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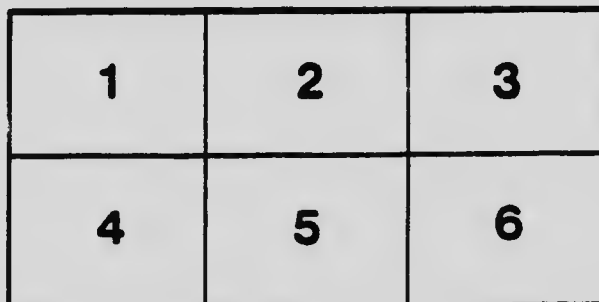
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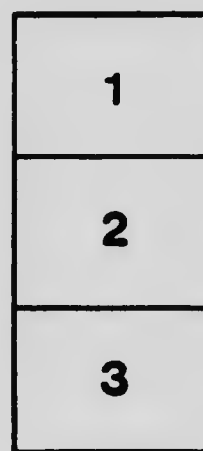
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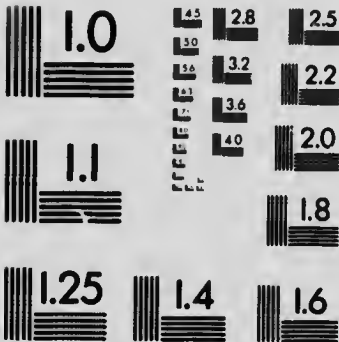
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### No. III.

## THE HEROIC WAR WORK OF THE MERCHANT MARINE

BY

**SIR ROBERT A. FALCONER, K.C.M.G., LL.D., D.C.L.**

*President of the University of Toronto*

Today we hear a great deal about the Freedom of the Seas. The curious fact is that the nation which did most to deprive neutral countries of the Freedom of the Land during the recent war has been most loud-mouthed about the Freedom of the Seas. Germany allowed no food to get to Serbia or the portions of occupied France or Belgium while her soldiers were there, except in the case of the Belgian Relief from America. But hypocrite that she was she complained because the Allied fleets, and especially that of Great Britain, kept supplies from crossing her borders after they had been landed in the neutral ports of Holland or Denmark. This blockade, however, was one of the most powerful aids for the winning of the war; and this we owe, of course, to the British Navy. To that Navy in a large measure Europe is indebted for such freedom as it has on land to-day, where, otherwise, despotism would be rampant.

But we must not forget that the Merchant Marine also has contributed a large share to the winning of freedom for the world. In the Merchant Marine we include not only the great ocean liners and freight tramp steamers, but the little coasters, the old sailing ships recalled to service, and the small wooden vessels fishing along the shore or on the banks. The men who compose that marine are all those, other than His Majesty's sailors, "that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters." Never before in history have sailors gone through such perils as they have had to encounter during the past three years. When the Psalmist wrote of old the world dreaded the sea, and he thought of the soul of the sailor melting away because of the stormy waves; but to the sailor of today the sea is his home and modern ships venture upon it at all seasons and in all its moods. During the later stages of the War the sailors even welcomed the gale, for on mountainous waves the Submarine would be unable to get its aim and the ships would be more likely to pass unharmed.

There has never been such a terror on or under the sea as this reptile of the deep, and it preyed chiefly upon the merchantmen and small boats. So, for safety, the ships were gathered together in convoys and in their numbers they found greater protection. A convoy in mid-ocean was a memorable sight. The swift company of large ships zig-zagging toward some European port would be filled with troops; the slower convoys with food and ammunition. Passengers on a west-bound steamer would see on the horizon a large ship and in her train a fleet of small vessels. As they drew nearer it was evident that the leader was an armed merchantman and in her wake followed others of every size and shape. Moving hither and thither on their zig-zag courses, they seemed to test the patience of the leader which, like an enormous duck, was intent on keeping her brood within range. Some miles behind there may have lagged a lame duckling whose machinery or coal kept him back, a prey, perhaps, for a watching Submarine.

It was necessary to travel on the ocean during the war to realize the heroism of our sailors. Passengers had to carry their life-belts at all times, even hanging them over the backs of their chairs at meals; they were assigned to boats and given drill, and would get the first chance should any disaster befall. Suspense reigned from the beginning of the voyage to the end, but as soon as the ship touched the wharf they were off to their homes in safety. Not so, the sailor. He had to turn round and sail back over the same perilous course, and he was an exception who did not, sometime, have his ship go down. The one steamer that I crossed on had already been torpedoed, and he never left his post or was out of his call during the twelve days of my voyage. Officers and men went about their duties as faithfully as ever, undeterred by impending disaster. Towards nightfall one would see the stokers taking a short breathing spell on the topmost deck, and then descend again into the bowels of the ship, where if a torpedo were to strike they would be almost certain to be the first to perish. But we never heard that, through fear, they refused to do their duty. To all these men of the lower ranks of service, as well as to the officers and captains of mighty ships, we owe the deepest gratitude.

