

BRIEF HISTORY OF HMCS AMHERST

The "Flower" Class corvette, HMCS AMHERST, pennant number K-148, was the first of three ships of the same class completed by the Saint John Drydock and Shipbuilding Co. Ltd.¹ Laid down on 25 May 1940, she was launched on 4 December the same year, Mrs. Frederick F. Mathers, wife of the Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia, sponsoring the ship.²

HMCS AMHERST may be justly called a "fighting ship." Built quickly in a time of emergency, when ships were scarce and the need great, she lived fully in a time of war and, with the coming of peace, vanished. Her's was a lifetime of fire and peril when, it can be quite truthfully said, she did not know for months on end when the torpedoes which ended the lives of the merchant ships she shepherded and sometimes those of her mates, would come out of the dark night and destroy her too.

Endurance trials for the corvette were held in July 1941 and acceptance trials on the 4th of the following month. On 5 August 1941, HMCS AMHERST was commissioned with Lieutenant-Commander A. K. Young, RCNR, as her first Commanding Officer.³

The ship was named after Amherst, the shire town of Cumberland County, Nova Scotia. Earlier, this town had been called Les Planches by the French, but was given its present name in 1759 in honour of General Amherst, Commander-in-Chief of the forces in North America and, a year later, Governor-General of British North America.

Even before she was commissioned, AMHERST became a special charge of the War Workers of the Toronto Evening Telegram. Throughout her career, these kindly folk sent gifts about three times a year and never forgot Christmas. The town of Amherst also took particular care of the ship. The local chapter of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire and other service organizations supplied an electric washer, toasters, percolators, electric irons and other equipment.⁴ Such appliances were not essential to the fighting efficiency of the ship and therefore were not supplied by the Navy. But it will be readily recognized just how much they were appreciated by the ship's company.

On 2 April 1942, a picture "typical of the corvette, HMCS AMHERST" was sent to the Mayor, Mr. Martin J. Kaufman. It was suggested that he and the Town Council might care to hang it in the Council Chamber or in some other place they deemed suitable.⁵

Like many another corvette, AMHERST sported a war-time badge, painted on the gun shield by a member of the ship's company. It depicted Pluto, the dog belonging to the Mickey Mouse of the comic strip, pouncing on a surface submarine which looked up at its attacker with a terrified eye painted on its bow.⁶

AMHERST wasted no time in getting into the worldwide struggle for which she had been built. On 21 August 1941, she left Saint John and arrived in Halifax the next day. Leaving the latter port on the 27th, she proceeded to Pictou, N.S., where she carried out two days of anti-submarine practices in company with several destroyers and corvettes. Three more days of similar exercises occupied her outside this port from 3 to 6 September.⁷

During this month, HMC Corvette BADDECK escorted the troopship, *SS Lady Drake*, from the St. Lawrence River to the Caribbean Sea. The corvette having engine trouble, the troopship was accompanied back from Jamaica by HM Cruiser *Caradoc*. On the 18th, AMHERST was ordered out to the Halifax approaches to relieve the cruiser. Taking over escort duties from *Caradoc*, she sailed to Quebec City where she and *Lady Drake* arrived on the 21st. From here, she and the troopship returned down the river to steam to Botwood, Newfoundland, via the Straits of Belle Isle. The two ships then went back to Quebec City, where AMHERST left *Lady Drake* and proceeded alone to Halifax to arrive on 4 October 1941.

Having made her start, AMHERST was ready for sterner duties. Allocated as a mid-ocean escort, she underwent a short refit, which was intended to prepare her for the work ahead. Leaving Halifax, she arrived on 12 October 1941 in St. John's Newfoundland, a port she was to get to know very well in the years ahead.⁸

St. John's, originally planned as a base for Canadian local defence forces only, was by this date fast becoming, under the administration of Canadian naval authorities, one of the principal allied bases from which the all-important Battle of the Atlantic was being waged. The first corvettes had arrived there in May and their number had risen to forty by August.⁹ These small, gallant ships, along with destroyers, sailed with the convoys to Iceland where they turned over their charges to Royal Navy escorts, picked up west-bound convoys brought in by the latter, and returned along the stormy routes of the North Atlantic to Newfoundland. By the end of September 1941, the escorting of the slower ocean convoys had become the responsibility of the RCN, US Naval escort forces having taken over the protection of the faster convoys. In practice, however, the performance of the USN was less than originally indicated, that of the RCN more.¹⁰

AMHERST left St. John's on 13 October 1941 to join a group of seven other corvettes led by the destroyer, HMCS ST. FRANCIS. Their convoy was the 38-ship SC-49. A strong south-westerly gale delayed the convoy, but there was no opposition from the enemy. Arrival in Iceland was made on the 24th.¹¹

The weather during the month of November 1941, was almost continuously bad. Convoys were slowed down, which meant less time in harbour for the escorts and more time at sea. The corvettes with their unresisting buoyancy bore the heavy seas without incurring too much weather damage; the destroyers; however, suffered greatly, six only of the thirteen being capable of sea duty during the month.¹²

AMHERST returned to St. John's as one of the escorts of ON-32.¹³ From the Newfoundland port, she sailed on 24 November 1941 to join the 46-ship Convoy SC-56, HMC Destroyer RESTIGOUCHE, Senior Officer, with five other RCN corvettes and the Free French corvette *Alysse*. Continuous gales characterized the passage and the convoy hove to on two occasions. A straggler, the 4,016-ton British steamship, *Scottish Trader*, was unaccounted for at the end of the passage and it was later learned that she had been torpedoed and sunk on 6 December 1941, south of Iceland.¹⁴

AMHERST arrived in Hvalfjord, Iceland, on 6 December 1941, and sailed again on the 10th to join Convoy ON-44. November's bad weather had not let up. Until the 12th, the convoy could not be found. RESTIGOUCHE set off to search for it but by dark she had failed to find any trace of it, so returned to the corvettes. Throughout the night, the ships proceeded in line abreast, along the path it was calculated the merchant vessels would follow. The next morning contact was made with them. They were some thirty miles distant, but there was never any meeting, for now a very hurricane descended upon the sea and the unfortunate ships.

RESTIGOUCHE ordered the corvettes to heave to. Once this was accomplished, the mountainous seas shut them from the destroyer's sight. The night that followed was like a nightmare for her. She suffered severe damage and had to proceed to Greenock, Scotland, for repairs.¹⁵

As for AMHERST, after heaving to, she was unable to remain in station. She was in danger of being fouled by HMC Corvette ORILLIA, so she proceeded before the wind to the eastward. Because of the seas and driving spray, she could not see the other ships of the escort.

In the morning she hove to. No ships were visible. The next day, the 15th, she succeeded in contacting ORILLIA by radio, but an attempt to join this ship and HMC Corvette AGASSIZ was not successful. Nor was her luck better when she tried to find ON-44. It turned out, however, that the convoy had been given orders to disperse. A signal received on the evening of the 16th, informed her of this fact.

By the 17th, no vessels having been encountered and fuel getting low, the corvette proceeded toward St. John's, where she arrived on the 21st.

While AMHERST did not suffer from the storm as had RESTIGOUCHE, she did incur some damage, although much of it was caused on the relatively quiet 11th. The wireless aerials have been carried away, damage had been sustained by the bridge dodger, and there was some other minor damage about the ship.¹⁶

The bad weather of the previous two months carried on into January 1942. It was almost welcome to the tired escorts, however, for, when it moderated, the danger of U-boat attack increased. The German underwater craft were concentrating around the coasts of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and the United States, and they made numerous attacks during the month.¹⁷

On 4 January 1942, Task Unit 4.1.11¹⁸, HMC Destroyer SKEENA, Senior Officer, with five corvettes, including AMHERST, sailed to join SC-63. This was a convoy composed of 34 ships, but heavy weather damage caused seven of them to return to St. John's and an eighth, who had lost her rudder, to Sydney.

Just outside the harbour, SKEENA had a contact which she attacked. The weather, however, appeared to be the chief menace. On the 6th, fog set in and, the following day, a westerly gale rose to roil up the ocean. On the 9th, at 0700, the gale dropped off, but an hour later it was replaced by a more violent wind. The seas were heavy throughout the night. The convoy hove to and scattered and SKEENA suffered such heavy structural damage that she was forced to return to St. John's.

