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## **TEN THOUSAND MILES ON THE "THIEPVAL"**

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### **THRILLING EXPERIENCE FOR CREW ON TINY MINESWEEPER IN DANGEROUS AND UNCHARTED SEAS**

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**HMCS THIEPVAL played highly important part in MacLaren's glorious failure -  
Furious gales made voyage a perilous one.**

*By Frederick B. Watt*

At 1:30 p.m. on August 21, 1924, His Majesty's Canadian Ship THIEPVAL rounded the point at Esquimalt harbour and sidled up to her home jetty. With true Navy precision, the hawsers were cast ashore and in a few minutes the ship was secured. A group of four or five naval officers who had been waiting on the wharf moved to the head of the gangway that was shoved ashore from the little 135-ton minesweeper. A slight, fair haired officer stepped ashore and grasped the outstretched hand of the acting senior naval officer of the base.

"Well played, sir" exclaimed the acting S.N.O.

Thus did the THIEPVAL return from playing a highly important part in a most glorious failure, Major Stuart MacLaren's plucky attempt to fly around the world. In the six months that had elapsed since the little vessel, only a few tons heavier than Columbus' Santa Maria, had steamed away from that jetty she had covered over ten thousand miles of dangerous and uncharted seas, had crossed the Pacific Ocean to Japan and had passed through enough thrilling experiences to last the ordinary man a lifetime. Had it not been for her, four gallant airmen would probably still be languishing on the bleak semi-civilized Bering Island, awaiting for the annual steamer which is due some time next July.

### **NO CHEERING CROWDS**

The fact that there were no cheering crowds when THIEPVAL tied up at her home berth made the scene much more dramatic. The silence, the businesslike attitude of the sailors, the more-or-less casual greetings from the informal reception committee on the jetty, were all so distinctly of the Navy.

Probably the majority of Canadian citizens will be surprised to hear THIEPVAL referred to as a naval vessel. She has been, undoubtedly, the most maligned ship that

ever knew the White Ensign. During those long months in which her name flickered occasionally from out of the north or from across the Pacific the press correspondents referred to her as everything but what she really was. She was given titles ranging from “steamer” to “fishery patrol vessel”. A civilian could hardly imagine the indignation of her purely naval crew on seeing the HMCS that she bore so proudly on her life-preservers, completely ignored.

It will be a long time before the complete story of that perilous cruise will come out. True, there is the ship’s log but it is only a cold, methodical record of winds, mileage and other technical details interspersed with occasional remarks about gear being carried over the side and other things of a like nature. The elaborated story with human interest details included, comes out only in short snatches in the Wardroom or the Mess-deck. Humorous parts of the trip are easy to gather, being told with much gusto, but the passages of life and death interest remain untold. The members of the crew have, however, told enough to make a skeleton of a story and even that is well worth recounting.

### **HAND PICKED CREW**

A picked crew was selected for her in which all three branches of the naval service were represented: The RCN of permanent ratings and the RCNR and RCNVR, the reservists. Lieutenant Roy Beach, RCN was placed in command with Lieutenant Arthur Pressey, RCN, as his First Lieutenant. Lieutenant Shipley, RCNVR completed the list of officers. The crew, including officers, numbered less than thirty men. In addition there were carried Lieutenant Colonel Broome, organizing officer of the round-the-world flight; Captain Arthur Freeman, pilot for the inside waters; Dominion Ornithologist Laing and a motion picture operator named Valaquette.

Esquimalt was left on February 28th and the ship arrived at Vancouver the same day. Final details were attended to at that point and when the departure was made on March 2nd the adventurers were given a rousing send-off. Some idea of how dangerous the work in hand was considered came shortly after leaving harbour when a wireless call was received ordering the ship into Trail Bay so that the insurance surveyor could take one last look at her. This official flew up by seaplane from Vancouver and shortly afterwards THIEPVAL again headed northwards up the inside passage.

