and the rigours of the ice-fields.

The Newfoundlander is obliged to stay close to the elemental truths; to be a homespun creature in tune with natural things. He suffers long and stays kind, and perhaps, because he is so subject to nature's hostility, he inclines towards a warm hospitality. Because he loves a cause he loved the cause of the Caribou Hut which came into being the year that Winston Churchill picked up the dimmed political torch thrown by Neville Chamberlain; the momentous year when the new Prime Minister shook England with his platform of “blood, toil, tears and sweat.”



It was at the close of that year that Newfoundland became a boom country, and the invasion sounded like an oncoming stampede, after some one had shouted, “gold!”

Why?

Because Newfoundland had the most important geographical position between the two hemispheres. She was furthest away from America, and the nearest to Europe. Her capital town was the most easterly port, stuck out in the North Atlantic. Other than that St. John’s had an almost land-locked harbour that could wrap comforting arms round the ships fighting the Battle of the Atlantic.

From earliest times Newfoundland harbours meant peace after storm. The “Snug Harbour” is more than a name. Bare, and bleak as they are, the harbours are magnificently safe, having represented new-world anchorage to the bold buccaneers manning the cockleshell boats which crossed the ocean “by guess and by God” to fish in Newfoundland waters, as early as 1502, after Cabot had declared that the cod-fisheries of Newfoundland were richer than the silver-mines of Peru.

St. John’s harbour is one of the safest in the world and it appears as a cosy shelter after a fierce tussle with the open sea. It is also like a secret, an unexpected surprise.

As a ship approaches the coast one becomes fearful that the captain might have lost his mind, when it seems all too evident that he is steering towards solid rock. Then the miracle appears—the hills open—the ship runs through a passage called “The Narrows”—it enters a harbour, about a mile and a half long, and a quarter of a mile wide. The flustered ship is most happily in port.

Normally St. John’s harbour has plenty of space for its steamers, schooners, sealers, salt-ships, oil-tankers and visiting craft of any kind. The water can always roll spaciously around the ships rising and subsiding with the tide, but when St. John’s became a swollen port and garrison town the water could scarcely be seen for the ships. It became an epic sight for the far-sighted Newfoundlanders who unconsciously give their first glance to the sea. It was endless fascination to study the changing face of the harbour, to see an empty bit of space immediately occupied by another ship. The historic harbour had become a marine parking-place marked out by an economical hand.

Against the skyline the ships resembled a forest of shorn trees, with stout funnels like tree-stumps. Near the water the hulls were closely packed, and their camouflage gave a weird illusion of a gigantic display of modern art. All the colours, at the cool end of the spectrum, seemed to be bent—to be waved—in order to render the ships adaptable to every blue-grey-green-yellow mood of the sea.

No Newfoundlander will ever forget the harbour, and the active but stealthy hush-hush when a convoy began to assemble. Though secrecy was maintained it was impossible not to know when something was in the wind because of the knowledge of the human eye, though the ships would begin to stir as if imploring the land to look away. It was equally impossible not to realise the near submarine warfare when the wrecks came limping in; when the ships anchored full of tragic holes, and with weary lists that told their own tales. As long as contemporary memory lasts, who will forget the wreck that stood for so long with a great hole raised high above water-line through which the gulls swooped, to be lost to view for a second before they reappeared on the other side? That action became part of the waterfront—the full circle of white wings that suggested guardian angels, though people used to study that ship rather nervously, and think that it was a bad advertisement for the Battle of the Atlantic. But perhaps it also made them aware of the value of the Caribou Hut.

Newfoundland was sometimes in the frontline, and knowledge after the event revealed that torpedoes had been fired into St. John's harbour; that ships standing at anchor, in other places, had disappeared in front of wildly incredulous eyes. The ships were there, and not there. One was forced to recognize a sneaking menace.

St. John's further had a full wartime black-out which intensified the problems of the overpopulated town in providing the screen for unlawful action. As the natural tone of Newfoundland is sombre, a St. John's moonless night was frequently one of Stygian darkness.

What is St. John's like, the seaboard town that is as old as any on this side of the Atlantic?

It rises steeply from the waterfront in a series of rocky terraces, and even when the summit is reached it continues to undulate like a country that abhors flatness.

St. John's is a tall, flat-faced, wooden town, which might have been handsome had it been allowed to follow a natural evolution. But like the Phoenix it kept rising from its own ashes, and as it rose it grew plainer and plainer through the sheer compulsion of providing a quick roof over the human head.

Four times in a century fire destroyed St. John's, the wind whipping the fires until they became great holocausts. Newfoundland is a country where wind and fire make vicious company, but truly the wind will always make the country one of the "Big Breath." The wind never lets people off. It bends them double, sniffs at them like dogs tempted by a bone; it snatches at the fashionable hat and the new hair-do; and in pioneer days it is recorded that the settlers went out tied together. Once, it is told, that a wrestler came to Newfoundland, and he became so tormented by the wind, that he stopped in the street to fight it. When the travelling Newfoundlander returns home, he feels comfortably sure he is back when he gets an orange-wrapper, or a paper-bag full in the face. It is not unusual to pass a place, where building is in process, and receive a necklace of shavings, and on a big windy day, any Newfoundlander can read the news from the papers that blow round his feet.

Yet, strangely enough, the wind often spares the frail wooden structures, and the flimsy fish-flakes that the fisherman perches so precariously on solid rock. It could be that God has taught the Newfoundlander some natural geometry that the wind recognizes and respects.

Even St. John's looks frail in contrast to its hard foundation. Visitors are inclined to ask how the thin-looking, wooden houses withstand the wind?

It is always difficult to see ourselves as others see us, and the Newfoundlander is often surprised, and irritated, by outside analysis of his country and himself. But similarity of opinion is arresting. The visitors flinch from the wind, and ask if it is always like that? Everyone remarks the lack of architecture, town-planning, and the wooden houses. Some one said they were like "wooden boxes, turned any-which way." Everyone is inclined to think that the houses look weather-beaten outside, and unexpectedly handsome inside.

More outspoken and personal comment frequently infuriates the native who takes fire easily. A well-known book, written about the Banks of Newfoundland, said that the native had come to resemble a cod-fish himself from so much association with his natural resource.

Another observer said, after watching some Newfoundland soldiers pass by, "faces like live rocks."

A modern historian, who declared that there would always be backward places on the earth for reasons of climate, gave Newfoundland as an example. Tradition says Newfoundland has nothing but weather. Yet the old island can manifest a splendour unknown to temperate places. Its stayed bud and blossom can leap into what the native calls "gunshot growth."

Summer can come full-flowered. Then the weather-ridden Newfoundlander will “oh” and “ah” in the awed recognition of God’s country, at last.

Ask anyone who has visited Newfoundland how he enjoyed himself? Invariably he will say that he had a wonderful time, but prior to 1940, visitors stood out in the sparsely populated country. Local hosts were pleased to see them and enjoy a contact with the outside world, but when thousands and thousands of visitors began to arrive, Newfoundlanders were overwhelmed, especially in St. John’s, which was in the state of being too small a place for too many people. The tall, wooden houses were suddenly required to have elastic-sides. People began to feel crowded as if they were being asked to pull rabbits out of a hat.

Something had to be done. But though bewildered, St. John’s had the Imperial spirit. Was it not the very cornerstone of the British Empire? Had it not nurtured the spot where Sir Humphrey Gilbert had claimed Newfoundland in the name of Queen Elizabeth, declaring that anyone uttering words of dishonour to Her Majesty should lose his ears?

Though larger and better-known Colonies did not always remember it, the British Empire had started in St. John’s, Newfoundland.

That was in 1583.

In 1940 Newfoundland was re-discovered. Britain, Canada, and the United States had suddenly recognized her as a bastion for North American defence.

But there was something else highly strategic in Newfoundland—the great airport—conceived in 1936, as if some British statesmen had experienced Imperial prevision; as if they knew how important a Newfoundland airport would be when the sea-routes were being made impossible with submarine warfare.

While the United States was still neutral, and it was manufacturing bombers for Britain, there arose big transportation difficulties. Such bulky aircraft required shipping beyond the capacity of Britain, and even the ships they had were beginning to go down in the Battle of the Atlantic.

There stood the Newfoundland airport.

When the situation was going from bad to worse, some one had a brain-wave.

“Fly all the bombers,” he said, “from the airport in Newfoundland, under their own steam.”

It was inspiration, Heaven-sent, and the beginning of the Newfoundland invasion. The country became a spring-board for squadrons of bombers, while young men of all nations arrived to fly them overseas, and to come back to do the same thing over again. These young airmen began to appear in St. John’s for week-end leave and there were very few places for them to go. Then the Canadians arrived to defend the airport, and they too began to appear in town seeking distraction beyond its scope.

Those vigorous young men, made fighting fit and fit to fight, were in urgent need of entertainment that did not exist. For that reason St. John’s threatened to become loose and disorderly. There were reports of broken windows and very big fights in very little quarters. Modest little ice-cream parlours, that had never seen anything wilder than teen-agers sipping soda through straws, reported a far and wide flinging of chairs and tables, as well as other outbursts of misdirected energy. Though money began to flow freely, conservative and unhappy proprietors were willing to take less money if they could be sure of a whole café next day.

At first the Newfoundland civilian was stunned. He had always had his country and his roads to himself. He could dawdle, and enjoy both in the spirit of undisturbed ownership. Now

he felt dispossessed, crowded on his own streets, mowed down by the ever-increasing numbers of dun-coloured, army-vehicles. The strangers were strutting, becoming the “big-shots.” They looked down their noses at the natives. They were disdainful of a hard old heritage. They began to call the townfolk “the Newfies” and like Queen Victoria, the Newfoundlanders were not amused.

But worse was yet to come. At first it was like a blow beneath the belt, the absolute change, a possible change of sovereignty that stuck in the local throat.

On August 20th: 1940, Winston Churchill was speaking in the House of Commons, and Newfoundland was big news.

Was it possible that he was saying this?

<sup>[2]</sup>“Presently we learned that anxiety was also felt in the United States about air and naval defenses of their Atlantic seaboard, and President Roosevelt has recently made it clear that he would like to discuss with us, and the Dominion of Canada, the development of American naval and air-facilities in Newfoundland and the West Indies. There is, of course, no question of any transfer of sovereignty—that has never been suggested, or of any action being taken without the consent, or against the wishes of the various Colonies concerned, but for our part, His Majesty’s Government, are entirely willing to accord defence facilities to the United States on a ninety-nine years’ lease basis, and we feel sure that our interests, no less than theirs, and the interests of the Colonies themselves, and of Canada and Newfoundland will be served thereby. These are important steps. Undoubtedly this process means that these two great organizations of the English-speaking democracies, the British Empire and the United States will have to be somewhat mixed up.”

Somewhat mixed up?

No Newfoundlander could hear or read further. He was already mixed up, confused, quite sure that he was being made an American overnight. Even when he realized that there would be no change of sovereignty he still knew that the Yanks were coming, not only for wartime, but for ninety-nine years.

Ninety-nine years!

The greatest optimist of longevity could not hope to live long enough to get his country back to himself.

It was unbelievable. The Yanks had ninety-nine years’ lease on lands in Newfoundland for the establishment of naval and military bases, in consideration of releasing at once to Great Britain fifty American destroyers.

<sup>[3]</sup>Fifty destroyers! So that was the price!

Newfoundland was shaken to the core of her old, rugged heart, and the first reactions were tempestuous. An ancient privacy was being violated, an independent country was being invaded, and it was useless to insist that a people had been consulted. So *that* was what Newfoundland was worth to Britain. Sold, up the river, for fifty destroyers!

When the native got his breath he began to examine the terms of the agreement more craftily.

It was definitely laid down that local labour must be used in ordinary construction. The fisherman knew he could beach his boat and take a rest from the sea. The “livvyer” understood construction. Was he not a natural Jack-of-all-trades, accustomed to entering the virgin forest to cut wood for his house, his boat, his oars? Now the seams of his boat could open wide. The Americans were rich. They paid the highest wages for the shortest hours. The fisherman could come to town and get steady work, with regular pay, and his bread and butter

would no longer be subject to the caprice of the seasons, or to the foreign markets. Let the Yanks come! They could usher in a reign of prosperity that was more than welcome in Newfoundland. They would build a naval and military base in Argentia. They would build a streamlined fort on the outskirts of St. John's, all along the softly rolling slopes of a lakeside where the Newfoundlander had held his annual Regatta from time immemorial. The beautiful Quidi Vidi, the lake, "the pond" that represented the local festival.