On the 13th, the scattered convoy was ordered to disperse and on the 15th, the escorts reached Iceland. The fact that the enemy were in the vicinity of this convoy was revealed in the fate of two stragglers, *SS Caledonia Monarch*, who was torpedoed on the 12th, and *SS Dimitrios G. Thermiotis*, who was torpedoed on the 18th. Both ships sank.¹⁹

From Iceland, the group sailed to join ON-60 on 28 January 1942. On 8 February, AMHERST found that she had just enough fuel to take her back to St. John's. She notified the Senior Officer in HM Corvette *Polyanthus* and received permission to steam directly to Newfoundland. There were indications of U-boats in the vicinity and, while en route, she tried to draw away their attention by carrying out dummy runs with depth-charges. She was in St. John's the next day.²⁰

The Free French Corvette *Alysse* was also to be detached on the 8th, to proceed directly to St. John's, but at 2230 she was torpedoed. Thirty-four survivors were picked up and she sank the following day, at 0930, while in tow.

The U-boats struck again, at the convoy, this on the 9th, when they torpedoed and sank *SS Empire Fusilier*.²¹

AMHERST joined SC-70 on 19 February 1942, along with three other corvettes and the Senior Officer, US Destroyer *MacLeish*. Following the 24th, the convoy was beset by strong easterly winds and gales. Three of the thirty-two ships straggled, but were eventually accounted for.²²

AMHERST returned to St. John's with ON-74 and left the port again on 4 April 1942 with SC-77. Sailing with this 52-ship convoy, HMC Destroyer ASSINIBOINE, Senior Officer, gave the corvette her first opportunity to end the transatlantic passage in Londonderry, Northern Ireland. The Irish port, which was to become so familiar to most Canadian Naval personnel, was established as the eastern terminus of the escorts in January, Task Unit 4.1.12, HMC Destroyer OTTAWA, Senior Officer, being the first to steam up the River Foyle leading to the city after escorting Convoy SC-64.

Bad weather experienced during the passage of SC-77, forced ASSINIBOINE to leave the convoy. Gale-force winds slowed it down to about two knots and, at this speed, her fuel was not sufficient for the voyage.²³

Convoy ON-88, which was joined from Londonderry on 23 April 1942, appeared to be shadowed by U-boats a few days out. On the 27th, and again on 1 May, the enemy's homing signals were heard in the vicinity and they tallied with the Admiralty's U-boat disposition reports. ASSINIBOINE, the Senior Officer, carried out a search, but found nothing. It was thought that these incidents verified the theory that U-boats were aware of the convoy's whereabouts but preferred to attack ships sailing without protection in coastal waters.²⁴

After arrival in St. John's, AMHERST remained in the port for only two days, when she sailed for Halifax with Convoy CL-32.²⁵ On 13 May 1942, five days after arrival, she proceeded to Liverpool, N.S., for a refit. Installation of radio direction finder (RDF) or radar was an important part of the refit.²⁶

On 28 June 1942, the corvette sailed back to Halifax. Here she was taken in hand for completion of defects. On 10 July, she proceeded to New London, Connecticut, to escort the British submarine, *P-554*,²⁷ to Argentia, Newfoundland.

She left New London in the submarine's company at 2400 the 14th. Outside the harbour, in Block Island Sound, the submarine, for exercise purposes, submerged at 0400. At 0055, it signalled that it had surfaced. AMHERST proceeded, with her radar reporting a submarine echo on the starboard quarter throughout the middle watch. The corvette put on her navigation lights to enable the other to take station on her, but, as the submarine failed to put in an appearance, it was later concluded that the echo had been a false one. When daylight came, there was no sign of her companion. She carried out a search and notified aircraft and ships in the vicinity. Finally, at 2203, she returned to New London, where she found the submarine in harbour.

In his story of the affair, the Commanding Officer of *P-554* noted that he had informed AMHERST of his intention to dive, of the duration of the dive and the point three miles away where he intended to surface. He came up twenty-one minutes after submerging, but almost one-half mile north of his estimated position. AMHERST had been clearly audible throughout the dive, but on the surface he could not hear or see her. He signalled with Aldis lamp and remained stopped for twenty minutes. He then patrolled at slow speed until 0519, by which time it had been broad daylight for forty-five minutes. Visibility was at its maximum point, but the corvette was not in sight. He consequently returned to New London.²⁸

AMHERST and the submarine left again on 16 July 1942. This time there was no trouble and Argentia was raised on the 20th. En route the corvette found lots of opportunity to train asdic and radar ratings. Lookouts were also trained in the methods of sighting submarines.

On the 23rd, AMHERST slipped at St. John's and proceeded to Cape St. Francis at the entrance to Conception Bay to escort SS *Botlea* to St. John's. Later in the day, the 5-ship convoy, JN-8, was lent support and, the following day, the 2-ship NJ-6.²⁹ Foggy weather gave the ship an opportunity to put her new radar to work.

In July 1942, events seemed to show that, with the increasing of strength of escorts in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Caribbean, the U-boats were again turning their attention to convoys approaching and in the Newfoundland area. On convoy attacked during the month was ON-113. On the 23rd, HM Destroyer *Burnham*, Senior Officer of its escort, sighted a submarine and, the following day, HMC Destroyer ST CROIX sighted two of the enemy boats and destroyed one.³⁰

The morning of the 25th, SS *Broompark*, the tanker *British Merit* and the motorship *Empire Rainbow*, were torpedoed. None of these ships sank immediately, although *Empire Rainbow* did so the following day, and *Burnham* ordered the corvettes, HMCS BRANDON and HMS *Polyanthus*, to stand by them.

On the same day, AMHERST was ordered from St. John's to relieve *Polyanthus*. She proceeded in company with HMC Corvette NAPANEE and HM Tug *Frisky*. US Tug *Cherokee* was also sailed from Argentia, while the Bangor minesweeper, WASAGA, and the tug *Foundation Franklin*, were despatched from Halifax.

AMHERST relieved the British corvette on the 27th. *Polyanthus* had been screening *British Merit*. When *Frisky* arrived with NAPANEE, the tug prepared to take the tanker in tow. NAPANEE having taken over the screening of the operation, AMHERST, at 0015 the 28th, shaped course ten miles to the north-east where *Broompark* was waiting.³¹ When *Cherokee* arrived, a working party made up of men of the US tug and the corvette went aboard *Broompark* to secure tow-line and examine damage. At 1615, the tow commenced. Progress was slow. The freighter sent a signal stating that her list was increasing and that the water was rising in her engine room and foreholds. The men were then taken off and the towing resumed. The next day - the 29th - *Broompark* was down two feet more by the head. The weather, however, was very fine. On the smooth sea, undulating gently with a slight swell, AMHERST sighted a floating British contact and antenna mine and sank it with rifle fire.

The tug could not make much speed because of the quantity of water shipped by *Broompark*. In an effort to remove it, the Bangor minesweeper, HMCS COWICHAN, was ordered to sail from St. John's on the 29th, with salvage pumps and gasoline. The Bangor arrived on the scene at 1425 the next day. *Broompark* was then rolling heavily and the wind and sea were rising. After waiting for a favourable ship moment, COWICHAN succeeded in putting aboard the torpedoed ship two dockyard engine-room artificers, two pumps and a drum of gasoline. She then returned to St. John's.

The following day, a working party joined those already aboard. Unfortunately, the pumps were not in working condition and could not be got going. After seven hours of futile work, they were removed. The men were also taken off.

COWICHAN was sighted again on 1 August 1942. She was in company with *Foundation Franklin*. But before she and her companion arrived on scene, *Broompark* sank. The freighter gradually settled by the head until the forecastle was covered. Her stern rose to an angle of almost 90 degrees and she disappeared beneath the moderately swelling sea. The entire process of sinking took about 1½ minutes.³²

With the submarine, *P-554*, AMHERST engaged in asdic exercises in Conception Bay from the 8th to the 12th and she also carried out more exercises with HM Corvette *Celandine* on the 14th. On the 15th, both corvettes joined the escort screening the 29-ship convoy, SC-96.³³ St. CROIX was the Senior Officer, and along with her was another destroyer, HMCS OTTAWA, from whom this was destined to be the last crossing.³⁴

The month of September 1942 was an unhappy one for the Newfoundland Command. Locally two merchant ships were torpedoed and sunk at the Wabana anchorage in Conception Bay, and another ship was torpedoed within eight miles of St. John's harbour.³⁵ The U-boats also pressed vigorous attacks against the ocean convoys. Among these none was more sorely hit than ON-127.