It was necessary to anchor at the entrance to Seymour Narrows until the tide turned. THIEPVAL’s nine knots were good enough for mine sweeping but not for bucking a tide that at times runs at twelve knots through that slender passage at the north of Vancouver Island. When the right hour arrived for running the narrows the ship proceeded and the first stop was made at Bella Bella where a “gas dump” was laid. Prince Rupert was reached on March 4th.

## **FIRST ICE ENCOUNTERED**

Ship was coaled the following day and on the 6th, Canadian waters were left behind. Fine weather favoured the mariners and the trip to Wrangell, Alaska was made in good time. Here another dump was laid. Past Wrangell Narrows the first ice was encountered and while there were no bergs of great size the sailors, new to these waters, began to get an inkling of what was ahead of them. By the time Taku was reached all of the warm clothing aboard had been brought into commission.

At Juneau, which was reached on March 9, the officers were greeted by Governor Bone of Alaska who wished them God-speed. From this point on the ice became worse and became an added factor to the navigation of the ship. On the evening of March 10, the head of Icy Strait was reached, bringing to an end the 1,000 miles of sheltered inside passage.

Fine weather had been experienced all the way but on this 1 evening, just as THIEPVAL was about to emerge into the open, a strong south-east gale blew up. When the anchor was weighed at daybreak next morning, however, the wind had gone down and the minesweeper emerged from Icy Strait into the long swell of the North Pacific.

From this point on, gales had a habit of springing up at a moment's notice and ending with equally surprising suddenness. THIEPVAL seemed to bear a charmed existence. As soon as she slipped into shelter for the night it would commence to blow hard outside but when it was time to proceed ahead in the morning the wind would die away. On the night of the 12th, while lying at anchor in Yakutat, the usual gale was accompanied by a bitter sleet storm but the morning once more broke bright and clear.

## **PUNISHED SEVERELY**

On the 14<sup>th</sup>, a nasty blow chased the little ship into Cordova and snow fell all the next day when coaling was being carried out. A furious gale prevented the trip from being continued on the 16th but on the day after that a dash was made for Chignik. The luck was beginning to break by this time, however, and THIEPVAL was forced to drop anchor and huddle in the lee of Elizabeth Island where the gale punished her severely and left her coated in ice.

Once again the course was laid for Chignik, Lieutenant Colonel Broome hoping to make connections there with Lieutenant Bissel, advance officer of the United States flyers. A rendezvous at Uyak was arranged by wireless and THIEPVAL managed to slide into that harbour just in time to escape another severe blow. On March 20, the steamship STAR arrived with Lieutenant BISSEL aboard.

The STAR and her skipper, Captain Johansen, are well known in northern waters. The seas that they ply are practically all unchartered and on every trip they are credited with discovering at least one new rock. This has become such a regular occurrence that

the STAR carries a three-foot layer of concrete on her bottom. Living up to her reputation the hardy vessel had bumped into an unknown rock on her way to Uyak and had been slightly delayed as a consequence.

Captain Johansen made quite a hit with the THIEPVALITES. His utter disregard for the rock infested area, that the ordinary mariner would shun altogether, tickled their sense of humour and their visit with him is one part of their story that they are only too willing to tell. Before the STAR set out to look for its next rock the Canadians had gathered some highly useful local information from the captain.

## **EXTRA PRECAUTIONS**

With the charts unreliable from this point on, THIEPVAL had to take extra precautions in navigating. Almost as soon as Uyak had dropped over the horizon another gale swept down on the following craft and for twenty-four hours she was flayed unmercifully. One cannot imagine very well what it is like aboard a ship of 135 tons in a gale. Experience alone can convey the proper impression. Where a liner crashes straight ahead, bowing only to the most mountainous seas, a minesweeper is forced to follow every curve of each roller it encounters, rising to the greatest heights one moment and sinking seemingly, into the very heart of the ocean the next.

All hands were tired and uncomfortable when Chignik was reached, the ship being rather damp inside and out, but a lull in the storm was too good to be passed up and the captain decided to press ahead the same day. It was calm when the harbour was left behind but it didn't take long for another gale to blow up and a dash (if one can dash at nine knots) was made for Dolgoi Harbour where fair shelter was obtainable. On March 24, a start was made for Dutch Harbour which was reached the same day. A thick fog descended over the sea during the run but the swell abated considerably which made up for the lack of visibility. Ship was coaled on reaching the harbour and for three days THIEPVAL lay at anchor awaiting further orders.

