

# HMCS Port Colborne

By Gene M. Labiuk

This article tells the story of *HMCS Port Colborne* as told by a sailor from Montreal in letters to his wife. This collection of letters is owned by the Niagara Military Museum and I am able to tell this story with their permission. During this period of WWII, postal censorship was in effect as will be seen with some of the letters.

*HMCS Port Colborne*, a River Class Frigate – named after the town of Port Colborne, Ontario – was built at Esquimalt, British Columbia. She was launched on April 21, 1943 and commissioned into the Royal Canadian Navy on November 15, 1943 with the pennant number K326. Figure 1 shows the certificate of the commissioning of *HMCS Port Colborne*.<sup>1</sup>

On December 12, 1943, the *Port Colborne* departed Esquimalt for Halifax via the Panama Canal (Figure 2). On April 27, 1944, the *Port Colborne* left Halifax and arrived on May 12, 1944 at Londonderry, Northern Ireland, which was to be her home port. While in the convoy across the Atlantic, a sailor on one of the other ships took ill and had to transfer to the *Port Colborne*, which had medical facilities and medical staff. The transfer was attempted by the “high-wire stretcher” (Figure 3) due to the bad sea conditions; this was cancelled and a motor boat from the *Port Colborne* was dispatched to transfer the ailing sailor.

Upon arrival at Londonderry, Seaman David Tendler sent his wife a letter in which the day has been cut out by the censor. The 6d British air letter is cancelled and post-

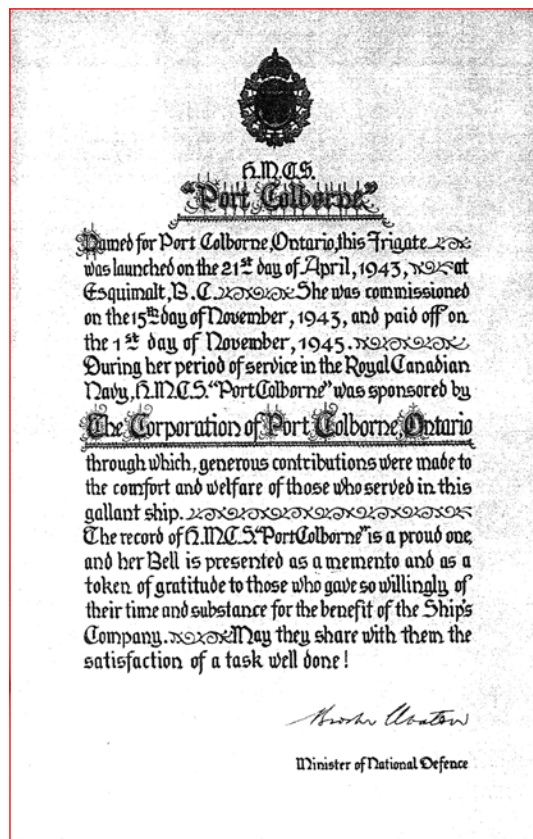
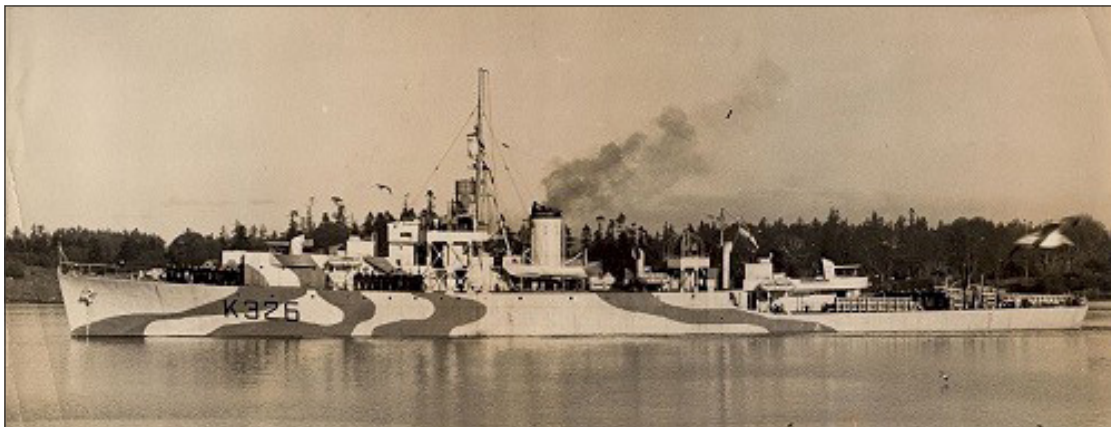