Now it was gone to the Yanks for fifty destroyers.

Quidi Vidi? But it was part of everyday life, the walk on a fine day, "the drive round the pond" to round off the evening, the place where one skated, where the horses raced in winter and the boats sailed in summer.

It was a bitter pill on the St. John's palate.

The Americans would spoil the day of the races. They would erect prohibitive gates with sentries alongside. There would be Yankee troops where the Newfoundlander had placed his wheel-of-fortune, his tents, and his band-stand where the band played "The Banks of Newfoundland" or "Comin' up the Pond" at the end of every race. The time-honoured melodies that could raise the native from the dead, would now fuse with the "Star Spangled Banner." It was a time of mourning indeed, a time for an old-world lament.

Everywhere it was change, startling change. Newfoundland would never be the same again. One could hear the old days in recession. Even Churchill, the instigator, seemed to know that himself. His every word acknowledged a period of history, and of humanity, in a sharp crook of evolution. An old order was being broken up—the turmoil—the war—the blood, toil, tears and sweat represented the convulsive pangs of the new-world order, and Newfoundland was drawn in.

<sup>[4]</sup>"For my part," said Churchill, "looking into the future, I do not view the problem with any misgiving. I could not stop it if I wished. It is like the Mississippi—it just keeps rolling along. Let it roll. Let it roll on full-flood, inexorable, irresistible, benignant, to broader lands and better days."

Newfoundlanders understood talk like that. They were sea-people, conditioned to the rise of the flood-tide, sometimes carrying all before it. They knew that the sea gave and the sea took away.

Newfoundland began to rise on a flood-tide, and to adapt herself to a new way of life.

The Americans arrived to swell the already large numbers in the already bursting town. The troops came in a gigantic transport which the sea walloped, as she stayed uncomfortably off-shore, fearful of the narrow entrance to St. John's. A salty townsfolk chuckled with mirth when the wonder-working Americans were brought in by a local skipper. Somehow that made things more equal when the vital young Americans overran the town.

In St. John's the human element was forced to adapt itself to complete change, but the old country herself behaved like the "Bedlamer" she sometimes was. It was not surprising to people who had always claimed that Newfoundland herself was the creature, and the people on her crust merely appendages. The Island sulked, doing her best to justify her bad reputation. Like an unreconciled shrew she veiled her face in her finest fogs, making it difficult to see all the strangers. One merely heard them grumbling about the backwater to which they had been sent—no wonder it was called "foreign service".

The Americans became more vitamin-conscious, wondering if the lack of summer-sun would take the enamel off their teeth. As for the Newfoundlanders they did not miss what they

had never had. If it was November in June, that was just Newfoundland acting up, and moaning about the change.

The local eye was on the American steam-shovel gouging the base of a granite cliff at the foot of Quidi Vidi, but now the local mind was appeased. The Americans had gone to the bottom of the pond. The Regatta would still go on!

The steam-shovel had become an attraction to which men took their wives and children, but for a while the labourer-fisherman hung back. He was a pick and shovel man, used to working the long way round. But he was a quick learner. After the first strangeness was over, he was ready to work the quick way, to help build an American fort on Newfoundland soil.

So the home-folks came as well, to add a few more to the crowd.

The Canadians brought a whole regiment and built another headquarters in another part of the town.

East, west, north and south there were men, as well as a whole floating population on the harbour. It was both Bedlam and Babel, with the unfortunate civilian lost between uniformed men. The streets thundered and broke down under the weight of army-vehicles. Mechanical equipment made loud snorting noises. It was exciting, but wild and disorganized, with the strangers carrying all before them. When the black-out fell, people were unhappily aware that every law was being broken. Quiet householders began to find soldiers and sailors everywhere; sitting on their doorsteps, dating in their gardens, and maybe jackknifing in their doorways as they took a little nap.

St. John's had become a Mecca for women. The older girls persuaded their parents it was time to leave school. The maids gave notice because they could make better money elsewhere, and stay out later at night. Every girl had a "fella," even those who had never had a date in their lives. Some thought that the sentry-box was a peaceful place for a date when the rest of the town was so crowded.

Parents felt the loosening of all authority and the lowering of every moral standard. Every girl felt that her boy might die; therefore she aimed to please. The rapidly changing dates became the same dream, only with a different face, and perhaps from another wartime service. There were many Lili Marlenes, under the lamp-posts, and by the barracks-gates.

Definitely something must be done.

When confusion was at its height some one glimpsed the possibilities of a wartime hostel, of a place of entertainment, and with the vision came the plan, and an implacable determination to organize. Some one called a meeting—and the seed of the Caribou Hut was sewn on very fruitful ground.

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[1] *Atlantic Meeting* by H. V. Morton, page 93.

[2] *Blood, Sweat, and Tears* by Winston S. Churchill, p. 351.

[3] "Sept 3rd, 1940. The United States transfer 50 of their older destroyers to the Royal Navy. Britain agrees to lease to U.S.A. for 99 years without charge naval and air bases in the North and South Atlantic." P. 354, *Blood, Sweat, and Tears*.

[4] *Blood, Sweat, and Tears* by Winston S. Churchill, p. 351.

## CHAPTER II THE PATTERN

“. . . to lick it into form.”

ROBERT BURTON

### THE FINANCE

“Money which represents the prose.”

EMERSON

The meeting which represented the beginning of the St. John's War Services' Association, was convened on October 2nd, 1940, by the Canadian Club of St. John's at the suggestion of an officer of the Canadian Auxiliary War Services. Its purpose was to consider ways and means of providing accommodation and entertainment for the members of the army, navy, and air-force who might be passing through St. John's.

To this meeting was invited, one member each, of the town's most influential clubs, societies and associations, with the hope that each individual member would report the cause to the group he represented and thus, win wide and representative support.

From such a capable gathering the framework of administration was immediately procurable. There was little need for persuasion as every man realized the need of constructive action in his disordered town. The meeting resolved at once to:—

- (1) Provide billets in private homes for troops from the airport who might be granted week-end leave in St. John's.
- (2) Establish a hostel for men of all branches of the services where some overnight accommodation could be provided, and where arrangements could be made for their entertainment and comfort.

As a temporary relief the group resolved to take some immediate steps towards the billeting of men in private homes, though everyone acknowledged the bigger need of giving first and foremost consideration to the founding of a hostel that would make an inclusive service for board, recreation and entertainment; of procuring the building for it, where a man could find “a home away from home.”

The incipient organizers who glimpsed the size and complexity of the scheme, realized that they must win the spontaneous and sustained interest of the government, city and townsfolk. After that they would look for the building.

Everyone knew where to look.

The local eye could visualize a rectangular building which had been standing on the waterfront for thirty years, like a memorial to Sir Wilfred Grenfell, “the Labrador doctor” who had sponsored it as a hostel for seamen and sealers. Out on the brick façade was carved the name, “King George V Institute” and inside were ready-made facilities for board and lodging, and the entertainment of men.

Individual memory could picture a commodious basement with a swimming-pool, bowling-alley and a room for table-tennis. It could glimpse the promise in the entrance-lounge where an open-grate could be lit to suggest the home-fire to the incoming soldier and sailor. There were kitchens with big ovens that could provide home-cooked meals. There was a room

sizeable enough for a canteen, another suitable for an auditorium where dances, movies, shows, concerts, and sing-songs could take place. There was more space that could be converted into reading and writing rooms, and better still there were upstairs bedrooms for the accommodation of overnight guests. The building was outwardly weather-beaten, but it stood solidly, like a service already in operation.

As the King George V Institute was under the control of the Newfoundland Commission of Government clear-cut action was indicated. It was resolved by the meeting:—

- (1) To become the nucleus of a St. John's War Services' Committee.
- (2) To appoint a sub-committee to discuss the project of a hostel with the government.

Newfoundland authority was fully aware of the needs of the times. The government co-operated expeditiously by placing at the disposal of the committee, the basement and ground floor of the Institute, three rooms on the second floor, and all the men's bedrooms still in existence on the third floor. The government further guaranteed to meet the costs of cleaning and renovating the building up to the sum of \$5,000. It would continue to pay for the heat and light, to maintain the outside structure, and to contribute the services of a janitor, fireman and night-watchman, as long as the Institute operated as a wartime hostel.

It was an auspicious beginning though the government made it abundantly clear that it would accept no financial liability for any further operating costs. Those responsibilities must be shouldered by the aspiring, but at present penniless committee.

At their second meeting the group, calling itself, the St. John's War Services' Committee had become the inheritors of enormous responsibilities, but they were men of stout hearts and good heads. In spite of their many personal undertakings in the social and economic worlds, they were not intimidated. They invested themselves with power and authority by incorporating as the St. John's War Services' Association, and thus became officially known in the town and the whole country. They elected to office knowledgeable men with infinite staying power. They established an Executive with final authority for the complete venture. They shouldered the burden for the unknown weight of things to come.

Thus the Executive became the head, the finance, the centre controlling the ever-widening circle, and that heroic body functioned at high-pressure until 1945, and neither the richest pen, nor the desire to accord praise where it is truly due can ever do that body justice. But in the invisible worlds of mind and spirit one knows that all the trumpets sound sometimes, and the echo of those rich notes still linger in Newfoundland's big overtones. One is reminded of the story of the man who rebuked over-statement by saying that one "thank you" was sufficient when it was sincere enough.

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When the cleaning and the painting was done the "Caribou" Hut was declared officially opened by the Governor of the Colony on December 23rd, 1940.

The opening itself illustrated the extent of the Newfoundland invasion. Never had there been so much lustre. There were representatives from city, church and state, and from the army, navy and the air. The hostel flashed with the insignia on khaki, navy and air-force blue, with red tabs and gold braid, while outside a guard of honour made a precision display.

The opening illustrated the St. John's background and it was something for the native-Newfoundlander to be there, and to think of his isolated land in the foreground of activity.

So the hostel was launched and its doors flung wide-open for all the varied comrades-in-arms of the non-commissioned class.

The Caribou Hut had arrived to stay as long as the war endured.



Why was the hostel called the Caribou Hut?

Because the name is a symbol of Newfoundland plenty and the word entitles many local ventures, being indicative of a bounteous natural resource.

Caribou is the promise of rich, red meat for the isolated settler. It is sport for the huntsman. There was an issue of stamps called “the Caribou Issue.” There is a place in Gallipoli renamed “Caribou Hill” by the Newfoundlanders who were there during the first World War. The Caribou was the chosen emblem for the Newfoundland Regiment from 1914-1918. It made a design for the memorial at Beaumont Hamel to the flower of Newfoundland youth, and so that the Caribou Monument should be closer to home its replica stands in Bowring Park to keep the homefolks in sight of the faraway shrine.

The hostel was a Newfoundland effort, so it was fitting to preserve a tradition, and name it the Caribou Hut.

This record of the virtues, the failings, the struggles and the accomplishments of the Hut is the real “thank you” letter to the Newfoundlanders, and all the visitors who came to lend a hand. It is a greeting to many who came and stayed awhile; a “hello” to tell them that we never forget.

Before going into voluntary liquidation the St. John’s War Services’ Association decided to sponsor this little book so that some of the sprawling information might be co-ordinated for the purpose of showing the Newfoundlanders the volume of their wartime activities. Also, with some regret, the Executive ventured to think that a record might be useful should Newfoundland again become a bastion for North American defence.

After deciding to sponsor this book the Executive decided to depersonalize the story, except for the inevitable naming of the Commission of Government in Newfoundland, and the Canadian Red Cross which acted like the Lady Bountiful, the fairy-godmother, and the seemingly inexhaustible cruse of oil. Whenever there was giving to be done the Canadian Red Cross seemed to always be at the top of the list with service and goods; but there never was a time when the joint-services in Newfoundland did not contribute most generously to the Caribou Hut. Then the story could not be written without naming and renaming the Young Men’s Christian Association of Canada. The Y.M.C.A. worked along with the hostel during all its growing-pains. It was the source which provided, free of charge, a succession of trained managers for the Hut. It was an advisory association which could shape policy from its own broad field of experience. It knew how to head new ventures in the right direction. It was the means of co-ordinating the work of the many sub-committees, and because of the Y.M.C.A. the organization of the St. John’s War Services’ Association was considerably facilitated. There was always a resident-manager, and later on a programme-director, as well as a desk-clerk paid for by the Canadian Council. Frequently the trained efficiency of the Y.M.C.A. resembled cool sanity when the zealous, but less-disciplined service was rising to fever-heat.