ST. CROIX and her group, TU-24.1.14, including AMHERST, sailed from Londonderry to join this convoy on the 5th. In the evening of the following day, a U-boat made a sighting report of the convoy. On the evening of the 9th, ON-127 passed the southern end of a long patrol line formed of the "Stier", a new group of U-boats, and the "Vorwarts", an older one. The enemy lost contact during the night, but regained it at daylight on the 10th.

When the attack came, it was unexpected, for no Admiralty sighting reports had been received. In quick succession, three ships were torpedoed. These were the Belgian steamship *Elisabeth Van Belgie*, with 44 survivors out of a crew of 50, the British tanker *F J Wolfe*, who remained afloat, and the Norwegian tanker *Sveve* whose entire crew was rescued. HMC Corvette SHERBROOKE was ordered to stand by the torpedoed ships, while ST. CROIX and *Celandine* turned toward the convoy and carried out sweeps. Both OTTAWA and ARVIDA attacked contacts.

At 1915, almost five hours after the first attacks, the British tanker, *Empire Oil*, was hit by two torpedoes. All but two of her crew were rescued. The sighting of a periscope close to the victim indicated that the attack had come from within the convoy.

At 2225, the Norwegian tanker, *Marit II*, was torpedoed, but she remained afloat as a straggler. The Norwegian tanker, *Fjordaas*, who was a straggler from the convoy, was another damage victim. She was able to return to the Clyde under her own power. Following these attacks, AMHERST, ST. CROIX and HMC Corvette ARVIDA, all dropped patterns of depth-charges on contacts without results.

Attacks were resumed the next day, the 11th. At 1755, the British steamship, *Empire Moonbeam*, was sunk, her entire crew of fifty-five being saved. At 2310, two tankers were torpedoed and sunk, the British *Hektor* with one lost from her 87-man crew, and the Norwegian *Hindanger* with one lost from thirty-nine. AMHERST was detailed to stand by the wounded Norwegian, who was eventually abandoned and sunk by gun-fire.

The escorts fought back. Following the attack on *Hindanger*, numerous surface sightings of U-boats were made. One of these was a thousand yards from ARVIDA. After the U-boat crash-dived, the corvette carried out an attack with a six-charge pattern. Another, at 0335 the next morning, was blown to the surface by *Celandine* after it dived; but it fell back into the water and disappeared. The same ship attacked another on the surface, but it also got away.

At 0428, while *Celandine* was attacking the second U-boat, another Norwegian tanker, *Daghild*, was torpedoed. The tanker did not sink, but remained with the convoy.

There were no further torpedoings on the 12th. During the daylight hours, however, U-boats surfaced around the convoy and were chased and attacked. ARVIDA attacked a contact at 1243, and was later credited with a "U-boat probably slightly damaged."

In their attacks, the U-boats had worked in pairs, approaching the convoy from ahead during the day, diving under the escorting ships and firing their torpedoes from inside the convoy. Once they made their kills, they had remained among the ships, steaming along with them for two or three hours until the alarm had died down and they could deliver further attacks.

The escorts, for their part, scored at least twenty-four counter-attacks by the end of the action. They were credited afterwards with "probably slight damage" to three U-boats.

There was another attack in the forenoon of the 13th, at 1045, when the Panamanian steamship *Stone Street* was torpedoed. She was abandoned and, at 1215, sank.

The last casualty was a very serious one to the RCN. This was no other than HMCS OTTAWA, who was torpedoed shortly after midnight the 14th. At approximately 0016, she was torpedoed again. The destroyer listed to starboard, broke in half and sank bow and stern up. *Celandine* picked up forty-nine men and ARVIDA, who already had her decks crowded with some 166 survivors, rescued twenty. Five officers, including Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Commander Clark A. Rutherford, RCN, and 109 ratings lost their lives.

On the morning of the 15th, HMC Corvettes BRANTFORD, REGINA and MONCTON of the Western Local Escort Force, joined. AMHERST and SHERBROOKE

with three damaged tankers and another merchant ship, detached for St. John's. While there were no more attacks on the main convoy, this group which had separated from it, themselves caused a casualty. Their course took them across the bows of Convoy SC-100 and, in the early morning of the 16th, one of the tankers collided with and sank the British steamship *Empire Soldier*. Her survivors were added to the number already carried by the corvettes.³⁶

AMHERST brought in a total of 125 survivors, and SHERBROOKE forty. More arrived in ARVIDA, *Celandine* and ST. CROIX. In all there were some 443, 68 of whom came from the OTTAWA.³⁷

On the 22nd, C-4 joined the 27-ship Convoy SC-101. There were no attacks made on this convoy, but a straggler, the British steamship *Lifland* was sunk on the 28th, presumably by a torpedo.

Poor weather and the prompt aggressive action of the escorting ships of C-4, kept losses down in ON-137. The group sailed from Londonderry on 11 October 1942 to join this convoy. In the forenoon of the 16th, ON-137 appeared in the southern part of the U-boat patrol line on the east side of the Atlantic. A scout reported its appearance and twelve boats of the "Panter" group and the 15 boats of the "Wotan" were ordered to attack. Soon after the original sighting, however, the weather deteriorated so much that the shadower had great difficulty in holding on to the convoy.³⁸ At 1103 on the same day, *Celandine* sighted the periscope of the shadower and dropped depth-charges on it. The convoy made an emergency alteration to port and the British corvette came down its starboard side. At about 1130, AMHERST, who had been sweeping astern, joined the hunt. At 1147, she got a firm contact and fired a ten-charge pattern. The contact was regained on the port quarter at 1000 yards. AMHERST altered to attack again, but found *Celandine* doing so. After the latter's pattern exploded, the contact was lost and not regained. AMHERST then left the other corvette to search and rejoined the convoy.³⁹ Following the war, it was learned from German records that the U-boat attempted to fire torpedoes by hydrophone bearings, but was forced by *Celandine*'s attacks to dive to eighty and later to 170 metres, suffering considerable damage as a result.⁴⁰

The other U-boats were unable to find the convoy and, consequently, had to content themselves with stragglers.⁴¹ One of these stragglers was the US steamship *Angelina*. At 1531 the 17th, she was struck by two torpedoes. The magazine exploded and she sank. There were nine survivors, one of whom died in the rescue ship, *Bury*.⁴²

At 0930 the 19th, the US steamship *Steel Navigator* sighted a U-boat. This ship, who had straggled because of shifting cargo, fired two rounds of 5" shell at the prowler and forced it to submerge. At 1531, the enemy retaliated with a torpedo which struck home. The boilers exploded and the ship sank. "Five or more casualties" were reported. The U-boat rendered safe by its covert attack, surfaced again, and its Commander questioned the survivors. When they refused to answer questions, he

threatened to ram their raft. Finally he observed, "I see you are Americans. I am sorry for you."⁴³

The Commodore's ship, *SS Hilary*, nearly became a casualty on the 16th. The asdic operator aboard reported an underwater explosion and, sometime later, a torpedo track was seen on the starboard quarter passing the ship. It was thought that the explosion had been caused by a "dud" torpedo striking the ship.⁴⁴

Because of the severe gales and wide diversions of route taken by the convoy, the fuel situation among the escorts had become critical. ST. CROIX had to proceed to the Azores and leave RESTIGOUCHE to assume the duties of Senior Officer. AMHERST's fuel supply was also low. At 2000, the 19th, she and *Celandine* detached for St. John's and, the next day, ARVIDA followed them. Only two escorts, RESTIGOUCHE and SHERBROOKE, were left with the convoy. It was estimated that at the time four U-boats were shadowing them. Happily, no further attacks developed.⁴⁵

On 30 October 1942, the group sailed from St. John's to join the ill-fated convoy, SC-107. It had sailed from New York on the 24th and was composed of 36 ships. Senior Officer of C-4 was HMCS RESTIGOUCHE and she was accompanied by seven corvettes, including AMHERST. The convoy was met at the appointed position and was taken over from the Local Northern Escort, HM Destroyer *Walker*, Senior Officer. Previous to the taking-over, a U-boat had been sighted on the surface, so the convoy knew it was being shadowed.⁴⁶ The shadower, *U-522*, had sighted the convoy near the coast of Cape Race, Newfoundland.⁴⁷

After the failure of the operation against ON-137, the "Panter" boats had formed a patrol line north-east of Newfoundland, named "Veilchen". The position of the convoy was known, so the U-boats took the risk of narrowing the patrol line and moving it up to the limit of a belt of prevailing fog, in readiness for a concentrated attack. The convoy passed through the centre of the line and, within a few hours, six of the enemy were in contact. To them the escort screen appeared to be weaker than usual, perhaps because there was only one destroyer present.⁴⁸

The escorts themselves had received several warnings of U-boats throughout the day of 1 November 1942.⁴⁹ At 2204, RESTIGOUCHE had an asdic contact. This was followed by a radar contact at 1800 yards from a surfaced U-boat. She increased speed to twenty knots to close, but gave up when she received information that one of the ships had been torpedoed. This was the British cargo ship *Empire Sunrise*. The freighter remained afloat for some time and tugs were sent out to tow her into St. John's, but she sank before they could reach her. All 51 crewmen were rescued from this ship by the rescue ship, *Stockport*.