Figure 1. Certificate of commissioning of the *Port Colborne*.<sup>1</sup>

marked FIELD POST OFFICE, May 16, 1944 and bears a 2-line FROM H.M.C. SHIP / EXAMINED BY DB/N 737 (Figure 4). It was posted four days after the ship's arrival at Londonderry. The contents of the letter indicate that this is the second letter that he had written to his wife; the first was sent the previous day.



*Figure 2. Photo of the Port Colborne leaving Esquimalt in December 1943. – From the collection of Harold Colgan, Courtesy of Randall Colgan<sup>2</sup>*



*Figure 3. Photo of an attempted “high-wire stretcher” to the Port Colborne. – Welland Tribune, April 28, 2001<sup>3</sup>*

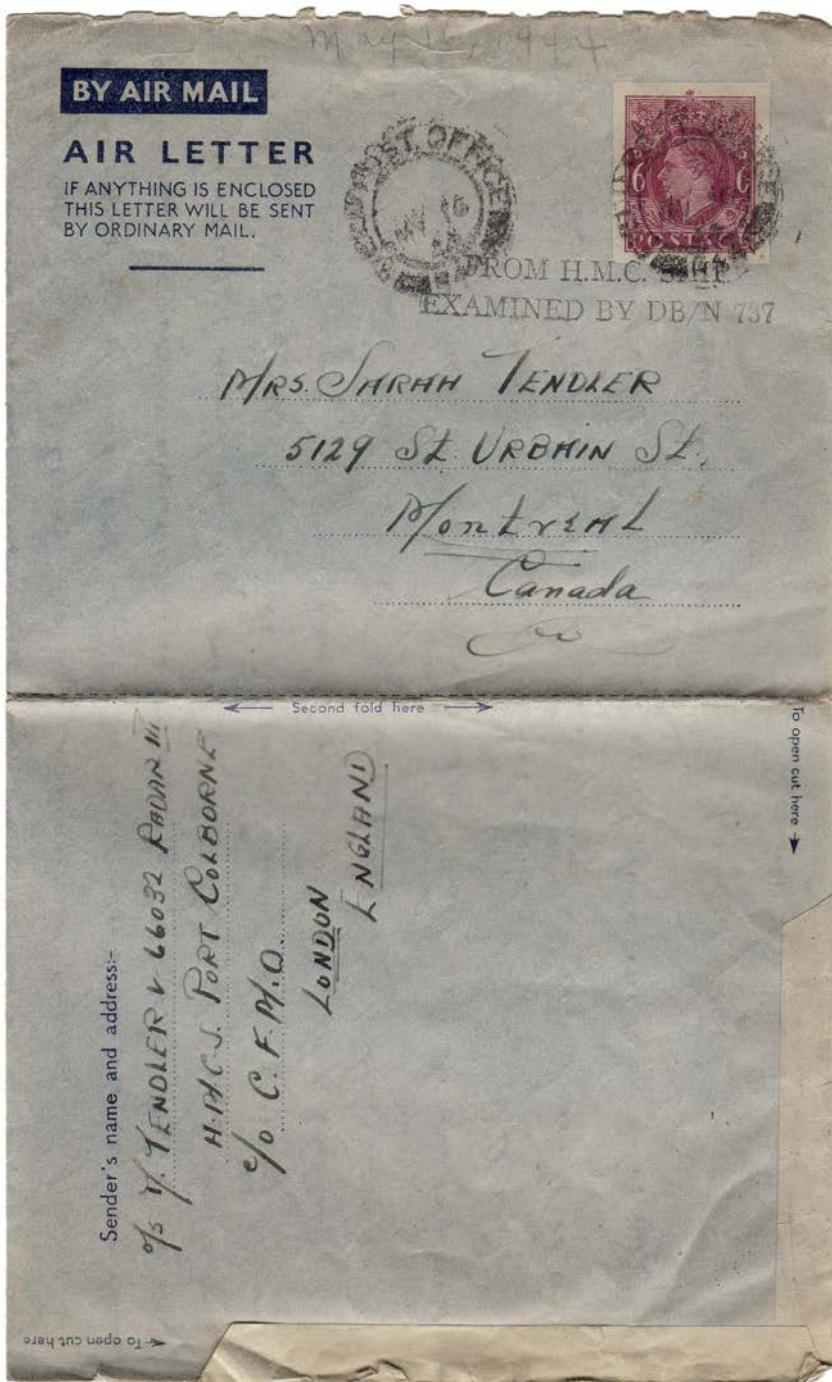
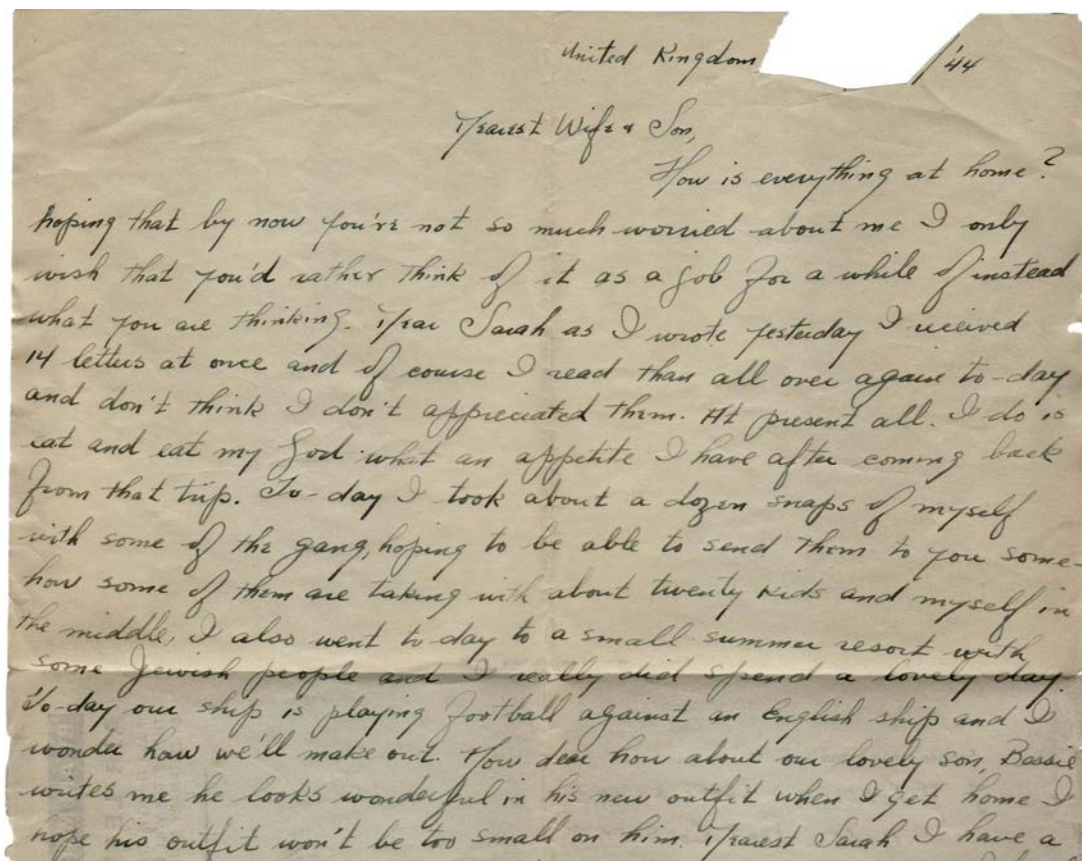