In retrospect it is difficult to recapture the energy, vitality and resourcefulness of the whole venture. It would be more difficult to attempt to enumerate the people who were identified with the hostel. Names are personal things, belonging to time and place, but service is universal with an ageless quality, inherent in spirit.

Again to try and list the numberless organizations, societies, clubs, groups and centres, who contributed as a unit, would result in a book of names only. The best of records can miss something, or some one, and many registered workers brought others along, from the floating population of St. John’s that was like the ebb and flow of the tide.

We find, in assessing our all-over wartime numbers that there is no complete record. Defence was joint and authority had many heads. Official Newfoundland herself was often in a turmoil, frantic to get on with her own job. It was indisputable that the independent old island had been occupied, and often it could do no more than play host to an inter-allied party, with many gate-crashers from the Battle of the Atlantic. Newfoundland is receding from her largest period of history without a full sense of assimilation.

Also to attempt to enumerate would be a sure way to evoke hurt feelings. Even with the greatest care we could anticipate, after publication, the reproachful letter saying, "I was there and I was not mentioned."

So we are nameless. Beyond that there is the question of relative values. Big and little service might be thrown on a pair of scales and make a perfect balance. Half an hour of some person's time can represent more than a day of time from a leisured and privileged life.

The size of the financial donation illustrates the same principle. The time-honoured story of the widow's mite could be listed equally beside the millionaire's cheque, so if anyone feels that service was disproportionate, we suggest that it was relative, springing from the diversities of human background and fortune.

To launch the hostel was one thing. To keep it going represented planning, organization, daily work and constant supervision. As we have said, authority belonged to the Executive and that body maintained unflagging zeal. Others came and went, picked up and laid down, started ardently and capitulated to fatigue and boredom, but the Executive rooted itself like rock in shifting sands, so the short-time worker can be humbled when he learns that it was the Executive's decision to be nameless.

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How did the venture evolve towards its larger growth, and what, in truth, can be written of administration?

To insist that there was a static pattern would be to write falsely. The St. John's War Services' Association was obliged to be stable in quality but extremely flexible in organization. Whenever a working or advisory committee was needed, it was selected from the most competent sources available, but often certain ventures required temporary committees which only lived long enough to fill a need of the moment, and at one point, when an all-over organization seemed rooted and stable, it was found necessary to over-haul and remodel. Then a new alignment of committees was drawn up under the broad headings of administration and planning.

But, in the main, there was the Executive with its chairman, secretary, assistant-secretary, treasurer, the hostel-manager, and about ten permanent members who became the conveners of all the main committees, which in turn organized the necessary sub-committees. Each of the latter had its own work to do, with a chairman who brought to its main committee any problems which arose. The main committee then came to a decision which the convener presented to the Executive for authorization.

That in broad outline became the working principle. Naturally with all the committees there were routine meetings which made detailed reports that kept the Executive informed of everything taking place in the hostel. For a long time the Executive met weekly, then monthly, as well as quarterly and annually to keep the general public informed of the enterprise they were supporting with money, service, goods and equipment.

As the Hut functioned on an expanding scale, each year presented new problems, which eventually required the formation of a House Committee, in charge of the bedrooms,

swimming-pool, bowling-alley, etc.; an Entertainment Committee occupied with the organization of the dances, movies, Sunday-night suppers and sing-songs, etc.; a Finance Committee exploring ways and means of support; a Publicity Committee designed for the stimulation of the Press; and on the honorary side there were the honorary auditors, lawyers, and the many patrons of the forces, the city, church and state.

In time the chief woman member of the Executive became the head of the multiple women's committees, and that appointment marked an advance in organization, as some policy became more domestic, and the facilities more homelike for the visitor, but those ventures will be recorded later under entertainment.

As for the Canteen it requires a whole chapter to itself. Of the two-hundred volunteer-workers needed to sustain it, many used to say that the canteen would live in human memory through the smell of bacon-fat. Others thought that the kitchens might become convenient for working if the war lasted long enough to catch up with all the labour-saving devices.

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In its origin and spirit the St. John's War Services' Association was designed mainly for the capable volunteer whose steady work, and sense of responsibility, was considered sufficient for the operation of the services. But the sheer growth compelled a quick change in that policy. The daily cleaning of the hostel reached a point where the efforts of part-time volunteers were clearly insufficient. The large areas of floor required constant sweeping and scrubbing, necessitating the steady employment of charwomen. The advance in the number of dormitories made housemaids imperative. The ever-increasing volume of the meals in the canteen required cooks, and the mountains of dishes demanded more dish-washers.

From an original paid staff of three, the steadily employed personnel increased to thirty-three of whom represented the initial responsibility of the Newfoundland Government, three came from the Y.M.C.A., while the salaries of the rest had to be met by increased financial efforts on the part of the Executive.

Yet though there were thirty paid-helpers, there were often times when they gave up their leave to return to the Hut and resume the rôle of the volunteer.

It is perhaps needless to say, that in time, other hostels were erected to meet the needs of the swollen town, but this record is concerned only with the Caribou Hut which never lost its popularity. The old hostel was weathered, with its walls made salty from its first contact with Newfoundland seamen and sealers. Perhaps because Sir Wilfred Grenfell had sponsored its origin, it never seemed to lose his missionary spirit. Though the quality of the Hut was homespun, it was cosy and warm of heart. Other than that it stood parallel with the waterfront, which proved a great advantage to the floating population that always lived on the harbour. The sailors took to the Hut like ducks leaving the water for dry land. They did not have to go beyond the shore to find "the home away from home." And during the latter days of the Hut it seemed as if its numbers became preponderantly marine.

For 1,637 consecutive days the Caribou Hut functioned as an all-round hostel, and a place of entertainment. Though figures can look dull in print, the following must surely live because they grew from such small beginnings, and this record from one small minute of a meeting, called by a group of patriotic men.

As an hotel the Hut rented 253,551 beds.

As a restaurant it served 1,545,766 meals.

As a Cinema it offered 1,518 movie-shows.

As a social-centre it gave 205 Sunday-night sing-songs with free suppers.

As a dance-hall it provided 459 dances with orchestras and suppers.

As a theatre it staged 395 entertainments.

Its total attendance exceeded the known figure of 722,704 individuals.

It was a hotel teeming with life. It held the best that Newfoundland could give and its name spread to the seven seas.

## THE FINANCE

Long before the monstrous sums needed for modern warfare it was said that endless money formed the sinews of war.

The sustaining services may come from Heaven but their application requires the coin of the practical world. In sight of an empty till, the leader, the prophet, the man of ideas would be like a person with one leg. On every Executive there has to be one man who sees that the idea does not travel beyond the purse.

The secretary and the treasurer bore much of the burden of the work. They maintained that meticulous routine which is the life-blood of good enterprise. They did not anticipate the palm without the dust, and though some people participated in all the high-spots at the Caribou Hut, the Executive experienced the jog-trot.

The treasurer had to watch every cent, render accurate accounting and to shape policy. It was necessary for him to be level-headed and keep the Executive in sight of its financial size.

In his reports the first mention of money comes from a donation of \$72.00 towards the cost of billeting men on furlough.

So from \$72.00 the Caribou Hut evolved into a flourishing business concern, with a turnover in excess of \$150,000 annually.

But as a preliminary, the first financial concerns revolved around the receiving of donations, and the paying for town-billets. Then the character of the hostel changed completely, ceasing to be a project sustained by voluntary contribution. With the assets of an equipped building, the operation became a business-venture, concerned with the debits and credits of an inter-allied hotel, and place of entertainment.

The repetition of the part the Newfoundland Government played is necessary at this point, as it gave the financial programme a head-start. The building, with its heat, light and structural maintenance was free. Its interior had been repaired and redecorated up to the sum of \$5,000. There had been solid gifts of furniture and fittings and a large number of volunteer-workers were lined up to do the work. For the latter reason the overhead expenditure was magically lessened. People who could not contribute towards the finance, helped save incalculable sums by the gift of willing hands.

From its inception the aim of the hostel was to give every man his money's worth, to make his board, his food, his cigarettes, his candy, his soft-drinks as inexpensive as possible. During the life of the hostel it was estimated that the men received ninety-seven cents' worth of goods for every dollar they spent.

To illustrate that principle we show the following—the Caribou Hut was in operation from December 23rd, 1940, to June 17th, 1945. The gross takings in the canteen for food and accessories (including meals served free of charge to some members of the paid staff) amounted to \$463,027.57. In comparison the cost of the goods sold was \$449,168.32. The amount over the cost was \$13,859.25 which surplus went into operation, and expenditure on

current refitting and refurbishing, so it really could be said that every cent taken from the men was returned to them, in kind or service.

It was natural for the canteen to become the most productive source of income—the big money gatherer.

“The army marches on its stomach.” Because of that most elemental principle the canteen was soon supplying substantial meals, though in origin it had only been intended as a snack-bar.

So the canteen brought the largest receipts, seconded by the renting of beds, which averaged \$1,200 monthly, or 4,000 beds rented per month.

But almost immediately the prices of commodities, and food-stuffs, took a great soar, and the cost of operations travelled along a sharply ascending curve.

The first year’s total income was somewhat over \$54,000—the second year (including donations) was just over \$110,000, but instead of a surplus over expenses, as in the first year, there was a deficit of nearly \$15,000.

The treasurer’s detailed reports showed all too clearly the all-over rise in prices, and it became urgent that an income apart from the earning of the hostel must be found if the venture was to thrive.

It became like the first days, before the disorder of the town had been quelled by the organized entertainment. Now the services were there, but they were being threatened by the lack of money. However retrenchment was unthinkable, as the natural evolution of the Hut suggested growth, more growth. Whatever happened, it must be forward march, and more money procured from somewhere, and full recognition of a \$15,000 deficit.

Appeals were sent out to all the associations, groups, societies, clubs, etc., which had sponsored the Hut’s inception, but this did not attract sufficient returns. The deficit remained uncovered, and with mounting costs, there was a sure expectation of an even larger annual deficit, if the policy of giving the men their full dollar’s worth was to be maintained with no charge for overhead.

Disraeli said, “There is no wisdom like frankness.”

It was decided to put all the cards on the table, and make an all-out appeal to the general public, and announce a necessary objective of the sum of \$25,000.

But how to campaign and give full value to the cause?

Here again we come to the ever-helpful Y.M.C.A., so well versed in the ways and means of organization.

The hostel manager stepped forward to lend his considerable experience to the scheme.

Enthusiasm was general. Everyone wanted the Hut to grow, and above all to stay solvent.

The mayor of the town became an inspired campaign-chairman; the sponsor societies, the collecting units; and though the actual drive lasted only two weeks, money kept coming in for the rest of the year. By the end of 1943 the drive had reached the figure of \$36,130.37—a sum way beyond the wildest dreams, and if there was one feature particularly gratifying, it was the generous and enthusiastic support of the men of the Canadian, American and British forces. Though one expected the loyal townfolk to respond, one could not take the visitors entirely for granted, but their support was heartening, a most tangible manifestation that Newfoundland was not alone in her patriotic enterprise.

As the venture proceeded from month to month, year to year, one of the greatest expense was the cost of replacements. Perhaps because war is destructive, that principle seems to influence the serviceman’s reaction to all the objects he handles. It is staggering to note that in

the Hut's peak year the cost of replacements reached the figure of \$10,000. But the building was open day and night, and it resembled an international corridor through which more than 720,000 individuals went, like a youthful stampede, leaving behind plenty of evidence of wear and tear.

Then the cost of the paid staff grew to the sum of \$24,000 in a year. It was inevitable that there should be another deficit, and a second financial campaign was launched on similar lines to the first. This time it was harder going—people so frequently do not want to do twice what they have done once. There was variation in response, and less enthusiasm from the collecting units, but fortunately the law of supply is notoriously productive when one taps it with faith and hope. When one source fails another springs up. Interest in the Hut never died, and during the second financial campaign many donations poured in from unexpected quarters, and as far away as the British War Relief in the United States. Then our own loyal outpost women made a great effort and sent in a handsome sum. In all, the second campaign brought in \$39,557.80 and one can say that the financial well never seemed to run dry. Had there been a third appeal, some new source of supply would have certainly sprung up.

So much could be written about the ups and downs of the dollars and cents, but every individual knows the necessity of the financial cornerstone. In the material world one can always anticipate the bill for every concrete object. To say that something must be done simply means that money must be found. But the person who handles small sums cannot comprehend the tabulated accounts of big business. Neither can the small householder think comfortably in terms of hundreds of thousands, but we must be concrete enough to say that from the opening of the Hut to its closing on June 18th, 1945, the total amount of cash received was \$643,123.34. Of this sum \$83,098.76 was received as cash donations from all sources, leaving \$560,024.58 as the total amount paid over the counter by the men of the armed forces.