Contacts were obtained by the escorts and patterns of depth-charges were dumped on them. The next day – 2 November, 1942 – was a grim one for all. At 0315, the action stations bells were rung as three ships were successively torpedoed.⁵⁰ RESTIGOUCHE dropped a ten-charge pattern, while *Stockport* went busily about the

scene, lit up luridly by “snowflake,”⁵¹ picking up survivors. At 0705, the enemy stuck again and in the next ten minutes torpedoed in turn the British tanker *Empire Leopard*, the British steamship *Empire Antelope*, the Greek steamship *Mount Pelion* and the British steamship *Maritima*. “Snowflake” was fired but there was no sign of U-boats.

AMHERST and ARVIDA went to the aid of *Stockport* and helped pick up 250 survivors. Casualties were high, particularly in *Maritima* and *Empire Leopard*.

Welcome reinforcements to the escort later in the day were HMC Corvette MOOSEJAW and HM Destroyer *Vanessa*. In the middle afternoon, wet snow appeared to cut down the visibility. As darkness fell, two evasive turns were made in the hope of shaking off the enemy pack, if only temporarily. A respite was indeed gained, but during the evening and night more H/F D/F reports of enemy submarine transmissions came in.

Finally, the enemy caught up. Shortly before dawn, the US tanker *Hahira* went up in a massive burst of flame and smoke. *Stockport* got 53 survivors off this ship, losing only three. Three torpedoes had been fired at the tanker, but only one had struck. The explosion broke her in two and she had to be sunk by the escort.

After the torpedoing, in brilliant sunshine, AMHERST sighted a U-boat on the surface and chased it without success. ARVIDA had a similar experience, and *Celandine*, who had been 15 miles astern during the preceding 17 hours, rejoined to fire on a U-boat and dump three ten-charge patterns on a contact made off it when it dived. The German retaliated by firing torpedoes at her.

Stockport by this time had become crowded and the US rescue tugs, *Uncas* and *Pessacus*, were consequently detailed to join her in the work of rescuing survivors.

At 1930, the Greek steamship *Parthenon* was struck by a torpedo and sank, and, at 2055, the Commodore’s ship, the British steamship *Jeypore*, became a victim. There were eight casualties, while eighty-three men were rescued by *Uncas* and *Pessacus*. Among the latter was the Commodore of the convoy. Commodore B. C. Watson, RNR.

The attacks went on. At 2310, the Dutch steamship *Hobbema* was hit. She was abandoned and sank at once. The British steamship *Hatimura*, struck by two torpedoes at 2315, followed her below the waves. The crew of this latter ship felt that there had not been enough escorts and that too much “snowflake” had been fired, thereby illuminating the ship conveniently for the enemy.⁵² There was only one casualty from this ship, seventy-one survivors being taken aboard by the tugs.

Another victim of this unhappy day was the British steamship, *Empire Lynx*. For a time it was believed that the Dutch cargo ship *Titus* was still another. An explosion was heard in the bow and twenty-two of her crew abandoned. The ship, however, went on to reach the United Kingdom undamaged.⁵³

The situation aboard *Stockport* and the tugs was becoming acute. Food and water were becoming scarce, not to speak of room on their decks. The following evening, at dusk, they detached from the convoy for Iceland. *ARVIDA* and *Celandine*, whose fuel was running low, sailed with them.

The night of the 4th was brilliant with northern lights. The enemy did not take advantage of them by attacking from starboard when the ships would be silhouetted against the northern sky. When their last attack came, it was from the port side. The British steamship *Daleby* received this parting torpedo at 2200 the 4th. She sank at 0200 the next morning. There were no casualties.

At dawn on the 5th, three US ships appeared, the coast-guard cutter *Ingram*, the destroyer *Leary* and the 1090-ton experimental ship *Schenck*, along with the Liberator aircraft, H/120. The Liberator attacked two submarines during the day and was later credited with the destruction of one of them, *U-132*.⁵⁴

Fifteen ships had been accounted for in the gruelling battle. Because the rescuers were skilled men, there were relatively few casualties. Most of the ships had a few, but the largest numbers were in ships which had sunk shortly after being struck, such as *Hobbema*, *Maritima*, *Empire Leopard* and *Hartington*.

German losses had been two U-boats, *U-132* as noted above, and *U-520* destroyed by RCAF Squadron 10 on 30 October.⁵⁵

AMHERST and the group returned to St. John's with the 29-ship convoy ON-147. In contrast to the eastern passage, this was an uneventful one. Although there was no opportunity to relax vigilance during these days, it is likely that the absence of actual attacks was welcome.

Back in Newfoundland, men of AMHERST's ship's company were guests of the YMCA Red Triangle Club. On 5 December 1942, two trucks conveyed forty men from St. John's to Harbour Grace. In the latter town, they were served hot soup and lunch on arrival and another lunch before returning to their ship.⁵⁶

While December 1942 was a month of many sinkings, one of the worst being ON-154 with 16 ships lost, C-4 had no more to contend with than some rather abominable weather. The 49-ship SC-112 was joined the 10th. Senior Officer of the escort was HM Destroyer *Churchill*. *RESTIGOUCHE* was also along, with five corvettes including AMHERST.⁵⁷

The worst sufferer from the bad weather encountered was HM Destroyer *Caldwell* who joined on the 13th after sailing to overtake at 18 knots. She was struck by a heavy sea at 2030 the 16th. Three scuttles were stove in and the bridge superstructure was damaged. She detached and proceeded to St. John's at 12 knots. She received further damage during the return voyage and, on the night of the 18th, a

Chief Stoker was washed overboard. Eventually she had to be towed in to the port by the tug *Tenacity*.⁵⁸

The bad weather continued through January 1943. It discouraged the underwater prowlers and there were few sightings of them or attacks on convoys. AMHERST and her mates went from Londonderry to join ON-158 on the 4th. Back in St. John's, they joined HX-224 on the 27th.

The U-boats were more active in February 1943. Their policy seemed to be to concentrate on one convoy in a general area and attack it heavily. Bad weather gave the ships' companies no rest at sea and, because it took their ships longer to reach port, their stays in harbour were too short to rest them. The weather also kept the aircraft on the ground, so that there was little support from the air.⁵⁹

HX-224⁶⁰ was escorted by HM Destroyer *Highlander*, Senior Officer, Churchill, RESTIGOUCHE and four corvettes. It consisted of 58 ships in 14 columns and it was estimated that at one time during its passage it covered an area of no less than 52 square miles.⁶¹

At 0835, 29 January 1943, an escorting aircraft suddenly crashed into the sea. Its depth-charges exploded and there were no survivors. The same day, the convoy ran into very heavy weather, which continued until 3 February.⁶²

AMHERST reported on 1 February 1943, sighting a suspicious object distant seven miles on the port quarter. She investigated it, along with SHERBROOKE and a Fortress aircraft, but found nothing.