## **FROM DUTCH HARBOUR ON**

Dutch Harbour was the beginning of the really strenuous part of the journey. The vast expanse of sea and volcanic islands lying between this harbour and Japan offered little comfort apart from a few sheltered and uncharted harbours and the opportunity of obtaining fresh meat in the way of game. Of coal, there was none and fresh water was a thing that was rarely to be found. Much useful information regarding what was to be expected was picked from Trader Goss, who knows the Aleutians as probably no other white man does. Goss agreed to run forty tons of coal to Nazan Bay in his forty-ton schooner EVERETT HAYS so that THIEPVAL could pick it up on her arrival there.

The minesweeper's coal capacity was 160 tons. This, it was quite apparent, would be insufficient for the long run that lay ahead, and an extra supply was brought aboard. Five tons were stored in the stokehold and twenty more were carried on the deck in sacks. To add to this, sixteen tons of gasoline for the sea-plane were stored on deck in

tins. By the time all this extra cargo had been taken aboard the water line of the vessel was halfway up the lower deck scuttles and the ship had something like two feet of freeboard.

Officers of the ship claim that the fishing vessels in and around Dutch Harbour go to sea under like conditions and that the seaworthiness of the vessel is not affected, although the slightest sea splashes inboard. Be that as it may, the fact remains that when THIEPVAL got her orders to steam to Nazan Bay and weighed anchor at midnight on March 29, all of the women of Dutch Harbour flocked to the local church and prayed all night for the little gray trawler.

Their prayers were not uncalled for. It is a matter of 150 miles to Nazan Bay, fifteen hours of steaming under good conditions for a ship of THIEPVAL's speed. It was just three days later when she arrived there, and she'd been plugging ahead without a moment's delay all the time.

### **A FURIOUS GALE**

Even the ship's log becomes interesting during those three days and nights. A gale, the worst they had yet encountered, met them as they had cleared the harbour. This time it was not one of those erratic ones that they had been used to. It didn't die down with daylight. Instead it increased in its fury. THIEPVAL, with her regular water line some two feet below the surface, was in a continuous smother of spray. Perhaps some of the crew slept during those jumbled days. At that, it is very doubtful.

Despite the nonchalant talk about the ship being quite seaworthy, while loaded down so heavily, the order was given to commence pumping some of the fresh water supply over the side to add a few precious inches in the freeboard. This was done, and by the time the command to cease pumping was given ten tons of the precious fluid had mingled with the salt of the Pacific.

The deck was awash practically all of the time and it was not long before the tins of gasoline and sacks of coal were in a swirling mess. Under ordinary conditions, the logical thing to have done would have been to have let the whole deck cargo go over the side - as it threatened to do at any minute - and thus lighten the ship even further. The success of the round-the-world flight, however, hung on that gas, and without the coal THIEPVAL would have been unable to deposit the petrol where it was most needed. Up to their thighs in boiling sea and in constant peril of being swept overboard, Lieutenant Pressey and his deck crew toiled night and day to save those valuable sacks and cans.

One by one the bags of coal were passed down into the stokehold, which was soon so full that the stokers had scarcely room to swing their shovels. Fresh lashings were produced and the gasoline cans secured again. On March 31, the ship was buffeted into its destination, Nazan Bay, and anchor was dropped. The gasoline was still safe and the three days of hard steaming had provided plenty of room in the coal bunkers for extra

fuel - too much room in fact when the prospects of the long bleak miles ahead was taken into consideration.