The total cost of operating was \$632,684.21, and there remained in the treasury at the closing only \$10,439.13.

"Money is a good servant—a bad master." In the Caribou Hut the money was the best of good servants, and it was most wisely directed towards one of Newfoundland's best efforts.

But we cannot quite end here. We have talked of money and the things bought and paid for. There came a time when the Finance did not take in—it gave out—and though this event might be mentioned under entertainment, we present it under Finance as it represented giving out, that was gloriously free, and why not indeed, when it was Victory Week, and V.E. Day had come on May 8th, 1945.

Those who listened to Churchill attentively during the war must have been conscious of how he could always revive the drooping spirit and rejuvenate the soul. He was like an organ note to the whole empire, the resonant radio-voice that said the right thing, at the right moment, in a big inspired way. When V.E. Day came his voice seemed to echo over the harbour-hills and one recaptured his words, quoted in an earlier stage of the war.

[5]"Say not the struggle nought availeth  
The labour and the wounds are vain—"

For the Caribou Hut the struggle was over and everyone knew it had been well worthwhile. The time for rejoicing had come and the Finance was there with open pockets. On V.E. Day free full course dinners were provided, free movies, free dances, free soft-drinks with twenty cases of cigarettes and tobacco donated by the United States Army. The

servicemen ate, drank, and were very merry as they twined themselves up in paper streamers, and demilitarized their uniforms with gay paper caps of frivolous design. It was a new day, with the Finance staging a real party to suggest the turnabout to civilian life. If there was a deficit during Victory Week it was a deficit the Finance liked.

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[5] By Arthur Hugh Clough.

## CHAPTER III THE ENTERTAINMENT

“—the very life blood of our enterprise.”

Like a good host the Caribou Hut was always at home. If, as it is said, that the will in hospitality is the substance, then the Caribou Hut was always willing.

In 1941, when the hostel had been launched for three months a reporter came to inspect it. In the way of newspapermen he arrived unenthusiastically. He was merely doing a job, but once in the lobby, beside the big open-fire, he became galvanised by the scene—the comfort, the space—the surge of humanity, the camaraderie, the mixture of men from near and far massed together in an old building once exclusively Newfoundland. He viewed a new order where English “tars” and seamen, Canadian, and American soldiers and sailors, an occasional dark-skinned visitor, were milling around with the well-known Newfoundland Militia, and the latest batch of volunteers waiting to go overseas to be trained.

The newspaperman was delighted with the sight and he wrote of it enthusiastically.

“Sailors fresh from the sea, airmen on furlough, soldiers freed from duty at defence posts, and raw recruits wearing the armband insignia of acceptance in the various forces, rub shoulders at the Caribou Hut in ever-increasing numbers these days, enjoying the comfort and recreational facilities of what is now a military hostel in full swing.”

That the Executive had materialised its first vision of the possibilities in the Old Seaman’s Home is evinced from the reporter’s description of the entrance.

“As soon as the doors swing shut behind the visitor he finds himself in an atmosphere of cosiness and comfort. A bright fire burns in the big fire-place and there are easy chairs arranged along the alcove opposite.”

The welcome was as the Executive had first visualized it. Warmth was right at the door and Newfoundland will always be a country where people instinctively walk towards the fire. One can step from the high, wind-blown land, or the cold, open sea, and greet the hearth as the real symbol of home. Then the interior of the Hut was fresh, the easy-chairs were new, and though the boisterous young men who sprawled in them were frequently like a succession of careless boys, there were always patient hands to tidy up, and a considerate Executive to replace the extensive wear and tear.

Naturally the first concern of the visitor was his overnight accommodation. The Caribou Hut offered him a clean bed for thirty cents a night, though in the beginning, the hostel was limited to twenty-three beds which proved all too little from the onset. It was essential to make great efforts to increase the lodging capacity and this was helped by the use of double-decker beds. Then the joint-services, and the Canadian Red Cross came to the rescue with the loan of extra beds, linen, blankets etc., and such was the combined effort that a total of 260 beds became available. A volunteer feature arising from this service was the Home Corner, comprised of competent women who met regularly to keep the bedding in good repair.

During the whole life of the hostel 253,551 beds were rented, in addition to which, 1,649 were provided free of charge at the discretion of the hostel-manager.

So the visitor had a clean bed for thirty cents. He could go downstairs to the canteen and eat his meals. He could dwell momentarily on the novelty of change, on the good value of his



bed and board, but what would he do with himself when he had slept enough and eaten his fill?

Speaking of the problem of wartime leisure in England, the Times had stated that a good soldier starved of everything but his job was not a good soldier.

Yet what to offer was a question when all men did not want the same things. What was enjoyable to one could be torment to another. Though it was indisputable that many wanted to forget the war in noise, crowds and excitement; to tread down every moment in high activity, there were other men who felt they had suffered enough from the impact of the crowds imposed upon them by the mere fact of wartime service. The one thing they craved was privacy, a solitary place where they could recapture a sense of personal living. For those men the Reading Room was of inestimable value. It was installed with soothing, fluorescent lights, well-furnished, abundantly stocked with magazines from an exchange service, and in time came to possess a resident library. Above all the Reading Room made an oasis of silence in the always seething hostel.

Then there was the Writing Room, and though it was rarely vacant, that place was quiet also as the men thought of the things they would tell their families, their wives and sweethearts. On leave they had leisure, at last, to assemble their thoughts and write of their life in Newfoundland. To select another of the many good things that the Y.M.C.A. did in the Caribou Hut, is to mention that they supplied all the writing materials, free of charge, to all the servicemen. If figures can be made to live, it is arresting to note that 721,000 sheets of paper and envelopes were used, and though letters are personal, the background from which they are written influences thought, so many a letter must have gone abroad drenched with the Newfoundland scene.

Another moderately quiet place was the Card Room, always popular with men who liked sedentary games. Men of all ages and services came to play a game, sometime or other, and frequently a foursome looked like a relaxed corner of the League of Nations.

To the men who could not bear to sit still, there was the Bowling-Alley, repaired at the onset and rendered as shipshape as possible, and gradually supplied with complete new equipment in the way of pins and balls. There was a nominal charge of twenty cents for ten pins, and ten cents for five pins. Later it was found advisable to give a man a concession at the Bowling-Alley; to make him responsible for keeping the alleys in good condition and to pay the pin-boys. There was continual patronage of the Bowling-Alley which always represented a pleasantly rumbling area in the Hut.

To cater to the finer sense of dash and skill, there was the smaller game of table tennis, where the airy ping of the balls played double-counterpoint with the rumble from the Bowling-Alley, both stabbed by the swishing flight of the arrow towards the dart-board. In fact the Caribou Hut often resembled a symphony of unco-ordinated sound. As in all music there are many water-sounds, we heard many splashing notes from the swimming-pool and the powerful spurt of its shower-baths.

Though the swimming-pool was a great boon to the visitors, it represented continual responsibility and expense to the Executive, and the planning and programme committees. It was a steady chore to keep the swimming-pool scoured and the water in a suitable condition, consistent with health. Like the war, the pool was in a continual state of flux, but always in the slow process of improvement, along with its supplementary services of showers and lockers. The water was a ceaseless problem, subject to many laboratory tests in the effort to attain class A standard in the morning, and class C, after several groups of men had been in. Everything

was done to attain the hygienic standard, even to the installation of a foot-bath for the prevention of athlete's foot, and an attendant to make the service compulsory. It was a triumph to the Executive when the water attained class C (considered drinking standard) even after the immersion of several groups of men. The Executive almost became human guinea-pigs, over the testing of the water for the pool.

It seems that at some time or other the entertainment circle was extended to include every form of diversion. After the appearance of the Y.M.C.A. programme-director, experienced leadership was extended to the programme-committees, thus facilitating the way towards more organized entertainment. The influence of the director was all-round and far-reaching. As the seasons advanced, and men felt the call of the open air, outdoor games were made possible through co-operation with the local playing-fields. And those men who had an excessive amount of energy found that they could wrestle, and weight-lift to their heart's content.

But many of the aforesaid activities were considered, by the visitors, to be mere daytime diversions.

What could be done in the evenings? And what social contacts could the visitor make?

It was not enough to provide entertainment and to leave the man unhappily alone. It was well-known that men on furlough needed friendly contacts to help mitigate the unnatural life imposed upon them by war. From that need a most amiable service came into being in the lobby of the Hut. It was called the Hospitality Bureau, and it was organized, and run by a group of women who represented a sewing-club in peacetime. This group managed to keep two members in the Hut daily, so that any man wanting to be invited out to a private home, need only state his wishes. Then a suitable contact was made for him where hospitable and understanding people would let him stay home and sit by the fire, play games with the family-group—if that was what he wished; or take him out to see a bit of the town, or for a drive along the wonderful coastline. Many men admitted that this hospitality helped keep them on an even keel, and in sight of everyday living. They could enter a home similar to the one they knew, and behave like normal people.

There was another cosy little service organized by the chief-woman Executive who realized that when a man went out socially, he wanted to look spick and span.

There was a tiny room upstairs called the Home Corner where two women were in attendance to sew and darn, and press clothes. Even when the women were not present they made it possible for a man to find the facilities with which to help himself.

As a later but welcome activity, another was added, to be called Arts and Crafts. Space was found for a Hobby Room where a man could go to work, and create in plastic, leather and wood, and also learn the processes of photo-tinting and lino-cutting. This creative service was another benefit from the Y.M.C.A. and it became a big blessing to the frustrated craftsman longing to express himself with the work of his hands.

But we have asked what could a man do in the evening in the little auditorium called the Grenfell Hall?

In time everything was provided—a new stage with handsome curtains—a projection-booth for movies—new chairs and a public-address system. Then came the Juke-Box, Nickelodian to some, and the automatic phonograph to the more conservative Newfoundlander whose music stayed with the old-fashioned harmonium.

The Grenfell Hall stood ready for every form of evening entertainment. It never stayed empty any day of the week.

On Monday it became a Cinema offering two shows nightly. In all 1,518 picture-shows came from the new projection-booth, and like everything else facility came with time. A film-board was formed in Newfoundland between the joint-services and the many outposts, so that a supply of pictures would be always on hand; and to guarantee that each and every film would be shown at all possible places before leaving the country.

Tuesday evening was party-night, with hostesses in attendance to make partners for games, competitions or informal dancing. The Tuesday programmes were fluid, and of an intense variety. There were Bingo, Quiz-Programmes, Broadcasts, parlour-games and every type of diversion that human ingenuity could suggest. Sometimes the informal dancing made an extra on the programme of the round-the-year weekly dance. Always at those Tuesday gatherings there was some light refreshment, and one could not help noticing how the crowd swelled at supper-time. A half-empty room would become quickly congested, and it seemed as if some visitors idling on the side-lines, knew how to appear for the game they liked best.

Servicemen seemed like school-boys, always hungry, but Newfoundland food was good, and in spite of the war, rationing was often half-hearted. If other ventures went short it was never the Caribou Hut. The cakes were always luscious and sweet, with icings in which the fingers could sink past the first-joint. The sandwiches had fillings right to the edges of the bread. There was never any skimping.

Wednesday was movie-night again, following the same procedure as Monday.

Thursday was the gayest evening in Grenfell Hall. Then the real organized dance took place, with a real orchestra and a real supper. The troops stepped out, all the comrades-in-arms with the local hostesses acting as partners.

Perhaps those weekly dances required more organization, more plain kitchen-work, more staying-power than all the rest of the entertainment put together. When one dance was over, the immediate question was, where will we get the next orchestra? Above all who will provide the next supper?

To some women the Newfoundland war-effort meant a long succession of baking-days for the Caribou Hut. It was like a routine; there was the cake in the oven, the icing in process, the oiled paper at hand, the hat and coat ready for the run down the hill to the Caribou Hut. And this continued through the years, and through Newfoundland's moody seasons, and in the blackest of black-outs. Eventually the rigours of the latter became too extreme for the volunteer-worker, so organized transport came into being through the courtesy of the joint-services.