That evening and the next morning, a strong wind blew and the convoy was enveloped in a heavy sleet storm. At 0320 the 2nd, the rear ship of the port wing column, the US steamship, *Jeremiah Van Rensselaer*, was hit by three torpedoes. No white rockets were fired and there was a delay of about five minutes before the Senior Officer in *Highlander* was informed of the attack. AMHERST and SHERBROOKE carried out an "observant"⁶³ around the wreck, but nothing was seen. It was believed that the U-boat had escaped to the leeward in the rain.⁶⁴

Twenty-eight of the crew of seventy were taken off the stricken freighter. The Master was not a survivor. Despite the terrible explosions which had rent the hull and caused the death of so many, the ship remained afloat and had to be sunk by a boarding party. It was said that she could have been saved if the boiler fires had been extinguished.⁶⁵

From then on, H/F D/F bearings indicated that the convoy was being shadowed. It was believed that five U-boats were in contact, with at least one at each corner of the convoy. RESTIGOUCHE, returning from a sweep, disturbed one, and COLLINGWOOD carried out an attack on it. On the following morning, a tanker, *Empire Glade*, reported having struck a submerged object shortly after the corvette's attack. She thought this

might have been a U-boat. The fact, however, that, when examined later, she showed no indication of having struck an object, suggested that the impact may have been caused by one of COLLINGWOOD's exploding depth-charges.⁶⁶

In the early morning of the 3rd, the visibility was again obscured by heavy sleet. The enemy profited by it, sinking the British tanker, *Inverilen*. The counter-attack was slow in getting started. Nothing was sighted and no echoes were picked up by radar, although from survivors' reports it appeared that the U-boat passed close to the wreck five to ten minutes after the torpedoing.⁶⁷

Although it was not known at the time, another ship, a straggler, was sunk during the day. This was the British tanker, *Cordelia*. At the end of the voyage, she remained unreported and it was later learned that she had been torpedoed.⁶⁸

On 2 February 1943, the escort had been strengthened by the arrival of HM Destroyer *Clare* and HM Sloop *Londonderry*. On the morning of the 3rd, air cover appeared in the form of the Fortress aircraft N-220. This plane sighted a surfaced U-boat and, attacking it, succeeded in sinking *U-265*.⁶⁹ When it departed at dusk, *Highlander* requested the Commodore of the convoy to alter course, to give the impression that the convoy was making for Malin Head, the northernmost point of Ireland, and then alter back at 2200. At the same time, *Clare* and *Londonderry* were ordered to make a radar sweep astern, starting at 2145, so as to prevent a shadower from observing the alteration back. *RESTIGOUCHE* was to go six miles ahead to put down any U-boats shadowing from this direction.

As the Senior Officer had anticipated, *Londonderry* obtained a contact by radar just at the time H/F D/F bearings indicated that the enemy were informing one another of the change of course. *Londonderry* and her companion carried out five attacks. During the third, a violent explosion occurred which damaged the after part of the sloop and blew three men overboard. She had eventually to be towed to Moville on Lough Foyle, arriving minus her stern, which had dropped off during the tow.⁷⁰

There were no further attacks and C-4 arrived in *Londonderry* on 6 February 1943.

For a short period, in March 1943, *AMHERST* had the opportunity of tilting with the enemy in a different theatre of war, when the group interrupted its interminable escorting on the mid-ocean route, to take a troop convoy of eight ships from *Londonderry* to Algiers. Operation "Torch", which had begun on 8 November 1942, when a great combined force of British and US troops had landed in North Africa, had come to an official end on 20 February 1943, but the feeder convoys continued to sail into the Mediterranean. C-4's convoy was KMF-10-B, a fast convoy to North African ports, and consisted of eight troopships. Senior Officer of the group HM Destroyer *Churchill*. *RESTIGOUCHE* was present and four corvettes.⁷¹

That the enemy were in the vicinity of the convoy, became apparent at 0200 the 6th, when BRANDON obtained a radar contact. She lost the contact at 0222, but regained it twice later. At 0450, using radar range and bearing, she opened blind fire. Since the surface speed of a U-boat was greater than that of a corvette, she hoped by this means to make the enemy dive, which would decrease its speed and enable her to overtake it and attack.

AMHERST had an asdic contact, which she attacked; it is doubtful that it came from a submarine.

On the 8th, the convoy passed through the Straits of Gibraltar. On the following morning, at 0032, BRANDON investigated a radar contact which she thought at first might have been a side echo made off AMHERST. At 0100, she sighted a U-boat altering abruptly away from the convoy. She altered course to head it off, but lacked the speed to do so. At 0207, she had another radar contact and a second brief sighting. There was a third contact at 0342 and she opened blind fire to drive the enemy down so it would not be able to observe the convoy's movements. The Commanding Officer of this corvette, Acting/Lieutenant-Commander J. C. Littler, RCNR, believed that at least two U-boats participated in the attempted attack.⁷²

After this, aircraft became the menace. The convoy arrived at Algiers on 9 March 1943. Before entering the port, COLLINGWOOD oiled from a tanker inside the breakwater at the entrance. She then went to anchor just inside. In the night, German aircraft bombed the harbour in an attempt to sink the troop transports. The corvette was in the direct line of approach as one aircraft headed in on the tanker, but a British destroyer inside the breakwater, brought down the enemy.⁷³

The group left with a convoy the next day. On 14 March 1943, while in the Bay of Biscay, the convoy was attacked by four Focke-Wulf Kuriers. Because the escorts lacked long range anti-aircraft guns, the enemy was able to take his time on his bombing runs without any interference. He had no success, however, although one of his bombs hit a trooper, the *Duchess of York*. It passed through several decks, but did not explode.⁷⁴

Back in the River Foyle on 7 April 1943, C-4 sailed to join ON-177 but AMHERST remained in port, delayed by defects. Ready by the 19th, she left with the escort group, C-2, supporting Convoy ON-179. Strong winds were encountered during the nights, but there was no enemy action and plenty of air support. The U-boats were not far off, however. ONS-4,⁷⁵ which was sailing a parallel course, was being shadowed.⁷⁶ About 300 miles to the south-east of Cape Farewell, Greenland, it was attacked. Sent to reinforce its escort were the escort aircraft carrier, *HMS Biter*, and the destroyers, HM Ships *Pathfinder*, *Opportune* and *Obdurate*. Aircraft from *Biter* found and attacked a surfaced U-boat on 25 April. It dived and *Pathfinder* came in and heavily depth-charged it. The U-boat remained submerged for over an hour, but the entry of water through the Diesel exhaust forced it to the surface. Its engineer officer opened the valves and

flooded the boat after the crew abandoned. He and nine ratings were lost. *Pathfinder* rescued three officers, three midshipmen and thirty-three ratings.⁷⁷

Shortly after arrival in St. John's, the prisoners from this U-boat, *U-203*, were taken from *Pathfinder* in a harbour vessel and transported to the "floating barracks", AVALON II.⁷⁸ As US authorities wished to question these men, AMHERST and HMC Corvette CALGARY were ordered to take them to Boston. AMHERST embarked five officers and ten petty officers from the submarine, while its Commanding Officer and twenty-three ratings went to CALGARY. The corvettes reached Boston on 4 May 1943. After turning over their prisoners, they left for Halifax on the 6th with Convoy BX-49.⁷⁹

AMHERST left Halifax on the 11th to meet off Newfoundland and escort to Halifax the convoy ON-180. There was considerable ice that spring and, while ON-180 had lost no ships either to the weather or the enemy, it had suffered from this hazard. Drift ice, encountered on the 7th, had damaged several of the merchantmen, while among the escorts, HM Destroyer *Burnham* had had her propeller damaged and HMC Corvette BITTERSWEET had lost her asdic dome.⁸⁰

On 15 May 1943, AMHERST proceeded to Charlottetown for a refit. Included in the work to be done on her was the extending of her forecastle, an alteration which was made about this period to most of the corvettes. The refit, originally planned to be completed by 3 July, was not finished until November.⁸¹

On 11 November 1943, AMHERST left Charlottetown and returned to Halifax, calling at Pictou, N. S., en route. She proceeded to Pictou on two other occasions during the month, the first for five days of harbour working-up exercises, the second for eight days of exercises at sea.⁸²

In December 1943, AMHERST was returned to her old group, C-4. She left Halifax on the 23rd and was in St. John's two days later.

At this period, the Allied forces were waging the Battle of the Atlantic with emphasis on the offensive. The change in tactics had been permitted by burgeoning production lines and had been beginning to become apparent when AMHERST had last been on the trans-oceanic routes. The days had gone when escorting forces could do little more than use their spare numbers to beat off the enemy as best they could. Now they could sail out with a belligerent face, and they had fast striking groups, made up mostly of newly-commissioned frigates, whose chief function was to hunt out and kill, to lend them support.

HX-272, to which C-4 sailed to join on 26 December 1943, was a large convoy made up of seventy-seven ships of which three returned to harbour. Thirteen ships formed the escort, with HM Destroyer *Hotspur* Senior Officer. The passage was uneventful.⁸³

ON-220, joined on 16 January 1944, also had a large escort, with *Hotspur* again the Senior Officer. The convoy was shadowed on the 17th and 19th by enemy aircraft and possibly by U-boats, but was not attacked.⁸⁴ The real enemy was, as so often before, the violent weather which caused damage to many ships, particularly the "Liberty" ships, ships which had been built quickly to answer an emergency and which tended to develop cracked plates under stress. Six ships had to return to the United Kingdom. One of these was the US ship *Jane Long* who developed a crack across Number 4 hold. AMHERST was detailed to escort her.