### **DAMAGE PUT RIGHT**

Wireless orders to remain at anchor while negotiations were being carried on with the Japanese authorities arrived and the halt gave the sailors time to put right any damage done by the storm. THIEPVAL had stood the strain like a seasoned veteran which was not surprising in view of the West Coast patrols she had carried out previous to the expedition. On April 2nd another gale that amounted almost to a hurricane arose and, although THIEPVAL was in a well sheltered bay and at anchor, she shipped water as regularly as though she was in the open sea. It was only a matter of time, in such a blow, before she would drag her anchors and sure enough, as soon as the gale had reach its height, the gap of water between the ship and the shore began to narrow with alarming rapidity. All night long the engines were kept going "slow ahead", while THIEPVAL kept her nose into the wind and held her ground. Once she bumped an uncharted rock but without serious damage. The wind had abated on the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, but on the 4th the previous trying experience was gone through again. On the 6th the EVERETT HAYES rolled cheerily into the Bay for a little while and then tumbled out again on its way to pick up the promised coal, which was to be delivered to Kiska. The 8th produced another gale, which was no more comfortable than its predecessors. The next day the welcome word came to proceed from Nazan, which was apparently the gathering place of every wind that blew over the North Pacific.

### **HAZARDOUS OPERATION**

That evening, THIEPVAL was again punished badly and along with a 7,000 ton Norwegian, the HAVO, she sought shelter in Kuluk Harbour. The foreigner had apparently been blown out of her course further south. Both ships clung to the shelter of the harbour for four days, during which it blew a continuous hurricane outside. A gasoline dump was laid in the lagoon in the meantime. The carrying out of this operation was very hazardous, a bad sea running, and the breakers deluging the dories that landed the supplies with sheets of icy water. Fortunately none of the boats capsized, fine seamanship being shown by those in charge. The sea had subsided sufficiently on the 13th to chance a run for Kiska. It was far from being a comfortable trip but the distance was covered in two days and on the night of the 15th the ship steamed into the harbour which looked ruggedly beautiful as it lay bathed in the moonlight. Here THIEPVAL waited for EVERETT HAYES and the forty tons of coal. Both arrived two days later and the coal was in considerably better shape than the EVERETT HAYES. While THIEPVAL had been wallowing in Nazan Bay the little 40- ton schooner had been out in the open sea. How she remained on the surface was a thing of wonder to everyone except her crew. Her sails had been torn to ribbons, her boats and everything else movable had been carried away, and she had only enough fuel left for sixteen hours' steaming. She had only covered 400 miles, yet when she left for Kiska she had had enough fuel for 2000 miles of ordinary steaming. The coal for THIEPVAL still remained in the hold however. Skipper Goss admitted that it had been a pretty rough passage. His son-in-law, the engineer, rather regretted the heavy expenditure of fuel. The three Aleuts who formed

the crew hadn't any opinions to express. THIEPVAL supplied them with some canvas for sails, gave them a boat, some lubricating and a cake of soap, and left them boiling down seal's blubber to make up for their lack of fuel. The coal transferred aboard, the Canadian ship weighed anchor and headed for Attu in the teeth of another gale.

## **ONE MAN, 35 WOMEN**

Weathering another gale, THIEPVAL eventually dropped anchor at Attu where a strange state of affairs existed. All the male inhabitants of the small village on that island had left for the hunting grounds, leaving the female population, numbering about 35, in charge of one man. This fortunate - or unfortunate as the case may be - fellow was visibly relieved to get a glimpse of some members of his own sex, even if they were foreigners. He was even more relieved at the opportunity of obtaining a bit of decent food, of which there was a decided scarcity on the island. The Canadians gave him all they could spare. While the 35 women didn't all lock themselves in their houses, as was reported in the press, on the THIEPVAL's return, they weren't given over at all to curiosity and the members of the crew only got fleeting glimpses of them. They were not in very good spirits, the recent high seas having washed up into their village and flooded out the majority of houses. THIEPVAL's water supply was now dangerously low, and while there was no system for watering ship on the island, the ingenious sailors immediately began to work out a system of their own. The point at which the lone creek on the island hit the sea was at a place filled with reefs where it was impossible to get a boat in. Working like Trojans in the bitterly cold weather, the seamen diverted the course of the stream to a point where dories might be brought in.