Out of 1,637 days, there were in all 459 dances, many more than the programme-committee intended. It was, as we have said, not so difficult to set the scenes in the Grenfell Hall, not impossible to procure an orchestra—sometimes donated, sometimes hired—but it was extremely difficult to provide enough supper for all the vigorous young men, made fighting fit and fit to fight. The sheer physical strength seemed to increase the demand for more cakes and more sandwiches, and it was here that the women's units in St. John's did so magnificently. It appears as if every group, club, society, association of church, city, school, trade, sport etc., came to the rescue and gave suppers over and over again. Everything was done to foster this service. When one group had served magnificently, the publicity committee featured their efforts in a way that challenged other groups to step forward and give another supper—and another—and so on—until cakes and sandwiches seemed the foremost chore in the female mind.

Friday evening in the Hall was variable, ranging from a possible movie, a concert, or some amateur stage-show recruited from other places of entertainment.

Then so many corvettes appeared in the harbour, with so many sailors at a loose-end, that a special dance had to be organized every third Friday only for naval-ratings. It was just a question of another supper, another cake in the oven, another few dozen sandwiches.

To the baking women, Saturday was a true day of rest. At the Hut it meant movies, but the rule for this evening was “no refreshments.”

Sunday brought movies in the afternoon, and a sing-song and free supper after the canteen had closed in the evenings.

The Sunday sing-songs were temperamental, fluctuating according to the seasons, to what it was like outside, and above all to the mood of the men who were frequently out of step with the most rousing tunes, and the most world-uniting hymns. Sometimes there was restlessness, and a disturbance that even the loudest music could not quell. Sometimes the sing-songs deteriorated, and their organisers became frankly discouraged. Sometimes the local artists, who went to perform, felt quite unappreciated; then at other times the sing-songs would be pleasant, happy and harmonious. The men would arrive unabashed, and dare admit that they knew the songs and hymns very well. Then the old hostel released a high liberated note. Out around the hard, old hills, and over the stifled harbour would echo the ageless melodies of the English-speaking world. The men were letting themselves go, yelling “Tipperary,” “Pack up your Troubles,” “All the nice girls love a sailor,” etc.

Then, in contrast to the robust shouting, the voices would unconsciously deepen, and they would sing “Fight the Good Fight,” and “Abide with Me,” as if longing to forget the world of blood and death for “peace, work and salvation.”

It was natural for the sing-songs to be uneven. They sounded like a pulse-beat of the times. Men cannot return from war and be whole-hearted in their singing. Yet in spite of the truly hard conflicts expressed in the Sunday night sing-songs, they stayed, and were often a true inspiration. And, as a sequel of course, the music would stop and be succeeded by the cheerful rattle of cups and saucers, and the fragrant smell of coffee fusing with the overtones still vibrating in the air. In the magical way of men who know how to materialize at the right moment, the rooms would fill up. The sing-songs looked very well-attended indeed. One could deduce that the men on the outskirts had joined in silently, while waiting for the big supper noise.

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In review it looks as if the whole week had gone in entertainment that would start again on Monday, but there was so much more—other services—other activities—spread out over the years. There were the unrecorded things, the courtesies that came from private citizens who liked to do personal work. In the lobby, in the canteen, there were always men and women, watching and waiting, with cars at the door, should the men feel like taking a drive.

Then the Y.M.C.A. distributed hundreds of thousands of free packages of cigarettes and books of matches.

After the regular canteen closed there was a night-canteen where the men could buy soft-drinks, cigarettes, chocolate-bars, and this counter served some 600,000 men.

There were unspectacular services like the checking of clothes and packages, and the providing of stout safety-deposit envelopes for a man’s few valuables.

There was the source for the personal problem where a man could tell his troubles and be sure of constructive advice.

There were organized women who provided a channel through which the mothers of prisoners-of-war were entertained at tea, and in the relaxed atmosphere of the Hut they could talk freely of their anxieties to those who sympathized.

There was always clothing on hand, ready to be distributed to forlorn seamen or survivors, and here we reach a special service that was hush-hush, but only too evident to the rescuing squads in the Caribou Hut.

Survivors! The very word is remindful of Newfoundland's geographical position, and all that happened near her shores. The black-out covered so much—the stealth of ships easing in at night to land the shipwrecked men. People were not supposed to mention their activities in that direction, so the story of the survivors seems to belong to visual memory. Though the Hut was not organized for such a purpose many emergencies arose that were not consistent with its original policy but, “accidents bring to light the resource of a host.” The hostel had plenty of tests for resourcefulness and the Executive felt compelled to offer sanctuary to the survivors because at first, there was no other accommodation. Even at a later date when other facilities became available the Hut continued to take its share of distressed seamen, as this service always occasioned a departure from general policy, even though the extension seemed beyond the capacity of the accommodation, especially when the survivors arrived to be bed-cases. Naturally the numbers in connection with this service belonged to secret information, but when the Battle of the Atlantic was at its height there seemed to be far too many. Then in 1943 a hopeful note appeared in a hostel report.

“It is significant to note that the numbers of these men passing through our hands has diminished as the Battle of the Atlantic has taken a favourable turn.”

The hard night was showing a glimmer of dawn. It was like a materialization of Winston Churchill's famous quotation during the worst of days.

“In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,  
But westward, look, the land is bright.”

High-lights were not unknown in the Caribou Hut—there were the feast-days, the recurring festive seasons.

We all know how much service is jog-trot, how much action stems from the day of small things, but there are occasions which break up the commonplace, and sweep people together on a wave of good will. One glimpses the larger purpose and the true reason of being.

Christmas came five times in the Caribou Hut.

To be wrenched out of normal living is always bad but it seems so much worse at Christmas because one's thoughts insist on going home.

Newfoundlanders are a family people, but many for the first time in a lifetime, left home to go to the Caribou Hut to bring Christmas to the men faraway from their own people. Others went before to see that the hostel was transformed with the garish glitter, the green boughs, the cotton-wool snow, and the red streamers that go to decorate the season.

The Hut inside was shining and red, while outside the visitor found the true, “White Christmas.” He did not have to pine for that. The snow was always fresh, soft and rounded over the harsh contours of the town. The air was always exhilarating while the sky seemed specially made for the “Star.” And miraculously, in Newfoundland at Christmas, the wind seems to become still. The country appears to hold its breath and attain the large beauty of the north.

Someone said that Newfoundland represented a whole country of Christmas trees, and it is true. Surely the visitor will remember himself there, comfortably housed inside the Hut, eating, free of charge, plenty of turkey with all the trimmings, followed by the traditional second course, sent in abundance every year, by the housewives, who could not bear the men to be without their pudding, mince-pie and jam-tarts.

The Caribou Hut had fan-mail so we quote from the letter of a seaman who wrote after Christmas.

“We owe you—everyone of you a debt of gratitude—you have given us a home away from home—you have devoted hours of your time to bringing us comfort and pleasure—you have understood our wants and succeeded in your kind mission. From a crew of grateful men we tender our thanks. To you voluntary workers of the canteen we cannot be grateful enough. Thanks a million is our humble offer. . . .”

It was thanks a million very often, and many a canteen-worker paused at her work to glance through seaward windows to bless the ships that were outward bound. The worker knew the men well, because in the canteen they were fed, and somehow during that process they managed to tell the women and girls the things they could never tell their own kind.

And now—the canteen!

## CHAPTER IV THE CANTEEN

“No man can be a patriot on an empty stomach.”

WILLIAM COWPER BRANN

After the struggle is over it is easy to reduce it to figures which add up, subtract, divide or multiply. From the mathematical standards we choose the word “multiply” because, figuratively speaking, the canteen might have grown from “five loaves and two fishes.”

We might print an impressive series of figures, all on a rising scale, but would they tell the story? We could seek the totality of figures, and say that 1,545,766 individual meals were served and paid for, in addition to 3,656 free meals given through the consent of the manager. We could announce that the volunteers put in 225,000 work-hours, in the four and a half years of the Hut’s operation.

Figures are cold things, though it is fearful to think that the atomic bomb can be reduced to an equation on a scrap of paper. But what of the bottled-up energy and the radio-active principle involved? And what happens after the enormous destruction? Nearly always the appearance of the clean-up squads to try and salvage the mess.

In the canteen the clean-up squads were women. Perhaps that whole service represented the women’s best contribution to the welfare and happiness of the visitors. It probably followed life’s natural trend. As the representative of the creative principle, woman frequently builds up where man tears down.

A reporter, writing after the bombing of Berlin, said one of the most pathetic sights he ever saw was a little old woman emerging from a shelter with a broom in her hand, and without glancing at the men, stunned into idleness before the futility of work, she began to sweep up Berlin. The reporter continued, that he awoke at that time to the enormous patience of women even in the sight of the largest mess.

In the beginning there was a lot of mess in the canteen-kitchens which had to be like that, through sheer necessity. As Goethe died calling for, “light, more light,” so the restaurant went out of existence needing space, more space.

Naturally the canteen was related to the hostel, in the same way that a kitchen and dining-room is related to a home. No matter how great the occasion, how solemn the hour, how busy the housewife, meals recur three times a day. Every cook is resigned to the long hours of preparation of the tasty dish, demolished in a very few minutes. But food and drink is the fuel for the human fire which has to be replenished continually. It was not any different in the Caribou Hut. In fact the principle was intensified because “the army marches on its stomach.”

During the first planning days a room on the ground-floor with adjoining kitchen and pantries, seemed to be quite adequate, but almost at once the space proved a serious limitation to the scope of the enterprise. It is indisputable that the constant re-arrangement of equipment and space, occurred in conjunction with the arrival of hungry men, and under the feet of the volunteer-waitresses and the harassed cooks trying to operate the canteen. One worked, cooked, peeled vegetables, fried eggs and bacon, made sandwiches, washed dishes, prepared trays, made tea and coffee, while electricians, plumbers and carpenters crawled around the

floor. There always seemed to be two layers of humanity in the canteen-kitchen; those moving on two legs and those working on their knees.

In addition to the ubiquitous workmen, there were more, outside, chipping away at brick in the process of building another room, to help with the disposal of garbage and the myriad bottles for the soft-drinks.

Like the symphony of sound in the games' rooms, the canteen made another theme—clashing with glass, the jostling of china, the cracking of egg-shells, the whirr of egg-beaters and the clatter of the dampers on the coal-stove like the real lifting of the iron-curtain. Then there was the rumble of the coal-bucket, the swish of water in the sinks, and the rip of the cutting-knife in the belly of the cod-fish always in evidence on the marble-slab, bequeathed to the kitchen from some Victorian wash-stand.

In the canteen-kitchen, the mottled cod in its whole state, fresh from the sea, was symbolic of two things: the wealth of Newfoundland waters and work the hard way round. As the local labourer, in sight of the American steam-shovel, knew that he was a pick and shovel man, so the pioneer-worker in the canteen-kitchen felt detained by the lack of labour-saving devices. Then as coal gave way to electricity, the two-slice toaster to the eight-slice, the hand-cutting to electric-slicing, the hand-stirring to the automatic-mixer, it really seemed as if one had witnessed a curve of evolution. Again the cod-fish was the Newfoundland symbol when it began to come in fillets, cellophane-wrapped.

But the first days were tough, though like good hostesses the workers kept their difficulties in the background. Once outside the swinging-doors leading from the kitchen to the canteen, the women and girls were all gracious smiles. But as the men received their trays, they must have seen the coal-stoves reflected in the women's red faces. Quite literally it was bearing the heat of the day.

But there was much visible evolution from hand to machine, though the coffee evolved so slowly that it seemed like the diehard in the kitchen. First it was boiled in an enamel pot, then percolated through the stages of aluminum and glass, then dripped, in eight drippers that were emptied after the first round, until finally the restaurant urn appeared through the sheer weight of necessity.

And the dishes!

They seemed to sprawl in china acres cemented together with fat, and egg-yolk. The scraping, and hand-washing was prodigious. Then, through the generosity of the American Base Command, came an electric dishwasher. It was like Mecca at last, and the end of dish-pan hands.

Many facilities came as gifts from the joint-services to ease the long way round. Some did not. There was the mechanical potato-peeler, a delayed urgency on the agenda of a good many meetings. There were always so many barrels of potatoes to peel in the wasteful, old-fashioned way, and once a far-sighted buyer bought a whole field of potatoes, as it was said "on the hoof," and for a while that purchase gave a spur to the mechanical-peeler. Then it got finally bogged down, becoming entangled in red tape, and stricken with priorities. Peace came with the peeler still on requisitions.

Then there were the cockroaches—the small brown variety that insinuate themselves everywhere, but small as they were, they refused to be hush-hush. Their prevalence resembled the Old Testament plague of frogs in the land of Egypt, insofar as they intruded into the ovens and the kneading-troughs. Truly the cockroaches were the enemy of the homefront, though they were attacked from the beginning with every known form of insecticide. Then the



Department of Public Health and Welfare took up the battle with the insects, and though they were never quite vanquished they were kept decently at bay.