RESTIGOUCHE also suffered in the storm. Damage to her hull necessitated docking in St. John's on arrival and she was unable to join in the next passage taken by her group.⁸⁵

Escorting *Jane Long* had taken AMHERST back to Londonderry and she remained in the Foyle during February 1944. She had the misfortune while here to ground in the river. Her Commanding Officer and Navigating Officer were ashore attending a harbour training programme and she was in charge of the First Lieutenant. The tugs *Cervia* and *Fabia* were attempting to tow her from one berth to another. While she was about to turn to approach her new berth, she touched ground and held. The tugs kept at their work and she came free in four minutes and was then safely berthed. The asdic dome was torn off and there was a slight nick on the propeller blades.⁸⁶

Escorting Group C-4, having returned to Londonderry, AMHERST rejoined it on 28 February 1944 to make the passage to St. John's with ONS-30. Along with this convoy was a "MAC" ship,⁸⁷ *Empire MacMahon*. One of her Swordfish aircraft, while on anti-blockade runner patrol, crashed. A leading airman was killed, but the pilot and observer were picked up unhurt by RESTIGOUCHE.

Once again, bad weather was encountered en route and it continued into March 1944. Severe damage was caused and the Liberty ships were as usual the principal sufferers. The group went to HX-283 on the 17th. Foul weather met them as soon as they left St. John's. Visibility outside the harbour was two cables with a fresh southerly wind. The convoy was scattered and had to be rounded up over an area stretching thirty miles in each direction. The low visibility caused four of the merchant ships to be involved in collisions, of which one was able to continue with the convoy. Seven ships in all, of the original seventy returned to port.⁸⁸

An uneventful return was made by the group in April 1944. The month was a quiet one on the Atlantic. The weather had moderated and the U-boats generally were on the defensive. Less H/F D/F bearings were being taken, because the enemy was quieter and not giving himself away by radio transmissions. ONM-231,⁸⁹ which was escorted by the group, was a large convoy of ninety ships. HXS-288, which was joined from St. John's on 23 April, was still larger, with 103 ships, of which two returned to harbour. The escort was very small, being composed of COLLINGWOOD as Senior Officer and four other corvettes.⁹⁰

After returning in May 1944 with another larger convoy, ONS-236,⁹¹ AMHERST went on to Halifax to have repairs made to defective studs in the boiler mountings. She left this port on 17 June 1944. The Bangor minesweepers, HMC Ships TRURO and BROCKVILLE, were searching at the time for a U-boat located by H/F D/F, which was believed homeward bound on an easterly course. She effected a junction with these two ships the following day, and assisted in the hunt. Before midnight on the 20th, she gained a contact and attacked it with a ten-charge pattern. She succeeded only in doing herself considerable damage. As a result of fractured steam lines, the engine room was filled with steam. The engines were stopped and the ship was practically useless as an anti-submarine unit for twenty minutes. As so often occurred in such cases, the object contacted was probably not a submarine.⁹²

On the 25th, AMHERST sailed from St. John's to relieve HMC Corvette AGASSIZ, who was screening the cable ship, *Lord Kelvin*. A buoy, about 4' in diameter and 1-1½' above the surface, had to be located, and this was achieved on the 30th thanks to AMHERST's Type 271Q radar. Giving a remarkable performance, it detected the buoy through thick fog at 5600 yards.⁹³

Convoys escorted during July 1944 were HXM-298 and ONM-246. U-boats were not active in the North Atlantic during the month, many of them having been ordered to the English Channel to attempt to halt a part at least of the interminable stream of ships conveying supplies and troops to the invaded shores of Western Europe. C-4's chief activity was a 5-hour search carried out while escorting the first-named convoy. It took place 600 miles north of the Flemish Cap of Newfoundland, but produced no target.⁹⁴

August 1944 was also a quiet month. The group met with heavy fog after leaving St. John's on the 16th to join the 106-ship HXS-303. It lasted with hardly a let-up until the convoy split in the Western Approaches. The Master of the *Amastra*, a MAC ship in the convoy, stated that he had never seen so much continuous fog in the North Atlantic at that time of the year in twenty-two years at sea. None of the aircraft could be flown off. Remarkably, no ships were missing when it lifted, a fact which compared favourably with earlier days when station-keeping was a serious problem even in good weather.⁹⁵

Although in September 1944 allied shipping losses were less than in any previous month with the exception of May in the same year, it meant for C-4 a breaking of the lull in hostilities. At 0930 the 2nd, AMHERST joined the main body of the convoy, ONS-251, in company with the Senior Officer, HMC Frigate WENTWORTH. At 1902, an aircraft from the MAC ship, *Empire MacMahon*, reported an oil track, and HMC Frigate MONTREAL was sent to investigate. She found nothing.

At 2215, the moon shone on a flat calm sea. Suddenly the Norwegian steamship, *Fjordheim*, was torpedoed on the starboard side. The officer of the watch in HMC Frigate MONTREAL observed what looked like a giant roman candle sputtering in the convoy. The frigate closed and, at approximately 2224, observed the torpedoed ship sinking stern first. Arriving, she carried out an "observant". The steamship, *Empire*

Mallory, hauled out of her line in the convoy and stopped to pick up survivors. This action, humanely motivated, resulted in MONTREAL's obtaining negative results.

AMHERST had heard the explosion and she closed up to action stations, steamed cat gear⁹⁶ and increased to 13 knots. Zig-zagging and passing through the wreckage left by the sunken ship, she closed MONTREAL and commenced screening the frigate and *Empire Mallory*. The latter, who had picked up two survivors, was ordered back to her position by MONTREAL. The frigate went about the business herself and soon had thirty-three survivors on her decks.⁹⁷

The other ships were busy as well. Non-submarine contacts were frequent and added to the difficulties. Two of these were gained by WENTWORTH and COLLINGWOOD. HMC Frigate CHEBOGUE joined at 0440 the 3rd, and, with COLLINGWOOD, swept in the vicinity of the sinking.

It was believed that as many as a half-dozen U-boats might have been patrolling these waters north-north-west of Ireland. No more were seen by the convoy, however. One steamship, *British Valour*, straggled and COLLINGWOOD had to escort her back to the United Kingdom. On the same day – the 5th – after receipt of a warning by the Admiralty that north-bound U-boats might be encountered, the convoy altered its southern route to cross the concentration at right angles. On the 7th, schools of fish appeared in the convoy's path and sent off numerous false echoes. Several of the ships attacked them. On the same day, MONTREAL transferred her survivors to the rescue ship *SS Fastnet*.

Escort Group W-2 relieved C-4 on the 13th, but AMHERST and two other corvettes, HMC Ships BRANDON and CAMROSE, remained with the convoy to escort the St. Lawrence section. This section joined a Sydney to Quebec convoy, SQ-93, and were delivered safely to the Gulf.⁹⁸

On 23 September 1944, AMHERST proceeded to Liverpool, N. S., for a refit. It was completed on 7 December 1944. In Halifax, on 15 December, she was transferred to the Halifax Force. At the end of the month, she sailed to Bermuda for working-up exercises, escorting en route the tug *Clifton*. She was back in Halifax on 24 January 1945.

In February 1945, AMHERST passed a month in escorting coastal convoys and ocean convoys on the coastal legs of their voyages.⁹⁹ A half-mile from the Sambro Light Vessel in the Halifax approaches, AMHERST attacked a contact with hedgehog on the 15th. Before a second attack could be completed, the contact was lost. On the 17th, while escorting HFJ-40 with the Bangor minesweeper, RED DEER, she was present when the latter obtained a radar contact. After she altered to the bearing of the attack, the Bangor reported hearing two distinct underwater explosions. She attacked with depth-charges with negative results. An aircraft, diverted from a sweep, obtained several echoes in the area of RED DEER's attack, but it was hampered by the presence of fog.¹⁰⁰

AMHERST's sailings on the trans-Atlantic routes were not, however, finished. A corvette had to be prepared to fit in anywhere she might be needed. When escorting HJF-40 took her to St. John's, she was called upon to take the place of PARRY SOUND. This latter corvette was undergoing repairs and could not join her group, Escort Group C-7, which was leaving the port to join HX-340. AMHERST left on the 27th with the group under its Senior Officer, HMC Frigate LANARK.