Canadians must not forget what these men have done. In the first place they have transported millions of troops to France, to the Mediterranean, and to the further East. From Canada nearly 420,000 were taken overseas and not a transport was lost. Of those who went from the United States, over sixty per cent. were carried in British merchantmen, and

of those two million soldiers only a few hundred perished from the submarine attacks. What a tribute is this to the skill and heroism of our combined naval and merchant fleets!

In slow convoys supplies of munitions were carried for the troops that went in the faster ships, and from Canada far more shells were sent than were used by our own men at the Front. What dangers these sailors ran may be realized from what happened in Halifax (1917) when two munition ships crashed together and the high explosive did such awful damage for miles around. They also transported food across the seas to feed the troops and keep Britain from starving. In so doing they helped to win the war just as much as did the Navy which blockaded the European ports and prevented grain and raw materials from getting into Germany. England had not over much to eat last winter (1917-18). The bread was dark, meat was scarce, sugar was doled out in small quantities, fruit had almost vanished, but the ships ran the gauntlet of the danger zones and there was enough to eat for health and strength during the hardest season of the war.

It may be added in more detail that there were 300,000 merchant sailors serving the Empire in the World-War of 1914-18; that they carried from Canada to the Front \$1,800,000,000 worth of munitions, or a sum more than enough to pay the National Debt of Canada; that they carried billions of dollars worth of meat, wheat, and other commodities of Canada; that through their tireless, courageous, unflinching, unending efforts the people and armies of Britain, France, Italy and our other Allies were fed, reinforced, armed and sustained; that more than 15,000 of these sailors were killed by submarine and floating mine and more than 40,000 of their dependants left to struggle along as best they might. Harold Begbie in the *London Chronicle* has told this story of the War-crisis which came to us in the spring of 1917:

"Our merchant tonnage had been reduced by the action of the submarine to a desperate figure. A strain such as no man outside the shipping world can understand was put upon this diminishing fleet of British merchantmen. There were the seven armies of Britain to be supplied; there were the pressing necessities of our Allies to be met; there were the people of these Islands to be fed and clothed. Every day the chief authorities at the Ministry of Shipping found upon their desks a secret document. This document was a list of the merchant ships reported lost in the previous 24 hours. No more dreadful document at that time confronted our statesmen

"The situation was saved by a brilliant and heroic act. It was decided, however great the sacrifice, that we should concentrate our shipping in the Atlantic, that there should be but one main highway for the Mercantile Marine, and but one house of call—the Atlantic Ocean and the American Continent. Our rate of loss in April, 1917, was 548,000 tons. In May, 1918, this average had fallen to 191,000 tons. At the close of the War it was almost negligible. This triumph was brought about by limiting the routes, as far as possible, to one, by patrolling that single route with ceaseless vigilance, and by establishing a most efficient system of convoy. From June, 1917, to the first three weeks of July, 1918, we had over sixty million gross tons of merchant shipping convoyed across the ocean, and the percentage of tonnage lost was a little over 1 per cent."

This rule of route as to Merchant shipping did not apply of course, to supplies and men for the other British war-fronts and it should be pointed out, also, as Mr. Begbie proves, that the British merchant seaman carried nearly 50 per cent. of the entire imports of France and Italy, besides 60 per cent. of the American troops. He worked night and day with a giant's will, a giant's strength; and night and day he faced the risk of sudden death at the hands of an invisible, brutal, and merciless foe. As an English poet (C. Fox Smith) put it:

All honour be to merchantmen,	In peril of unlighted coast
And ships of all degree,	And death-besprinkled foam,
In warlike dangers manifold	Who daily dare a hundred deaths
Who sail and keep the sea	To bring their cargoes home.

A liner out of Liverpool—a tanker from the Clyde;  
 A hard-run tramp from anywhere—a tug from Merseyside;  
 A cattle-boat from Birkenhead—a coaler from the Tyne;  
 All honour be to merchantmen while any star shall shine.

Now that it is all over we are able to estimate how large a share of the victory was due to the men of our Merchant Service. They know by terrible experiences what a blessing the Freedom of the Seas is. Many of them died, if they did not fight to save it, and now that peace has come, none will rejoice with greater right in the security on the ocean that has been thus procured.

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