The cockroaches represented the major pest. The minor came from the house-fly, and the Newfoundland fish-fly which joined the activities from some primal sense of patriotism. As the heat from the coal-stoves was always intense, the windows on the waterfront were up and down all day, but soon the ever-vigilant Executive appeared in the kitchens with priority window-screens.

The inconveniences, the constant re-arrangement of space, and the pests were merely growing pains. It was a triumph of adjustment to cope with the situation at all when there was inadequate room. Makeshift had to be the order of the day, and how could it have been otherwise when the canteen, which had been designed as a snack-bar, was forced into the size of a big restaurant which opened its doors at six in the morning to provide an early cup of tea for the naval ratings before they rejoined their ships after late leave? Then it had to supply regular breakfasts up to noon—hot midday dinner from one to three—keep open as a snack-bar until suppertime, then become a restaurant again, and back to snack-bar, until ten-thirty, daily.

The situation was met by intensified effort, and the canteen food was designed to be homely, good and plentiful. What was hot was hot; what was cold was cold. Every inch of kitchen-space was utilized, and though the quarters never attained the laboratory streamlining of the modern lunch-counter, they stayed popular, perhaps for that very reason.

The canteen-kitchen became a priority need for paid, all-time workers, though like everything else it had been designed for the volunteer. For such a large venture that was an impossible ideal. Soon there were paid cooks, charwomen, assistant-maids, and later a professional dietician who acted as buyer and general supervisor, in conjunction with the hostel-manager. But in spite of the all-time workers, the part-time volunteer stayed as the backbone of the actual service. She became the foot-slogger, the waitress who carried the trays. She appeared early in the morning when breakfasts were needed for the overnight visitors. She was the same volunteer who came back for the extra feeding of the survivors, even though she had just completed her regular four-hour shift.

This service was of such value in the operation of the canteen that constant recruiting went on to keep the teams at full strength.

In the beginning a register was established for the women and girls who wished to serve. They were asked to sign on for any of the four-hour shifts, afternoon or evening, once or twice weekly, according to the time and inclination of each individual.

There was a pledge designed in the spirit of dedication which read as follows:—

“I pledge myself to work in the canteen during the hours of ———: to be on time, wear the uniform, and obey my supervisor. Only if I am sick shall I be absent and then I must let my supervisor know in time to get relief.”

It was excellent in principle. It would have been near perfect had it functioned in that high-minded manner. But all organizers know the need of allowing a high per cent for human caprice. We know how difficult it is to regiment, outside of a police-state, and the whole shattering war was fought against dictatorship; yet we have heard the hard-pressed conveners yearn for a temporary dictatorship, over what the old-timers called “fly-by-night” attendance.

The solid quality of staying-power would have meant so much in the canteen, but the town was full of wartime gaiety—many of the helpers were young—there were many men to

choose from, so inevitably, the dedicated volunteer was inclined to forget her pledge for another nice date, a bit better maybe than the last one, or the one before the last.

It is simple truth to say that the volunteers worked like “Torbay-ponies” and the work was hard, often inglorious, a mess of egg-shells, burns and scalds, dishwater hands, and kitchen-smells lingering in the hair. Beyond the drudgery there was the sheer human ache of hands and feet. Nevertheless in spite of the uneven attendance, many volunteers were faithful to the very end, never letting themselves be deterred by weather or distraction, or the black-out. Nothing kept them from the canteen, but that Act of God which manifests itself sometimes, in all lives.

There was never any need to give a pep-talk to the worker with the neat hand, and the strong sense of duty. There was great need to re-inspire the laggard, to re-inject her with a dose of service, when there were the usual percentages of those who liked to work, when, and how they pleased, and who thought more of their rights than of their obligations.

The fallible human element was often in evidence and rules did not help. The good worker did not need them, and the capricious worker ignored them.

The Executive tried to be appreciative and tactful; to act like patient fathers with temperamental daughters—to tender appreciation with one hand and correction with the other.

Very careful rules were issued about the dishing of food.

“. . . for example, a meal order of sausages and potatoes will consist of three sausages and two potatoes, and in no case should the size of the helping be varied. Similarly an order of bacon and eggs will consist of three slices of bacon and two eggs—never more.”

The rules for the dishing of food were then posted in a prominent place.

The place was never quite prominent enough.

Outside in the canteen, there might be some special soldier or sailor, waiting to be served by some special girl who knew what he had been through. She was sorry for him—she thought he was looking thin—maybe he was from England and had not seen a fresh egg for a long time—he was so sick of egg-powder.

It was expedient to side-step the dishing-rules and the quantity-lists, as the volunteer slipped another egg on a plate, another slice of bacon or two, and frequently she took care that the size of the helping of the bulk vegetables was not in accordance with the size outlined by authority.

It was often a question of the human emotions. The volunteer could not consider the canteen as a real restaurant when it had been planned to give the men the best for their money.

The volunteer sometimes interpreted that principle in her own way but the too-generous helper was up against it when the canteen began to show an increasing-loss, and conveners began to tighten up, to scrutinize, and to ask for conscientious co-operation. The Executive wrote a form-letter beginning, “Dear Miss—” and it made some strict rules that set up an inner conflict about the extra egg.

Undoubtedly it was the rising cost of food-stuffs that had an adverse effect on the finances in the canteen, but the volunteer might have helped a little. Perhaps her sense of guilt made her meek about the new rules. She became a worker without any perquisites at all. If she had a cup of tea after her shift she was obliged to pay for it. If she now gave too much bulk-vegetables she was sure to be noticed. If she lingered to talk with a boy she might hear the voice of her convener telling her to get on with her work.

It became like school with new rules designed to correct last term’s mistakes. When the canteen-committee marched in to inspect—to keep its eyes on the helpings—the worker was

docile. Her mind asked, had she put up the cost of operations? Doubtless she had, so to make amends she tried to be fair about helpings, to save the dish-towels and not use them for the wrong things, to buy a cloth of her own and wipe where she willed, to pay for her own cup of tea, or bottle of pop. She felt that authority was down on her because of her over-large helpings. But it was impossible to be conscientious all the time when the thin sailors kept coming back.

Then there was the Battle of the Smocks.

Authority varies, according to the make-up of people, and where they place the emphasis. There is the rigid formalist who is sure that efficiency is maintained when the exterior is all spit and polish, and a bit of hardware glitters on the shoulder or to the left of the heart. In the case of the canteen-worker there was a little button to which she was entitled after a year of service.

But on what would it be pinned? There seemed to be quite a disagreement about what constituted a uniform.

In opposition to the formalist there is the other type who gives first thought to the spirit of service, the one who insists that "the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life."

The volunteer was frequently nipped between the formalist and the non-regimentation mind.

There were reports of ceremonial shock after official inspections.

In their spotless white some volunteer-workers had passed, while others had been the occasion of outraged criticism because they had worn flowered smocks. Some inspectors thought the smocks cheerful, the sort women would wear at home. Others were sure that they were an abomination, a stain on the escutcheon of uniformity. The latter pressed for a hard and fast rule so another was posted.

"Each canteen-worker is expected to wear a white smock which she will provide and maintain at her own expense."

The Battle of the Smocks could be felt in the canteen. The workers in white could continue serenely, but the other workers felt themselves a scandal and a hissing, even though they knew their hearts were in the right place under flowered cotton.

The rigid formalist fought to the last for uniformity, but it must be admitted that the canteen passed out of existence with a last flash of colour from the roses on the offending smocks.

It was the mature housewife who stayed the course best. She could be detached in the presence of so many men. She knew how to fry eggs without getting bubbles in the white. She could go on cutting bread and butter while romance was born at her elbow.

The excited girl was inclined to think that the war had been designed for her love-life. She could burn a man's toast as she dreamed of the man. But it could not have been otherwise—life being as it is. On one side of the counter were the girls, on the other the young men. When the older women remonstrated, the girls were inclined to ask how their mothers had behaved during the first World War? Then the older women paused, and remembered the mutuality of experience in war, for each generation. Then, though there had been no atomic bomb, there had been the usual atomic emotions.

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Many distinguished people came to visit the canteen in the Hut. Of the many visiting Brass Hats from all the joint-services, none left Newfoundland ultimately, without coming once, to inspect or pay an informal call.

Newfoundlanders are accustomed to royal visits as a part of colonial living. One expects to build arches covered with green boughs, to erect platforms and reviewing-stands, to hang out bunting, to wave flags during state-occasions. It was a Newfoundland perquisite as a cornerstone of Empire. All generations of Newfoundlanders are familiar with the disembarking of a major or minor prince; then the ceremonial parade, the open-carriage from which Royalty bows to its Colonial Empire before leaving with the traditional backward wave.

During the life of the Caribou Hut it was not the usual British “man-of-war” that brought His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent to Newfoundland. It was an amphibian plane, with escorts, that wheeled over the outskirts of St. John’s, and curved gracefully down like a silver bird, happy to rest awhile on one of the big “ponds” that gleam like blue eyes on the dark face of the land.

There is a local tradition that when Royalty visits, Newfoundland knows, and concedes royal weather. She can even give a spontaneous sky-show unknown at other times. Once in a particularly benign mood, Newfoundland gave a show of coloured Aurora for a prince, and the prince, as well as the townsfolk saw the Aurora, in colour, for the first time.

But when the Duke of Kent was expected the Oldest Dominion was quite as mixed up as Winston Churchill had anticipated. She was so jostled by the invading democracies that she became dead to the Imperial touch. She betrayed her tradition of royal weather by detaining the Duke of Kent on Canadian shores, by hiding the Oldest Colony in the heaviest Newfoundland fog.

Ashamed of her own weather the Newfoundlanders swarmed out three or four times to meet the prince before he came. Then the old land seemed to remember her statelier past. She emerged from the doldrums and made a royal-blue rift in the skies through which the planes descended to permit the Duke of Kent, as an Air Commodore of the R.A.F., to make a military and naval review.

St. John’s was gay. All the troops were massed for a review and a march-past. At last everyone could have a good look at the naval-forces, the U.S. troops of the Newfoundland Base Command, the Canadian forces, all waiting for a single blast of a bugle that would make the joint-forces snap to attention for a prince of the reigning-house.

Newfoundland felt soothed, returned to one known allegiance, and though the traditional “royal weather” was fugitive, the day stayed fine as long as the prince needed it.

“Down town” the harbour bristled with ships and the waterfront waited knowing that the Prince would come that way.

It was a big day at the Hut.

Royalty is so magnificently at home amongst troops and the hostel represented their comfort and welfare; the canteen the place where they were fed. His Royal Highness could meet the St. John’s War Services’ Association and realize the scope of their venture. He could glance round the canteen and see many of his own countrymen of the Royal Navy, the reserve and volunteer navy. He could see representatives of the Royal Canadian Navy, Merchant Navy, United States Army and Navy, and the Newfoundland naval and military recruits. His eye could include the volunteer workers, the cooks, the charwomen and all concerned in the operation of the Hut. He personally met as many as he could, mingling in the crowds like a man on his own ground. He could bring lustre to the Hut, and the common touch as well, because Royalty belongs to all people. Many visitors and local people met the Duke of Kent.

Many truly grieved when he became a casualty himself. He had visited Newfoundland and the people knew him.

There was another vice-regal visit to the canteen in 1942. This time it was from Her Royal Highness the Countess of Athlone. She brought the woman's touch—her comprehension of the daily round and the very common task. She could meet the cooks and cleaners and understand the value of their work because she was acting on behalf of the Crown.

So the canteen greeted people from near and far, and from every station in life.

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In describing the growing-pains in the canteen during its period of physical growth, one is inclined to forget the desk where the men tendered their money in order to receive its highest possible value. In the second chapter, the financial section mentions the canteen as the big money gatherer, but without making reference to the evolution of the cash-system and the volunteers behind it.

The wits of the cashiers were required to keep pace with as many re-arrangements of registers, as there were of stoves, toasters and coffee-pots.

On every volunteer shift, there was one woman, or girl, destined for the cash-desk which was so often to be found in a different place from the week before, or of another variety.

The cashier might have been quick with figures, quick with change, but she had to learn the system to become adept. Then just as she had mastered it, another one would be installed. Then too, with regard to money, the Hut aimed to oblige—to make things easy for the visitors, and not subject them to the regulations regarding exchange.

The English tendered their pound notes and their half-crowns and they had to be accepted at local values.