Figure 4. British air letter rated 6d posted from Londonderry naval base to Montreal, postmarked May 16, 1944. – Tandler family correspondence, courtesy of the Niagara Military Museum<sup>4</sup>



Figure 5 shows the first few lines of the second letter written by David Tendler, Radar III Class upon his arrival at Londonderry. Note that the month and date have been cut out by the censor, which seems unusual because the air letter is dated by the post mark and the ship's name is written on the back. [Ed note: in this letter, the writer states "I wrote yesterday", indicating this was the second letter he had written after arrival at Londonderry.]

*Hoping that by now you're not so much worried about me I only wish that you'd rather think of it as a job for a while of instead what you are thinking. Dear Sarah as I wrote yesterday I received 14 letters at once and of course I read them all over again to-day and don't think I don't appreciate them. . . .*



United Kingdom 1/44

Dearest Wife & Son,

How is everything at home?

hoping that by now you're not so much worried about me I only wish that you'd rather think of it as a job for a while of instead what you are thinking. Dear Sarah as I wrote yesterday I received 14 letters at once and of course I read them all over again to-day and don't think I don't appreciated them. At present all. I do is eat and eat my food what an appetite I have after coming back from that trip. To-day I took about a dozen snaps of myself with some of the gang, hoping to be able to send them to you somehow some of them are taking with about twenty kids and myself in the middle. I also went to-day to a small summer resort with some Jewish people and I really did spend a lovely day. To-day our ship is playing football against an English ship and I wonder how we'll make out. How dear how about our lovely son, Bassie writes me he looks wonderful in his new outfit when I get home I hope his outfit won't be too small on him. Dearest Sarah I have a

Figure 5. Second letter written by Radar III Class Dave Tendler to his wife. (Cropped at bottom) – Tendler family correspondence, courtesy of the Niagara Military Museum<sup>4</sup>

Figure 6 shows an Armed Forces Air Letter form, rated 3d, from Dave Tendler to his wife. It was postmarked with a machine cancel ARMY / POST OFFICE / S.C. 2 / 29 JUN 44. It also carries the stamp of the ship censor: FROM H.M.C. SHIP / EXAMINED

BY DB/N 737. It also was censored by British postal censor #4718 as shown by the tape initialed by that censor. There is a pencil notation at the top of the front of the air letter: "June 22, 1944".