Even after this had been accomplished it was far from being a simple matter to replenish the fresh water tanks and the boilers. By filling pails and drums with the precious liquid it would have taken weeks to have done the job. Far from being discouraged, however, the men perfected the following scheme:

A dory was brought into the creek and sunk, until it was full of fresh water almost to the gunwales. It was then towed out to the ship and hoisted in the davits up to the level of the boat deck. Here the plug was pulled from the bottom of the dory and the water gushed down an intricate drainage system of ventilators and every sort of pipe into the tanks. It all sounds very simple on paper, but the great labour that it involved can be realized only by those who had to do the work. Towing the water-filled dory by man power required a great effort and in this work Leading Seaman McDougall and Able Seaman Church, the two Samsons of the crew, performed feats of great strength. It was all carried out in highly unpleasant weather and it was a great credit to the men that they did not become confirmed grouchers. Not once but many times was the ship watered in this fashion during the trip.

At Attu, a second hard task was discovered for the crew. The smell of gasoline became apparent one morning and with each hour the odour became more noticeable. Examination of the deck cargo of tins failed to reveal any broken receptacles, but still the

smell increased. Finally it was discovered that the salt water had rusted the bottom of the tins badly and in several cases had riddled the containers. Then commenced a long, arduous job of unpacking each tin and applying a thick coat of paint to each of them. There was a sigh of relief when the last can was again stowed inside its case. The majority of them were saved, although several had been drained of their contents before anything could be done to prevent the escape of the motive spirit. To the great relief of all, the wind died down at Attu and with the exception of a gale off the Bering Island, the remainder of the trip to Japan was continued in calm, although continuously foggy, weather. The first point of Russian territory to be touched was Copper Island, a secluded harbour away from everything, even the trading schooner courses. The inhabitants were greatly surprised to hear that Lenin had passed on to his reward, and they were also much interested on hearing that there were no really important wars going on in the outside world.

## **ALICE AND HORAX**

There was jubilation aboard the ship when an inquisitive member of the crew discovered a man ashore who owned two pigs. Fresh meat had been in a minus quantity so long aboard THIEPVAL that it had become more or less a pleasant memory. After some dickering, the owner of the porkers agreed to part with them, and at his call, his two pets Alice and Horax came rushing down the hill, only to fall into the hands of a gang of murderers, who rushed the squealing victims out to their little salt-encrusted vessel.

Alice died in a dignified fashion, like the lady she was, and turned out to be delicious eating. Horax, however, was a bad egg - as tough a fish-fed animal as ever eked out a precarious existence on Copper Island. He refused to be butchered in a respectable fashion and after a desperate struggle finally fell to a bullet from a service rifle that proved to be even a little tougher than Horax himself. But at that, the porker had the last laugh. He turned out to be so lean and stringy that the sailors were all too willing to forget their desire for fresh meat and go back to their corned beef.

Nikolski was the next port of call and produced a wireless station and a governor, who, according to a member of the crew, "couldn't talk English, but could drink Scotch."

Down the peninsula, THIEPVAL continued to East Kamchatka. The mariners had been told to expect a large settlement at this point, but discovered that a huge tidal wave had wiped out the entire town in 1922 and only a small portion of it had been rebuilt.

## **SHIP COATED IN ICE**

The weather grew colder with every day and by the time Petropavlovsk was reached the ship was coated heavily in ice and was extremely uncomfortable. The inner harbour of Petro was completely frozen over, so severe was the weather. The first real example of "Free Russia" was discovered ashore, where there were many Soviet officials and a regiment of troops, some of whom were immediately placed aboard THIEPVAL as



guards. While this was a most unusual proceeding, in view of the fact that THIEPVAL was flying the white ensign, no protest was entered in the face of causing the flyers trouble when they came over.

Japanese territory was reached following the next leg of the trip, the first stop being made at Kashiwabara. Here Japanese and American destroyers were encountered. Neither of them knew anything about the British flight and they were greatly surprised on learning of the great distance that the little minesweeper had traveled. The Americans immediately invited the Canadians aboard and treated them to as fine a moving picture show as they had seen in many a long day.