Near their destination on 7 March 1945, there was some excitement among the escorts when HMC Corvette HAWKESBURY gained a contact. HMC Corvette MERRITTONIA was detailed to assist her and the contact was attacked with negative results. At 1310, LANARK sighted an oil slick extending for about five miles from the position of the contact. HMC Corvette COPPERCLIFF detached to relieve MERRITTONIA. At 1600, several ships were screening the operation, including AMHERST. Before the attack was broken off at 1820, AMHERST and MERRITTONIA detached with the English Channel section of the convoy.¹⁰¹

Back to Canadian shores with ON-291, AMHERST went on to Halifax where she arrived on 3 April 1945. Working successively with Escort Groups W-7 and W-9, she sailed with HHX-350, the Halifax section of the main HX-350 convoy, and ON-296. On the 11th, she accompanied the cable ship, *Cyrus Field*, who had to make cable repairs.¹⁰²

At the beginning of May 1945, the corvette arrived for exercises in Digby, N.S., with W-9, HMC Algerine Coast Escort FORT FRANCIS Senior Officer. She remained with W-9 during the month. HHX-354 was escorted and the accompanying from Newfoundland of ON-300 took the group to New York, where they turned around with HX-358.

At 0426 the 11th, while joining ON-300, AMHERST reported that a collision had taken place twenty miles astern between two steamships, *Jacob S. Fashett* and *John Cropper*. ON-300 had been accompanied from the United Kingdom by Escort Group C-9 and its Senior Officer in HMC Frigate PENETANG ordered HMC Corvette FERGUS to investigate the accident with AMHERST. At 0715, the two corvettes located the damaged ships. *Jacob S. Fashett* reported that she would be able to proceed, but FERGUS had to remain with *John Cropper* and take her to St. John's. AMHERST joined the convoy.

At 1430 the same day, PENETANG detached HMC Frigate VICTORIAVILLE and HMC Corvette THORLOCK to intercept *U-190*. The war in Europe had ended on the 8th and the German High Command had broadcast orders to all U-boats to surrender. Obedient to orders, *U-190*, among whose feats was the sinking of the Bangor minesweeper, HMCS ESQUIMALT, reported her position on the evening of the 11th. When the Canadians arrived shortly before midnight, they found the enemy boat surfaced and burning navigation lights. It was escorted to Bay Bulls, Newfoundland.¹⁰³

The war over, the hard-fighting little corvette, built as she had been for an emergency, was no longer wanted. Her days were plainly numbered and, in fact, her end came soon enough.

On 7 June 1945, she sailed to Shelburne, N.S., to land her ammunition. She voyaged in company with the corvettes, HMC Ships MIDLAND, Senior Officer, and TIMMINS, and the Bangor minesweeper, HMCS LACHINE. On the 20th, she was sailed to Sydney to land her stores. Here she was transferred to the administration of the Naval Officer In Charge, Sydney, with accounting base at HMCS PROTECTOR. She was finally paid off on 11 July 1945.¹⁰⁴

The town of Amherst had been generous in making gifts to the ship. It was considered, therefore, that it would be a fitting gesture to present the ship's bell to the town of Amherst. After the corvette was paid off, a scroll, conveying a few words of appreciation from the Minister of National Defence for the Naval Service, was sent with the bell to the Commanding Officer of HMCS HALIGONIAN, the Halifax Reserve Division, to be presented to the Mayor or his representative. The presentation was made in the last week of August of that year. The ship's plaque was also forwarded to the Mayor, this by express on 2 July 1946.¹⁰⁵

In the middle of July 1945, AMHERST was sailed to Sorel, Quebec and on the 16th turned over to War Assets Corporation. She was one of forty-six corvettes recommended for disposal by the Naval Surplus Disposal Committee at its 59th meeting on 11 September 1945.

On 17 October 1945, seven corvettes were sold to the Government of the United States of Venezuela, to be taken into the purchaser's custody at Sorel. Among these was AMHERST.¹⁰⁶

It has been variously stated that AMHERST was renamed *Federacion, Patria, Victoria, Carabobo* or *Libertad*. Of the last two ships, one was lost en route from Canada.¹⁰⁷

It is known that in 1946 or 1947, the Venezuelan Consul at Montreal contacted the exporting and importing firm of C. C. Pratt Co. of Canada, Ltd., in the same city, informing them of the grounding of a corvette on the Gaspé coast the previous autumn, to whom he gave the name of AMHERST, and seeking their opinion as to what they considered would be a fair price for scrap for her.¹⁰⁸ It would seem probable therefore that AMHERST was *Carabobo* and that she came to her end in this manner.

As much as any, HMCS AMHERST could be considered the prototype of the war-time corvette. Undistinguished in appearance yet tough and seaworthy, her life was passed in times when tragedy and heroism were commonplace, nerves were tense, living quarters arduous and confined, and stop-overs in port often enough limited to a few days or even hours. She sank no submarines, enjoyed no spectacular successes; she was never even the senior ship of any of the groups with which she

sailed. But if mentioned little in reports, she will always be found in some list of escorting ships, save during the months when her hard-worked hull had by necessity to be refitted. For all her humble role, her history is that of the Battle of the Atlantic, and had there been one person who had sailed in her throughout her career, such a one could claim without boasting to have seen most aspects of this long, costly and most vital battle.

COMMANDING OFFICERS HMCS AMHERST

5 August 1941 to
20 November 1941

Acting/Lieutenant-Commander
A. K. Young, RCNR.

21 November 1941 to
19 September 1942

Lieutenant Harry G. Denyer,
RCNR.

20 September 1942 to
24 May 1944

Lieutenant L de la C Audette,
RCNVR.

25 May 1945 to
16 December 1944

Lieutenant D. M. Fraser,
RCNVR.

17 December 1944 to
11 July 1945

Lieutenant K. W. Winsby,
RCNVR.

Naval Historical Section,
Naval Headquarters,
Ottawa, Ontario.
18 June, 1962.

¹ Gilbert Norman Tucker, The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History, Volume II, (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1952).

² NSC 1926-112/9.

³ NHS 800; NS 800-331/4; NS175-1-9.

Particulars of HMCS AMHERST were as follows:

Standard displacement.....	1,170 tons	
Length.....	230'	
Breadth.....	33'	
Draught.....	13'	
Armament.....	1-4"	
		1-2-pounder anti-aircraft gun
		4 depth-charge throwers
		2 depth-charge rails.
Machinery.....	4-cylinder, triple expansion,	
		2750 horse-power (Single Screw)
Boilers.....	Scotch Marine, 3-furnace,	225 lbs.

C.B. (Can) 01815-B: Particulars of Canadian War Vessels, February 1942 – NS 8000-331/4.

⁴ NS 4052-331/4.

⁵ Ibid and NS 8000-331/4.

⁶ NHS Photo File. HMCS AMHERST.

⁷ NHS 1000-5-13.

⁸ NS 1000-5-13 (NHS); RONEO Cards (NHS).

⁹ By February 1942, when the Western Local Escort Force was formed, the Royal Canadian Navy could offer to this forces and the Mid-Ocean Escort Force 13 destroyers and 70 corvettes. NS1048-48-31.

¹⁰ NS 1048-48-31; Tucker, op cit., Volume II.

¹¹ RONEO Cards; Convoy Book (NHS). SC convoys ran from Sydney or later Halifax and New York to the United Kingdom.

¹² NS 1000-5-20.

¹³ ON convoys ran from the United Kingdom to ports in North America.

¹⁴ Convoy Book; BR-1337: Merchant Ships Lost or Damaged by Enemy Action.

¹⁵ NHS 8000: HMCS RESTIGOUCHE.

¹⁶ NS 1926-331/4.

¹⁷ NS 1000-5-20 (NHS). Following the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, and the consequent entry of the United States into the War, a shortage of anti-submarine vessels made incursions along this country's coasts extremely profitable for the U-boats. Samuel Eliot Morison, The Battle of the Atlantic, (Boston:1950), pp. 254.

¹⁸ After 16 September 1941, when the US Navy took over control of convoys in the Western Atlantic, the escort groups of the Newfoundland Escort Force came under the orders of the Commander Task Force Four, later Twenty-Four, and were organized under Task Group 4.1 or 24.1, with an added number to represent the Unit. On 30 April 1943, with the appointment to Commander-in-Chief, Canadian North-West Atlantic (C-in-C, CNA), of Commodore L. W. Murray, RCN, Canadian Mid-Ocean Escort Groups became known by "C" numbers, although it is to be noted that these were used semi-officially even while the US organization was still in force. Thus TU-4.1.11 became C-1. Similarly, TU-4.1.14 became C-4, a group with whom AMHERST was to become closely allied. NS 8440: Escort Group C-4.

