



Our Lives
Two Shipwrecks

Eric Blackwood

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The Wreck of the *Patrick Morris*

The *Patrick Morris* was a 10,000-ton ferry. We were in Sydney, Nova Scotia, loading rail cars when we got a call that the *Enterprise* was in trouble. The *Enterprise* was a herring seiner out of Cape Breton.

They were scrambling, trying to get something ready to go out. They decided on us. It was a bad choice because we were in a 10,000-ton ship and she wasn't equipped to save lives like that. It was the only thing available, so they sent us. But the *Enterprise* was gone (down) before we left Sydney. We went out in the area and come daylight we saw a body and we tried to pick it up.

I came on deck, daylight, when they sighted a body from the fishing boat. Everybody was out on deck.

It was a bad storm. On deck, we tried to pick up the body. We had it hooked one time, with a big hook on a line. We had it hooked by the strap of his life jacket but the strap wouldn't stand the weight if we hauled him up.



A fella Noah Moore was bo'sun on her. Noah and I were rigging a cargo net. We put weights on it to make it sink down in the water as we were sweeping.

I remember saying to Noah when the seas hit her, "Jeez, this one won't stand much of that."

We didn't know that the stern door was gone. She had a docking bridge on her stern and it was fifty-four feet above the water. The sea came right in over it.

All this time we were stern-on to the seas. The seas were like mountains. One particularly big sea hit her and burst in the stern door. When the door went she was all open to the sea.

The water just rolled into her. If the steering had stayed working, we probably would have brought her head-on to the wind and the sea wouldn't roll in there. But the water got down into the steering compartment and shorted that out. So the steering went right away. There is nothing you could do about it then. All we could do was get out of her.

It was only twenty minutes from the time the stern door went until she sank. That's coming in pretty fast when you think of a 10,000-ton ship, twenty minutes.



We were the starboard boat's crew. We got one lifeboat away. We tried to get the second one away but the ship listed apart so everybody went to the port side. That lifeboat was certified for fifty-two people and there were forty-seven of us in her. The day before that, when we left Port aux Basques, a young fella missed her, so we were one man short in crew.

Four people stayed on board the *Patrick Morris*, including the skipper.

The lifeboat would have had a full capacity. With the capacity of people it was certified for, there wasn't much room to handle the boat in a sea.

We were lucky because everybody was a small boatsman. Everybody knew how to handle a small boat, but if we had been a crew with people from cities we never would have made it.

Myself and Fred Wheeler were on a bow oar. There were other fellas on the other oars. All the oars were manned by two people.

Oh Jeez, it was stormy. We were in her an hour and three quarters I think. The ships started coming but they couldn't take us. The *Ambrose Shea* came there but her crew couldn't do anything. She had a big rubber around her. If she came near us, she would have sunk us right away. She could only stand by, up windward of us, to try to give us what shelter she could.



Then this German ore carrier came on the scene. She was a big thing, a 21,000-ton ship, the *Rhine Ore*. They had the right gear to make the rescue. By the time they got to us, they had her all rigged with scramble nets and rope ladders over the side.

I'll tell you how bad it was. She was 21,000 tons and she was empty, only in ballast. They had to put her right across the seas to shelter us, and she would roll down. There were fellas who left our lifeboat that just grabbed the rail when she rolled. They never had to get in the net.

We had two old men, well, they seemed old to us, in their late fifties. We were afraid they wouldn't make it. We tied ropes around them before we sent them up the ladder. When we saw them gone, then it was take off! We jumped to the ladder and clung to the net. The Germans were there, all lined up to grab us over the rail.

When we got over the rail, they took off our lifebelts and life jackets and took us to the galley. In the galley there were fellas with lots of coffee and bottles of brandy. As we came in they gave us a mug of coffee and a drink of brandy, every man.

They did a nose count. Until then, we didn't know who was not there. We knew the skipper wasn't there and we knew the chief engineer wasn't there because we saw them on deck when we hove away from the *Patrick Morris*. We got a count of how many there were and wrote down their names. The purser went to the wireless room and radioed it in. After we got straightened away they took us to the bridge to meet the captain. Two at a time, we went up to the bridge and thanked him.

The captain said to me, "Boy, don't thank me. You saved yourselves. It will never happen again that a crowd of men in a boat like that, in a sea, that somebody wouldn't panic. You saved yourselves by keeping your heads. Nobody panicked."

It was a one-time experience. One time in a lifetime was enough to do that. We had fellas there that it happened to before. One fella there, a friend of mine was torpedoed three times in the war. Lew Goulding. He was torpedoed three times and his brother was drowned overseas in the navy. It was tough on him.

The four left aboard the *Patrick Morris* were lost. All we found was Skipper Roland Penney's body.

The *Enterprise* never had a chance. She was an old wooden herring seiner, and she was built as a net tender or something during the war. Herring was big business here that time.

Anyway, we never got the body we went out for, and we lost our ship and four of our own.



Movie Night at Badger's Quay

I was home with a broken arm, so I got a motorboat for going back and forth. There was nothing in Safe Harbour. We had to go over to Badger's Quay for everything, even to see a movie.

I don't know what the movie was, but a fellow named Earl Parsons used to go around showing movies then. He was supposed to be there that night showing a movie in the Fishermen's Hall.

There was a good breeze of southeast wind. When we got outside the harbour the engine broke down and we were driven ashore and the wind kept breezing up.

When my boat went ashore the sea went out and she tipped on her side. The next sea came in and swamped her. I knew I had to keep her from bouncing too hard. Ross got up on the engine house, and Bram and I were trying to hold the boat steady. I got out in the water to hold onto the boat. The only rope we had was the tiller ropes. We took that off and lashed the two girls in the boat, on opposite sides.

I had my arm in a cast. We were there from that time until twenty minutes to twelve, when we were picked up. We were waving the flashlights and bawling out. A fella who lived down the shore came out and saw our lights. He went down and told Hubert Granter, "There's a schooner ashore and fellas bawling up there on Safe Harbour Point."

Hubert figured right away who it was. "That's not a schooner; that's Gus."

He went out and got Sam Barbour. Sam had a motorboat and they left and came up. When they got up to us, they couldn't get in where we were because it was blowing too hard. They went into Safe Harbour, got a dory, and came down and landed on the back of the island.

They came back out and threw a line out to us. That way we got ashore, from the little island of rock.

We were there for four hours. It was eight o'clock when we left, and it was twenty minutes to twelve before they got us to shore out of it. I was standing up in the water for four hours. The cast on my arm soaked to pieces.

There was my brother Ross, the youngest fella, he was fourteen. There was Bernice Andrews, a schoolteacher who used to board with us, and my sister Sadie, and a buddy of mine, Bram Feltham. This was the crew.

I lost my boat and I never saw the engine after. Of course it wasn't worth any fortune. It was only an old thing I had picked up. I think somebody got it up afterwards but I never bothered about it.

There's stuff that happens to you in a lifetime.

It isn't much to write a book about.