Another delay halted the trip in this barren little harbour. Permission had to be obtained from the Japanese officers before landing stores, and this permission was held up for some reason or other. May 1st still found them waiting and day by day the slim supply of water and coal melted away at an alarming rate. Four more days dragged by during which the American ship offered to supply THIEPVAL with some of her none-too-plentiful stock of water, but Captain Beech, rather than cause the gallant destroyer further hardship, decided to get along somehow without it.

The volcanic shores of Kashiwabara were as dry as the proverbial bone and offered no relief at all so on the fourth of May THIEPVAL was forced to abandon the plan of placing a dump at that point and steamed for Hittokappu. Arriving there on the 7th, no time was lost in landing supplies. Terrible weather was encountered all the way down and on the 6th especially the ship was beaten about unmercifully. Worse than the punishment she received however, was the way that the heavy steaming ate into the fast dwindling hillocks in the coal-bunkers.

## **DESPERATE SITUATION**

The last leg of the trip that was from Hittokappu to Hakodate is another period that is more or less veiled in silence. There is no doubt that the situation was desperate. Down in the bunkers the perspiring stokers raked the few tons of coal that were left into little piles so that there seemed to be more than there really was. The sediment that was in the drinking water warned the drinkers that the bottoms of the tanks were all but dry. Tinned food and none too much of it, formed the rations of the crew.

To make matters worse the wind rose in all its fury and laid huge vindictive fingers on the little craft, seeming to purposefully hold it back as it struggled gallantly for harbour. Wave after wave crashed aboard, filling the decks until they resembled a boiling cauldron.

The fact remains, though, that THIEPVAL finally did reach Hakodate. It was a narrow squeak. There wasn't a drop of fresh water aboard when she dropped anchor in harbour and the most coal that could be scraped out of all the bunkers amounted to fourteen tons, enough, perhaps, for another hour of steaming. Something over 5,200 miles had been covered since leaving Esquimalt.

THIEPVAL lay in Hakodate for two months owing to the delays that had occurred in Major MacLaren's flight. During that time the ship was put in shape again and in their spare time the crew educated the Japs ashore in the manly sport of football. Before the two months had elapsed the natives had raised a team which could give the Canadians a good battle on every meeting. Crowds numbering up into the thousands turned out for all of the matches. In one especially exciting game Lieutenant Pressey broke a couple of ribs, which put him out of the game for the remainder of the soccer season.

Major MacLaren's spare plane lay on the jetty ready to be placed aboard THIEPVAL at a moment's notice, but late in May word came of the flyer's crash at Akyab and on the 29th the "PAUL JONES", the American destroyer which so sportily came to the Britisher's aid, arrived at Hakodate and took over the plane, rushing off immediately for the scene of the crash.

## **ON THE RETURN TRIP**

Hakodate was left behind by the Canadian ship on July 8. The men took away with them the memories of many happy times, to say nothing of a bear cub that was named after its home town. At Aomori, a stop was made to pick up a spare engine for the seaplane. The flyers were at Tokyo at this time.

On July 10, a course was laid for Broughton Bay on the return trip. This point was reached on the 13th. The bay turned out to be an extinct volcano crater which the sea had broken into. Inside the bay there was 100 fathoms of water but the entrance was too shallow for THIEPVAL to navigate and all of the stores that were landed had to be taken over the bar in dories.

Two days later Petro was reached. The best of weather favoured the ship all the way. By a cruel turn of fate this same stretch was smothered in fog when the flyers came along three days later and it was this fog that was responsible for the failure of the flight.

THIEPVAL was waiting at Petro on the 17th when word came by wireless that the plane and its occupants were missing. The next two days were spent in searching for the airmen, but the welcome information that they were safe and the plane intact was received on the 19th and the ship put back to Petro.

## **MEETING THE FLYERS**

It was on July 24 that the THIEPVALITES met the men for whom they had spent so many perilous months at sea. It was tea time when the distant drone of an engine was heard. In an instant, wardroom and mess deck, galley and stokehold were emptied of their occupants and the rail of the little ship was lined with anxious, upturned faces. For some time the engine hummed from the heart of a low-hanging cloud, then suddenly the

plane burst into view and circling the harbour, dropped easily into the water not far from THIEPVAL.

