

dangers faced and undertaken by these individuals were enormous.

The situation in the North Atlantic is well described in this tale by Joseph Schull, in a volume entitled *Canadians at War—1939 to 1945*. He states:

In March 1943, about 70 U-boats were in the northwest Atlantic, in three great lines of patrol: one between Labrador and Greenland, another running due south and to seaward of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, a third paralleling the Nova Scotia coastline to a point below New York. They barred every exit and entry for the ocean convoys. Eastward, to the fringe of British coastal waters, were 40 more U-boats.

This North Atlantic force of 110 U-boats was by no means the total. On one day, March 9, five convoys were attacked simultaneously: two transatlantic convoys, a north Russia convoy, a convoy bound from Brazil to Trinidad, and one on passage from Britain to Gibraltar.

But the North Atlantic was still the crucial area. Three escort groups, struggling to keep convoys together in the great gales, had the impossible task of warding off attackers who came from many directions at once, often outnumbering the defenders two to one, sometimes more heavily than that. Evasive routing was practically useless in view of the number of U-boats at sea. Every sailing was made with the virtual certainty of encountering a larger German concentration. Losses were outpacing the entire shipbuilding efforts of the allies. So many escort vessels were laid up for repair or weather damage in March that the group system was in danger of disorganization. It began to seem that the convoy system, after all the years of effort, could not be maintained.

March losses were 627,000 tons of merchant shipping. It was not the highest figure of the war, but the ominous fact was that for the first time 75 percent of the ships had gone down while protected in convoy.

An amazing statistic.

It is clear from the statistics that I have mentioned and from the facts that surrounded the important role that the men of the merchant navy played that these were people of courage and gallantry who performed an essential and necessary service, not only for Canada but for the protection of freedom in the world. One wonders what would have happened had it not been for the sacrifice and contribution of these individuals.

Thirty-five hundred of them are left today.

When they came back from the war they lacked many of the benefits that the regular servicemen received. They did not have full access to the Veterans Land Act which many veterans took advantage of to get a foothold, to re-establish themselves when they returned. They lacked the educational programs. Many veterans were

able to achieve their higher education as a result of the programs available to them.

I am almost out of time but I would like to say in closing that one of the finest Canadians that I know was a merchant seaman. He wanted to join the air force but was unable to do so because he did not meet the educational requirements. Therefore to serve Canada he joined the merchant navy. He married on a shore leave and still continued to serve. He returned at the end of the war ineligible for education benefits. He and the wife he married during the war had a daughter who is my wife. I am very proud of him and think that he deserves every bit of recognition that any other veteran has received.

**Mr. Greg Thompson (Carleton—Charlotte):** Mr. Speaker, I am more than pleased to take part in this debate. I do want to thank the hon. member who was responsible for this debate today. Since I have been here, it has been an issue that he has brought to the floor of this House of Commons on many occasions. I think we all have sometimes a grudging respect for the member, but certainly a very deep respect for the concern and absolutely genuine respect for where his heart is in respect of this issue.

It is a strange irony, or an unsettling irony, that we are taking this debate up today given the fact that the Associate Minister of Defence spoke in the House today on the latest tragedy that has struck our Armed Forces. She spoke of the ultimate price that some of those individuals paid, that families are experiencing today, for serving our country so very well. We, as a nation, are only two weeks away from the day that we remember all of our war family people and past war experiences. I think it is very fitting that we do debate this today.

There is no question that the merchant seamen served us very well in World War II, exceptionally well. They were just some of many hundreds of thousands of Canadians who served us during the war that in a sense have gone unrecognized. That is not right. I believe they do deserve more recognition than they get.

One of the things that I want to do today, to the benefit of the member from Saskatchewan, is bring to the member's attention the benefits that we do give to the merchant seamen in recognition of the great service that they have given this country of ours. I do not think the member dismisses this. In total, that amounts to