

including two escort ships;⁴⁵ two ships were sunk at anchor at Bell Island and two more in convoy there;⁴⁶ and the *Caribou*, the ferry plying between North Sydney and Port-aux-Basques, was sunk with the loss of some 136 lives;⁴⁷ in addition, mines were laid in the approaches to Halifax and St. John's. But by the end of 1943 victory over the U-boats, if not yet achieved, seemed a reasonable prospect. By the end of the year, sinkings were declining, and the construction of new ships in allied yards appeared to be gaining over losses.

The Strategic Importance of St. John's

Dr. Tucker, the official historian of the RCN, sums up the importance of St. John's in the desperate struggle as follows:

The importance of St. John's as a wartime naval base can hardly be exaggerated. In simple terms it was the principal western base and turn-around port for ships flying the white ensign. These were engaged in escorting, on the lap between Newfoundland and the British Isles, the great transatlantic convoys that formed the main pipeline through which the enormous resources and strength of North America were pumped into Europe. For the U-boats in the North Atlantic that small harbour was a hornet's nest, and the naval activities which were carried on there made an inestimable contribution towards winning the war.⁴⁸

The extent to which St. John's was actually used by escort ships is indicated by the following table⁴⁹ based on Dr. Tucker's figures:

Warships Based at St. John's

	Destroyers	Frigates	Corvettes
Jan. 1942	16	—	52
June 1942	11	—	46
Jan. 1943	23	—	30*
June 1943	12	2	37
Jan. 1944	12	7	39
June 1944	—**	9	31
Jan. 1945	8	27	39
June 1945	3	36	41

* Many Canadian corvettes participated in the Allied assault on North Africa in the fall of 1942 and remained on convoy duty in the Mediterranean in 1943.

** At this time all destroyers were required for the invasion of Europe.

POST-WAR ARRANGEMENTS

With the approaching end of hostilities in Europe, Canada and Newfoundland were confronted with the need to re-examine their mutual

⁴⁵ Tucker, G. N. T. *op. cit.* p. 391.

⁴⁶ Documents 647-649 and 652.

⁴⁷ Document 732.

⁴⁸ Tucker, G. N. T. *op. cit.* p. 203.

⁴⁹ *Loc. cit.*