The members of the crew were thrilled - in fact, it was the one thrill that they will confess to in the whole trip. Shortly afterwards Major MacLaren, Flying Officer Penderleith, Lieutenant Colonel Broome (who had joined the plane at Tokyo) and Sergeant Andrews came aboard and tea was resumed.

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, the plane hopped off, leaving Sergeant Andrews, who was a very sick man, aboard THIEPVAL. The ship immediately put to sea to follow up the flyers as quickly as possible, but had scarcely cleared harbour before the seaplane was observed to be coming back, driven to shelter by the impenetrable banks of fog. Unfortunately, the hull of Major MacLaren's craft was stove in while making a landing at Petro, and once again it looked as though there was going to be a long delay.

### **PRAISE FROM MacLAREN**

Here again the crew of the Canadian ship proved very useful. After diverting streams and performing other such feats of strength, the task of digging a drydock on the beach for the plane was a comparatively easy task. This was done with all possible speed, and Dai, THIEPVAL's carpenter, immediately began to make good the damage to the hull. He came in for warm praise from the leader of the expedition when the job was finished, the airman declaring that it was a bit of work that would have done any skilled aeroplane worker credit.

THIEPVAL was coaled and on August 1 again put to sea after the plane had taken off. Word of the flyers' safe arrival at East Kamchatka was received, but on August 2 it was reported that a serious crash had occurred off Nikolski on Behring Island. THIEPVAL arrived at that point on the 3rd and discovered that the report had been all too true. The flight was at an end.

The plane was lying on the beach with her nose to sea to prevent her breaking up. The starboard wing was gone, the floats broken off completely, and the tip of the port wing badly damaged. There was a heavy surf running which made the work of salvaging the hull and engine very difficult, but eventually this was accomplished, anchor was weighed and a course laid for Dutch Harbour.

Needless to say, it was an effort to be cheerful. The Canadians' hearts had been in the flight almost as much as had the airmen's. At a dinner at the naval barracks in Esquimalt some weeks later the leader of the expedition paid a warm tribute to the way in which THIEPVAL's officers and men had cheered his companions and himself in their darkest hour. So, despite the fact that the return to Canada proved to be the conclusion of a failure, it was not an unhappy trip.

## **ROOM FOR EVERYONE**

The accommodation of the ship was much too small by this time. Apart from the crew's quarters, a ship of THIEPVAL's size is built to carry three officers. In addition to these officers, however, there were now the four airmen, two Japanese officers, Captain Freeman, the ornithologist, the motion picture operator, and, to make things properly packed, a Russian stowaway. Somehow, room was found for everyone.

Coming out of Dutch Harbour a heavy swell was encountered which continued all the way down the coast. It was mild, however, to what the ship had already gone through, although the sailors had great difficulty in convincing the airmen of this. Prince Rupert was reached on August 15 at 2 o'clock in the morning, but despite the unconventional hour, the whole town was down to welcome the ship in. As the vessel steamed into harbour the engines began to show the first signs of the strain that they had undergone, and there was a sigh of relief from the engine-room staff when the hawsers were cast ashore.

And that's the story. The arrival at Vancouver provided the newspapers with columns of copy and was heralded around the world. The arrival at Esquimalt was not so auspicious. There were no correspondents present to hear the battered little vessel sigh contentedly through her exhaust pipe as the propeller kicked over for the last time and she leaned lazily against the dock, happy in the knowledge of the 10,000 heaving miles behind her.

The big, four-bladed propeller that drove Major MacLaren's plane from London to Skyab now hangs over the mantelpiece in the wardroom of the Esquimalt naval barracks with the flyers' signatures inscribed in the hub. It was presented to the mess in recognition of THIEPVAL's work. Out in the harbour below the barracks, the little gray minesweeper, fresh from a thorough refit, waits the word to again dig her blunt nose into the long swell of the Pacific - headed for some new adventure.