The Americans came with their neat, crisp notes, which were always the plus of ten per cent, and perhaps to make it harder the Free French might tender francs and expect the cashier to understand them. Frequently the harassed girl would feel that she was inhabiting a miniature Bourse, Wall Street, or Bank of England—institutions for which she had been ill-prepared. It troubled her when she was detained by an exchange problem, as it held up the line of advancing men. Then at the end of her shift she was required to balance her cash with one of the record-keeping machines, and sometimes in the rush, and with the exchange problems, the amateur cashier simply could not make the money and record agree.

In one of the last public meetings the Treasurer said in his report, "It is worthy of note that throughout the whole four and a half years the degree of accuracy was high—and all of our cashiers were volunteers."

Doubtless the girls who had laboured over the cash, were grateful for that statement. Their minds had made heroic efforts to leap from one currency to another. They had been conscientious because money was involved and they had glimpsed a day of reckoning with the inspectors. They felt they would not be let off, as they were required to sign their names to the days takings, and to hand over to a trained desk-clerk. Though it was a bit intimidating, hope was an emotion that every cashier knew. At the end of the shift some miracle might balance the cash.

The Treasurer, who commented on the high degree of accuracy, could not know that after uneven balancing, the volunteers frequently opened their own purses and made up the deficit. Somehow there was never anything over, but when the volunteers had to pay back, it was like retribution for the extra egg slipped to a soldier or sailor who looked too thin.

The first system for cash resembled long rolls of tickets like those used in the movies. A visitor studied the price of food—decided what he would eat and then bought the appropriate strip of tickets. It was quite simple when the tickets represented five cents each, but when, with the mounting costs, things like chocolate-bars, bottles of soft-drinks and ice-cream cones rose to seven cents, it became complicated. While the number seven is known to be Biblical, and impressive in the Book of Revelations, it is an uncomfortable one for a cashier. Life would have been simpler at the desk, if the things that had been five, had stayed five. Then after several cash-registers, with different types of buttons, levers and bells, the canteen adopted cafeteria style, and the war stopped, most mercifully, before that system changed.

In cafeteria style, the customer passed with his meal in front of the cashier and paid what she asked. She was obliged to learn the price-lists, and her mind had to be nimble and her eye quick. Even then she was up against the intractable number seven. There was so much “pie, à la mode” with the blob of ice-cream that would have been more accommodating at five static cents.

The cashier, at work, was like a person whose eyes were required to stay at a certain level—to see nothing of the men but their hands and the money they tendered.

A cashier, who worked at the desk, for four and a half years, became extremely sensitive to the war in terms of the hands that fought it. She learned to distinguish the type of service that went with the hands, to separate the land, sea and air.

There were so many outstretched hands, with fingers that were thin, thick, boney-jointed, nail-bitten, club-thumbed. The cashier saw hands that were grimed with coal-dust, greasy with oil. In survivors she saw hands that shook, that were frost-bitten, scarred, and often minus a joint. Then the hands always represented the outside world, and were saturated with Newfoundland weather. The cashier knew when it was bleak, when it was wet, when it was summer from the supple look of the bones. She knew when it was winter from the chilled, rough texture of the skin, and the brittle look of the finger-nails. Often she wished she could look up and study the face that went with some sensitive-looking hand. Other times she might feel compassion for young hands that seemed so fresh, and unspotted from the world.

But there was little time to look up, and when the first rush was over the men had receded into the canteen. Other workers had to receive them as whole creatures—to talk to them—feed them—and when there was time to linger long enough to hear their stories, to learn where they were going and from where they came—and it was in the canteen that so many of the war-stories were told.

## CHAPTER V THE HUMAN ELEMENT

“Boots—boots—boots—boots—  
Movin’ up and down again!”

RUDYARD KIPLING

That was how it sounded—the clatter of feet on their various ways, and so often the mood, the purpose, and the state of the man was reflected in his walk. Frequently there was youth, and the sheer timeless joy of living, in spite of abnormalities. Sometimes there was self-effacement in the muted step of a man creeping towards solitude. Sometimes the feet stumbled and the listener knew that a man had sought oblivion in the deadening effects of alcohol. Often there was the tap of a crutch from a survivor whose feet had been frost-bitten through exposure in an open-boat. Sometimes the feet sounded old, because war is such a forcing-house. In the evening the feet danced, stepping out with a vigour that would annihilate the world of memory.

Perhaps, above the sounds of the feet, came the voices, and in them the listener could clarify tones, while learning the vernaculars of towns and countries, and the vocal differences that can separate the English-speaking world.

It is said that no one hears his own voice, and many know the experience of listening back, after recording, to some one who sounds like a perfect stranger. Though self-recognition may be lacking, the listener becomes immediately aware of sounds, different from the ones he makes himself.

The Newfoundlander became familiar with the foreign voices even when he could not hear his own. Then the visitor could tell the “Newfie” that his voice was from Ireland or still mixed up with Devon or Cornwall.

It is true about the resident. It was history brought forward in tones that expressed ancestry. A voice is a revealing thing. It reflects background, states of mind; above all it reflects national characteristics.

Prior to the Newfoundland occupation by the Americans for ninety-nine years, one thought vaguely of one American voice, perhaps largely divided into the vital resonance of the north, and the softer drawl of the south. But one did not have to wait ninety-nine days to realize much finer distinctions. A tone, an accent, belonged to each state, and in time it was not necessary to ask where the boy came from. One learned the sounds from Texas, the Carolinas, Missouri, etc.—it was like studying notes, until one knew the whole human scale of the western hemisphere. But in the main the American voice was vital, resonant, purposeful and uninhibited. It was like a shop-window with plenty in it, so unlike the English voice. There, one had to enter the shop to learn about the quality of the inside goods.

The American voice had an urgency which made the volunteer hurry a little as if the enemy was near. The Canadians had something of the same quality, though in a much lesser degree. They did not grip their vowels or shake them quite so thoroughly. They did not make the war sound so near. And the French-Canadians spoke English so well, and so courteously, that one felt insular and mentally lazy about languages. But if an occasional Free-Frenchman appeared, one pushed the girls forward who had been at school in Paris, or at a French-

convent in Montreal. Then if the local volunteer had to remain silent in front of an unknown tongue, there was always the language of the eye, and the finger that could point.

The American appeared as a vital creature with sufficient energy to solve the world's problems. He seemed to galvanize the Hut, and one sensed in him the rising nation, the future power that still sprawled in an unco-ordinated population. The diverse types of Americans brought the "melting-pot" right into the Caribou Hut. One glimpsed the future, realizing that the United States could become very great when she had amalgamated her races.

The English "tars" brought the old-world poise, the modulation, especially the regulars of the Royal Navy. They seemed to be unshakable young men, with narrow hips, clean necks, steady eyes, and quiet voices that could mention blitzing, shelling and torpedoing as everyday things. If the regular "tar" had a sorrow and told it, one became voiceless, because he spoke with a remoteness that repudiated pity and sentimental over-response. He was a creature who emanated discipline, dignity and tradition, and though from "below decks" he so often seemed like Britain's real aristocrat. If he responded to the intangible qualities of friendship, he would sit, and talk gently of England, and maybe search for the snap-shots of his sweetheart, his wife or child. Then one was surprised to learn the ways of naval-tailoring—the odd way bell-bottomed trousers are made—and where the navy keeps its pockets.

But all the English sailors were not disciplined regulars. There was the man from the shires, the ebullient Cockney, the joker, the life of the party, the man who must do his conjuring-trick even at a dance, or while having his tray added up at the canteen desk. That type was always asking for a spool of thread, a tumbler or a walking-stick, so that he could do a trick. There were others that radiated joy, the ones who entered the Hut with a laugh that was completely unliberated because it felt itself threatened. One instinctively treasured the men who were gusty and gay, the ones who could hearten more dolorous men. One unconsciously turned towards laughter, thinking of an old tag,

"If anyone can play a tune,  
For God's sake let him play."

The men needed the gay note, though some came to the Hut and danced, as if the war had made them tone-deaf.

The merchant-seamen suffered a great deal. Their service was so constant, so full of unceasing dread that high-tension was an inevitable sequel resulting in a shore reaction that made plenty of trouble in the Caribou Hut. Yet it was tragic to see some of the old "survivor" merchantmen sitting round the Hut. They looked so seamed, so sea-bitten, with an inertness that appeared super-imposed upon a saturation-point of endurance.

But as a general rule the men were cheerful. Many were quite happy and bright, and the ones that were truly gay were like a high, clear note of untainted joy. They seemed quite impervious to depression. There was a sailor who came often; one who said blithely, "call me Tip." Tip was almost unbearable to meet. He was so joyous that he hurt. Yet he was so soaked in disaster that one felt that the gloomy Gods had decided to pound him, to see if they could suppress his laughter. The only sign Tip showed was in the blue stains all round his eyes—but Tip comes later, when we try and recapture a few human details.

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It would be stupid to contend that life in the Hut was all cakes and ale, all beer and skittles. One was dealing with human beings, neither angels nor devils. Though great attention



was paid to the cakes and skittles, the men often took it into their own hands to see that ale and beer was included in their entertainment-programme.

War is not a Sunday-school picnic, and the social and welfare-worker who expects a man to act as if it were, would be a useless figure in a hostel. The “should and ought” mentality becomes an irritation. The unrelenting idealist too far removed from the common day and the human weakness.

One is reminded of a story of the last war. A male idealist was telling a seasoned veteran that his son had drunk nothing but milk for the duration. Then the deady quiet veteran inquired of the idealist how had his son procured the milk? Had he backed the rear-end of a cow over the trenches every time he craved a drink?

Then there is the story of the rapt woman relating the ecstasy of a young aviator in aerial warfare—how he had soared into the blue—into the empyrean, until he felt that he was touching the face of God. She was indignant when a debunking voice suggested that one hand might be touching the face of God, but the other was releasing the bomb that killed the non-combatant, the woman, the child, the baby in the cradle.

Yet there is symbolism in the story of those two hands. One must fully acknowledge the duality of man, the angel and devil in human nature. In spite of what one likes to think, it is irrefutable that the tot of rum, in war, frequently comes before the glass of milk. War makes many drunkards. In the Hut the rum had to be recognized even though it was never served there.

The best social and welfare worker does not try to reform at once. He picks the man up, without censoriousness. He mops up after him, and often through uncritical help he makes him conscious of a better way of enjoying himself. When a man gets over the beer he can be led to the skittles.

There is a comfortable proverb which says, “Thou wouldst do little for God if the devil were dead.”

The Executive had designed the Caribou Hut as a strictly temperance hostel, and everything was done to keep it that way, but it is well-known that when a man wants a drink, he is capable of plucking the wings of the angels, and once in the possession of a bottle it goes with him until it is empty.

The Executive faced their problem realistically as well as compassionately. As men they knew what war was like—that it inspired great valour and Victoria Cross conduct along with terrible reactions and gigantic shames. They recognized both angel and devil in the Caribou Hut, and when the latter was up they coped very well. This side of the venture is like a bit of “now it can be told,” the fact that went off the record. When the roistering spirit was on, and the drunk rolled in to break everything up, he was lured away to the “sobering-up room,” a spot hidden away in the basement. There he was isolated—kept out of harm’s way with a big-hearted Y.M.C.A. manager on guard.

With so much turbulent humanity it was necessary to enlist the services of the civil, the naval and military police of the joint-services, and keep them always on hand.

The control of drinking was always a serious problem, and in spite of the efforts to curb it, it continued, with a risk to the Hut that it might scare away the better type of serviceman. It became a problem of a good “chucker-out” and a strong doorman who understood the principles of muscular Christianity. In that way he could block the entrance of ineligible, and let the entertainment continue without too many incidents. In time the right doorman helped a great deal, and there was little protest when a roisterer was turned away. The majority of the

visitors were invariably appreciative of all that was being done for them, but of course there were some disgruntled fellows with chips on their shoulders. Though happily rare, there was that type of serviceman who expected the red carpet to be rolled out for him, whether he was drunk or sober, merely because he was a serviceman. For that reason he expected to break every social law with impunity. One is reminded of the old Quaker, who anticipating all types of people, said “Thee will find them all here too.”

In spite of the drunks it was amazing how rarely one needed the police in the canteen. Perhaps men pull themselves together in the presence of women. They unconsciously wonder what their own mother, wife or sister would say? There was the minimum of trouble, though the drunks often staggered into the canteen, seeking blotting-paper to sop up their liquor, but they frequently seemed to represent the unhappy drinker, the miserable fellow who was glad to place his head on the table and let his arms loll downwards. Once inside the canteen he often forgot to eat. Sometimes he fell asleep and snored fitfully, but no one put him out unless he became a nuisance to others, and in the clatter of the canteen a few snores were not noticed. Invariably the volunteers would keep their eyes on the spot where the drunk sagged, and when the sobering-up moment was ripe, some fearless girl would appear with black coffee. Often, when the four-hour shift was over, one might hear a young, motherly voice taking charge.