¹⁹ Convoy Book (NHS); BR 1337; NHS 8280: SC-63.

²⁰ NS 1926-331/4.

²¹ NS 1000-5-20 (NHS); NHS 8280: ON-60.

²² Convoy Book (NHS).

²³ NS 1000-5-20 (NHS); Convoy Book (NHS); Narrative "A", part II (NHS).

²⁴ Particularly the waters off the US coast where the U-boats had enjoyed rich harvests since the attack on Pearl Harbor and the consequent entry of the United States into the War. Narrative "A", part II (NHS).

²⁵ CL Convoys ran from St. John's to Sydney and Halifax.

²⁶ RONEO Cards.

²⁷ *P-554* was the former *S-22*. She was transferred to the Royal Navy from the United States Navy under the Lend-Lease scheme. (Jane's Fighting Ships, 1944-45).

²⁸ NS 1926-331/4.

²⁹ JN Convoys ran from St. John's to northern Newfoundland and Labrador ports, while NJ convoys ran in the opposite direction.

³⁰ This was *U-90*. BR 1736 (51) (1A): Defeat of the Enemy Attack on Shipping, Vol. 1A.

³¹ *British Merit* reached St. John's with *Frisky's* help on 2 August 1942.

³² NS 1000-5-20: NS 1926-331/4; Narrative of HMCS COWICHAN (NHS).

³³ The escort was made up of ships belonging to Task Unit 24.1.14, later to be known as "C-4".

³⁴ RONEO Cards; NS 1000-5-20; Convoy Book (NHS).

³⁵ This was the British ship, *Ocean Vagabond*. She succeeded in making port.

³⁶ SC-100 also ran into U-boats during its ocean passage. A good escort kept its losses down to five ships. Convoy Book (NHS).

³⁷ NS 1000-5-20; NHS Narrative HMCS OTTAWA; Narrative "A", part II.

³⁸ CB 4523 (2), vol.2, p.55.

³⁹ NS 8910-331/4.

⁴⁰ CB 4523 (2), as above.

⁴¹ CB 4523 (2).

⁴² Reports of Merchant Seamen, Vol.1. (NHS).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ NHS 8280: ON-137 (microfilm): Report of Proceedings: HMCS ST, CROIX. It is not known at this time what the circumstances were which led to a merchant ship, such as *Hilary*, being fitted with asdic apparatus. It is known, however, that this ship became *HMS Hilary*, the Headquarters ship for Force "J" at the Invasion of Normandy in 1944.

⁴⁵ NS 8910-331/4.

⁴⁶ NSS 1000-5-26.

⁴⁷ CB 4523 (2).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ These were obtained from high frequency direction finders (H/F D/F) reports. "Huff-duff" established the bearings of U-boats by intercepting their radio transmissions.

⁵⁰ These were the British tanker *Dalcroy* at 0315, the Greek steamship *Rinos* at 0320 and the British steamship *Hartington* at 0400. The last was hit by two torpedoes and had three killed and twenty-one missing (Merchant Seaman's Accounts).

⁵¹ Illumination was made by "snowflake", "a brightly burning powder fired in a rocket from a projector, with the object of enabling a merchantman's gun crew, as well as the escorts, to sight any surfaced submarine inside the columns." (Samuel Eliot Morison: The Battle of the Atlantic, Boston, 1950).

⁵² Merchant Seamen Reports.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Narrative "A", part 2, (NHS).

⁵⁵ CB-4523 (2), vol.11; BR-1736 (51) (1A).

⁵⁶ NS-1000-5-20.

⁵⁷ Convoy Book (NHS).

⁵⁸ NHS 8000: HMS Caldwell. Later, *Foundation Franklin* tried to tow *Caldwell* to Boston. The tug's winch failed and the destroyer broke adrift. HMC Destroyer COLUMBIA performed the formidable task of passing a tow line to *Caldwell* and towing her 390 miles to Halifax. HMC Bangor Minesweeper WASAGA also assisted in this operation (Narrative "A", part 2, p. 127).

⁵⁹ NS 1000-5-20.

⁶⁰ HX convoys ran from Halifax or, later, New York, to the United Kingdom. They were faster than the SC Convoys.

⁶¹ CB 04050/43 (2), February 1943.

⁶² NHS 8000: HMCS COLLINGWOOD.

⁶³ In an "observant" taken around a torpedoed ship, the datum point was fixed at 1000 yards abeam of her, on the side on which she had been hit. Where the side was not known, the wreck itself was selected as the "datum". The nearest escort proceeded at full speed toward the "datum", reducing asdic operating speed when at one mile distance, then swept across it to one mile on the other side of it, turned and swept clockwise in a square of two mile sides. The next escort swept around the "box" or pattern of the search, clockwise from the opposite side. (NHS 8000: HMCS MINAS).

⁶⁴ CB 04050/43 (2); Narrative "A" (NHS).

⁶⁵ Convoy Book (NHS); BR-1337; Merchant Seamen Reports.

⁶⁶ NHS 8000; HMCS COLLINGWOOD; Narrative "A".

⁶⁷ Ibid. Authorities.

⁶⁸ Convoy Book (NHS); BR-1337.

⁶⁹ BR 1736 (51) (1A).

⁷⁰ CB 04050/43 (2); Narrative "A".

⁷¹ NHS 8280: KMF-10-B.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ NHS 8000: HMCS AMHERST.

⁷⁴ Ibid and NHS 8280: KMF-10-B.

⁷⁵ ONS was a slow ON convoy.

⁷⁶ NHS 8280: ON 177-179.

⁷⁷ NHS 1650: *U-203*.

⁷⁸ The former Great Lakes steamer, *Georgian*.

⁷⁹ NS 1000-5-20 (NHS); Director Naval Plans and Operations (DNPO) Cards. BX were Boston to Halifax convoys.

⁸⁰ Narrative "A".

⁸¹ DNPO Cards.

⁸² Ibid and NS 1000-5-13 (NHS).

⁸³ Convoy Book (NHS).

⁸⁴ NHS 1700-193/960.

⁸⁵ NS 1000-5-20 (1926-112/3, vol.1) (NHS); NHS 8280: ON-220.

⁸⁶ NS 8180-331/4.

⁸⁷ The “MAC” ship was a merchant ship converted into an aircraft carrier.

⁸⁸ NHS 8440: Escort Group C-4.

⁸⁹ OHM was a medium-fast ON convoy.

⁹⁰ Convoy Book (NHS); NHS 8440; Escort Group C-4.

⁹¹ ONS-236 was made up of 113 merchant ships. HMC Frigates MONTREAL was Senior Officer of C-4 and she was accompanied by five corvettes. Three MAC ships were along to fly off aircraft. (NHS 8440; Escort Group C-4).

⁹² NS 8910-331/4.

⁹³ NS 1926-331/4.

⁹⁴ NHS 8000; HMCS MATANE. HMC Frigate MATANE was damaged during the month by an aircraft attack south-west of Ushant. She suffered a loss of four killed or missing and eleven wounded. (Ibid.)

⁹⁵ NHS 8280; HXS-303.

⁹⁶ Cat gear: noise-making gear designed to divert acoustic torpedoes.

⁹⁷ Captain Jansen, Master of the *Fjordheim*, estimated that his ship sank in less than seven minutes. It was felt that he and his crew were to be commended on the efficiency of their seamanship in abandoning ship so quickly. Of MONTREAL’s thirty-three survivors only one had been in the water.

⁹⁸ NHS 8440: Escort Group C-4; DNPO Cards.

⁹⁹ These were HS-208 (Halifax to Sydney), SH-203 (Sydney to Halifax), ON-281, HJF-40 (Fast Halifax to St. John’s), and HX-340. (DNPO Cards).

¹⁰⁰ NSC 1926-102/1 (NHS) – Royal Canadian Navy Monthly Review (RCNMR), March 1945.

¹⁰¹ NHS 8440: Escort Group C-7; NHS 8280: HX-340.

¹⁰² NS 1926-331/4.

¹⁰³ NHS 8440: Escort Group C-9.

¹⁰⁴ DNPO Cards.

¹⁰⁵ NS 4052-331/4.

¹⁰⁶ NS 8000-331/4.

¹⁰⁷ NHS 8000-800; *Jane’s Fighting Ships*, 1949-50. The latter authority declares that *Carabobo* was lost on passage from Canada and that she was the former corvette, HMCS KAMSACK. The same source states that *Libertad* ran aground off western Venezuela on 12 April 1949.

¹⁰⁸ NS 8000-331/4.