“There, there, my man,” would come the soothing command, “look up and drink this.”

Then the miserable fellow would open his bloodshot eyes, and do as he was told, in a spirit of intense meekness.

There were often many sad reasons why the fellow was drunk. He had seen Plymouth fall flat on its face—he had been in a squad detailed to clean up a child’s school after blitzing—he had seen things he wished to forget—he had been blitzed in Liverpool on his one night’s leave—he had been floating on a raft in mid-Atlantic in winter, and his frost-bitten toes still pained—he had been sailing in convoy so long that the tension had become unbearable—he did not want to go back to sea because he knew his number was up.

Then sometimes the lapses into drink were for private and personal reasons. He had been away so long that his wife had run off with another man—she couldn’t bear the buzz-bombs any more—the sirens were driving her crazy.

Who could abuse such men? No one in the canteen. The workers let them stay, and if there was time they encouraged them to talk, and sometimes the men lurched off as if they had experienced a mental release.

There were so many good fellows to remember—drunk or sober—a spark of divinity in all. One of the unforgettable sights was the drunken sailor who staggered into the canteen one night while the wind howled outside in a regular Newfoundland gale. Inside, the sailor seemed to have found sanctuary, and he clearly intended to make a long stay. Once settled he lurched from a table to a counter to buy ice-cream cones, which he shared lick for lick with the canteen-cat. The sailor was so very fair, never appropriating one extra lick for himself. When one cone was finished, he rolled off to buy another, while the cat sat on a chair, with her eyes narrowed to green slits of contentment. The cat seemed to provide all the company the sailor wanted; and, about cats and the men who rescued them from sinking-ships, one could write for hours in a spirit of pure heart-break.

In the whole war there were so many animal-stories, and this one, from Newfoundland, belongs to the merchant-marine, to a seaman who came to the Caribou Hut.

It is a story of a mother-cat and her kittens, torpedoed off the coast of St. John’s, and separated because one seaman rescued the cat and another the basket of kittens. If one can

credit the fact, we claim it as a truth that the seaman who rescued the kittens had his leg shot off, though he managed to hop to the life-boat with the basket under his arm. But in another boat the mother-cat thought her kittens had been left on the sinking-ship, and she clawed her way up a rope with a resolute sailor after her, both finally escaping by a hair's breadth.

The boats pushed off in the iciest chill, and the inkiest black, while a seaman in one boat tried to restrain the frantic mother from jumping overboard, and another in another boat, tried to shelter the kittens and feed them some powdered milk. The details of the two stories are touching, unselfish and heart-breakingly compassionate, but we must leave them to human imaginations. We can only say that after much hardship and delay, rescue-ships picked up the survivors, and the cat and her kittens were reunited on a Newfoundland wharf. For a second all the bigger issues were halted, all the human misery restrained, as a sub-Arctic dawn revealed a black cat rushing towards a basket to lick her kittens.

One must report the happy ending for the cat and her kittens. All were tenderly nurtured and given the best of homes.

In feline experience, the large cat was a prize, and a seaman told her story. Puss had been torpedoed four times and rescued. As the best of mascots she was carried from one ship to another. She had been to Dunkirk and watched the operations from the rigging of a small steamer, because there was no room, even for a cat, to stand round on the deck. As the seaman then said, "Puss went ashore at Brest and met a French gentleman," and truly the cat and her kittens became an illustrious addition to the cat-tribe in Newfoundland.

As one saw the black, green-eyed mother, and smoothed her warm sides one marvelled at the enormous experience enclosed in her shining skin. But when visited, Puss slept on, like the Sphinx who refused to tell its secrets.

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How many books could be filled up with heroic life-stories?

There were five hundred volunteers in the Hut—all or whom could be interviewed for a collection of amazing happenings, before which one would fall back in wonder knowing that truth was stranger than fiction. One could be sure that the war wrote its own tragedies, and its own epics, and that the human creature often acted spontaneously from another plane of consciousness.

Against the dark background of the past, memory often raises a face, and one asks where is that boy now? Often the mind says he is dead. But where are the ones who survived? Did they manage to readjust in the post-war world? Do they remember the friendships they formed in Newfoundland?

Where is Tip? Did life, and the gloomy Gods, finally crush his gaiety? We know that he sailed from Newfoundland with laughter that warmed the chilly air over his ship.

Tip was a person. By birth and education he should have been an officer, but he loved his fellows below decks, and he disliked the curbing effects of responsibilities. Tip would enter the Hut and announce, with complete glee, that he was just "out of clink" or just "out of the rattle" because of something authority could not condone.

Ask Tip if he had been torpedoed, and his white teeth would flash above his food. "I wore nine sweaters in Murmansk and they sopped up the Arctic water, but, I sweated in the mediterranean—that sea was hot—and it wasn't so bad—the sea, I mean, when I was torpedoed out of Galveston—but—"

Then Tip would stop because he could not tell his story in front of a crowd. He would go on laughing and have more to eat, though a thoughtful person might question the blue stains

round his eyes and wonder what they meant? But Tip would change the subject, roar laughing, and say that he had blown in a hundred dollars in an evening because he might be dead in a day.

In time people took Tip into their homes, and he laughed all the more in sight of fresh strawberries and cream, and as many eggs, and slices of bacon as he could eat. Maybe one gave him a cake, to carry back to his “flower class” corvette and in time one learned to fill in the gaps that Tip slid past.

He had been torpedoed, off Galveston, while in convoy, and his ship had stopped to engage a submarine so that some oil-tankers could get clear. In the convoy had been a passenger-ship which had been sunk, and later, tied to the raft on which Tip floated, was another raft where a young woman had given birth to a baby. The seaman did everything to keep both alive and Tip crawled from his raft to lend a hand. Then the mother died—then the baby—

Tip was still laughing as he devoured big Newfoundland strawberries and the famous “scalded cream.”

“I said a prayer,” he related, “and dropped the mother over. I said another prayer and dropped the baby over.”

There was a silence and some one asked why they had not been kept for decent burial? For once Tip stopped laughing and eating. His voice became stern. “There’s little room on a raft for the living,” he said, “let alone for the dead.”

Then, as if he might have talked out of turn he laughed, and then gulped but it might have been the strawberries, “I said another prayer,” he went on, “and dropped my pal over. He had been shot through the stomach when we engaged the submarine.” Tip smiled all round the table with some deprecation. “You’ll think I said a lot of prayers that day.”

Then he wiped his mouth with a very young gesture.

“Gee, thanks, but I must go,” he said, “or they’ll have me back in the rattle again.”

One can say in truth, that Tip was unbearable to be with because he was drenched in such tragic laughter, but as the Battle of the Atlantic continued, along with his joy, the blue stains round his eyes reached nearly to his hair-line.

On his fourth torpedoing he turned twenty-two.

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And, of course, there was that rare person in the Hut who touches the fringe of mystery. The canteen had its psychic, in a girl who was great friends with a sailor, on a corvette that was in and out several times.

The sailor had a handsome beard and he looked as impressive as the family album, though some said he was exactly like one of the disciples reincarnated into the British Navy.

When he entered the canteen his smile indicated that his beard was war’s finest achievement. To the girl he liked, he always announced himself with a “peekabo” smile, though he left her with a backward glance that held great promise for their future.

As the girl was shaking hands for the final good-bye, she was caught up in the arrested minute. In the awesome way she described it herself she said that time seemed to stop—the canteen stood still—even the clatter of dishes died away as her hair became like a million magnetized wires. She thought she was going to faint but it wasn’t that. The sailor appeared in front of her in a pool of blue light and his face receded into a luminous blur. She said she made a wild inner cry for help not to let the sailor know, that she *knew* he was going to die, and somehow she felt she had won when the sailor gave no sign of having noticed anything

unusual. But his last smile, the girl said, was like all of life's blessings pinned on one face. She says she will never forget him, here or elsewhere. She further said something arresting—that she stays silent now when people debate about the clairvoyant—she says it is just a question of knowing and not knowing—and when you know, you don't talk—you don't have to.

Five weeks after her experience she heard that the sailor had been the only casualty on a corvette, suddenly shelled.

There were so many unwritten stories like that—always the same story, about a different boy and girl in whom other-worldliness became intensified when they were torn apart.

But it was by no means tragic all the time—there was the girl who thought that a Canadian airman had fallen for her—but one evening, at a dance in Grenfell Hall, he confessed that he was miserable because he was terribly in love with a girl at home, and he had never been able to tell her—now he was going overseas—and she might get married to another fellow before he got back.

After the Newfoundland girl had recovered from the shock to her self-esteem, she showed her womanliness by leading the airman to the telephone, and under her encouragement and direction he got his girl in Canada, and made a long-distance proposal. That evening the airman danced with his heart in his toes, because, of course, the answer had been, “yes, I'll be glad to, darling.”

There was no human emotion left unexplored in the Hut. There was no volunteer who did not know hundreds of men.

Can we forget them? Never! They are the echo of a deep historic note, the bit of warmth that lingers in memory when the wonderful day is over.

Will they forget us?

We think not, because they were here, in Newfoundland, and now they know the inwardness of the old capital town.

“Ah! men must know you to understand  
Have seen the cliffs of your rugged land  
Have seen the mist come rolling down—  
The hills that guard the sleeping town.”

And now we run down the diminishing curve of this small book, the narrative of the Caribou Hut written in the beginning of 1949, as Newfoundland awaits the final stages of her fusion with Canada. Never has the country been more thoughtful—never has she taken such stock of her salty past.

As we have waited, with no more than a caretaker government, we have been like a people “sewn in between ancestry and posterity.” We will press onward, and like Churchill we do not view the future with any misgiving, but we know it is change, and we are experiencing the apprehension of the waiting-room. Our windswept isolation was long and the fight with the elements an unnegotiated thing. There was hardship in being a Newfoundlander but perhaps it was a strong thing too.

Love of country is in everyone. It is strong in the Newfoundlander because he knows the contrasting emotion of hate, but the old island has given her children salt on their lips, rock in their souls, and sea-sounds in their ears. Their living was a dependency on the fruit of the sea, the plenty of the ice-fields, and not for nothing did the most elegant of pioneers learn to drink a toast to “Bloody Decks!”

Whatever Newfoundland has been she was never trivial. Nature could not permit it. She was too rooted in the sea, and the sea came before the dry land.

What is there to say to all the visitors who came, now scattered as far as land lies and sea rolls? What is there to say to the St. John's War Services' Association now going into voluntary liquidation, to the volunteer, to every Newfoundlander now moving off from an old heritage?

Only this—that we will remember all that is good in the past, but we will anticipate the good in the future too.

But now we pause to salute the old days—the seasoned things—the efforts we know.

As our young visitors learned to spring to attention for our National Anthem, during our largest period of history, we spring to attention too. We say with our heart's blood—

“As loved our fathers so we love  
Where once they stood we stand  
Their prayer we raise to Heaven above  
God guard thee, Newfoundland!”

The Caribou Hut—and Old Newfoundland—Hail and Farewell.

MID  
February 12th, 1949.



Ode to Newfoundland

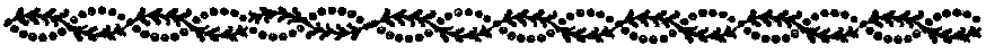
*When sun rays crown thy pine-clad hills  
And Summer spreads her hand,  
When silvern voices tune thy rills,  
We love thee, smiling land,  
We love thee, we love thee,  
We love thee, smiling land.*

*When spreads thy cloak of shimmering white  
At Winter's stern command,  
Through shortened day and starlight night,  
We love thee, frozen land,  
We love thee, we love thee,  
We love thee, frozen land.*

*When blinding storm-gusts fret thy shore,  
And wild waves lash thy strand;  
Though spindrift swirl and tempest roar,  
We love thee windswept land,  
We love thee, we love thee,  
We love thee, windswept land.*

*As loved our fathers, so we love;  
Where once they stood we stand;  
Their prayer we raise to Heaven above,  
God guard thee, Newfoundland,  
God guard thee, God guard thee,  
God guard thee, Newfoundland.*

CAVENDISH BOYLE.  
1849-1916.



## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *The Caribou Hut: The Story of a Newfoundland Hostel* by Margaret Duley]