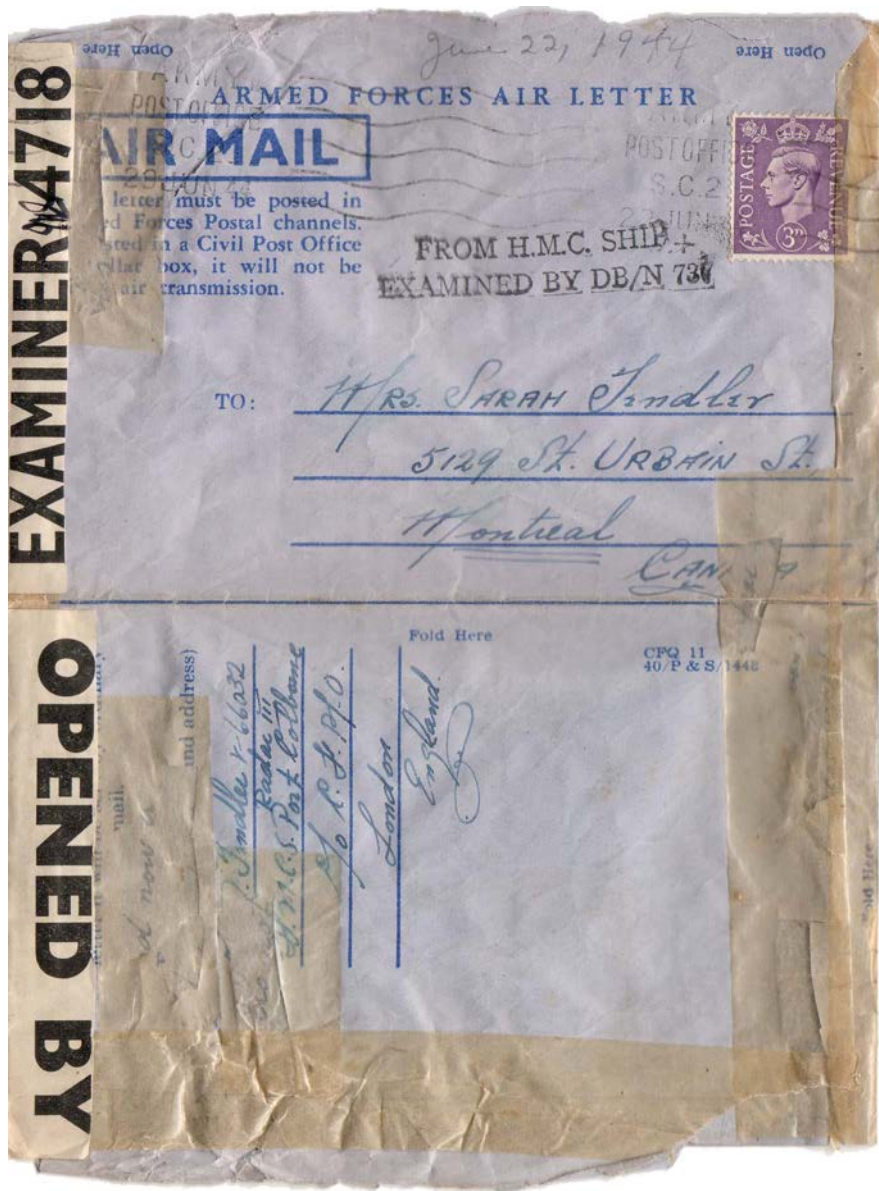


Figure 6. British Armed Forces Air Letter form rated 3d. – Tendler family correspondence, courtesy of the Niagara Military Museum<sup>4</sup>

The contents of this undated letter and the heavy censorship indicate that this was written about the events before and on D-Day, June 6, 1944 (Figure 7). [Ed note: the spelling and grammar are exactly as they appear in the written letter.]

F/L Base

My Dearest Wife Son,

How are you both doing? You my darling wife and son. To-day I received your mail addressed to G.P.O. three letters I was really glad to hear of you and Bert. Dearest Sarah the reason honey why you haven't received mail before was on account of the invasion, we were kept for some time (censored) (censored) (censored) and after about two week finally the (censored) came through that (censored) is given one of the most important (censored) of any Canadian (censored) overseas, the captain called together the ships company and talked to us like a father very annusual for a Lt. Commander telling us exactly what and when things are to happen and finally wishing us luck and above all he said Men, do everything with speed and give it your best also, I know it's hard to sleep with you life belts on but our assignment we must. Just imagine that scene all of us standing on the quadeck not a word or murmur for 170 men only silence, and so we got away in the middle of the night and what a rough night never was it so rough but we left a day to early as you know the sea was too rough (censored) my God how long that Monday was and finally Tuesday and for (censored) our ship did its duty with precision our ship was (censored) command we were about (censored) together including Americans British and Polish we also had very good protection from

(censored) (censored) we had (censored) of them, we lost a (censored) but they (censored) was saved by our ship, about men I can't tell you dear. My darling this is a thing of the past, and now we really don't know where next but my darling if you don't receive any mail from me for 2-3 week please do not worry as long as you have faith in me nothing can happen to me, and besides that most likely on our next trip I'll see Mrs. Shiffman, or our postponed siegal trip.

Dearest Sarah I'll write again to-morrow, there is not one day that I shouldn't think of you and Bert dear. I wrote also to my folks to-day at present I'm studing a new Radar Set in a English school it's only for a few afternoons, but the way the instructor talkes it's just a waste of time for him, he talkes I listen but what comes out of his mouth doesn't sound clear to me, but I guess on actual practice you always learn (unreadable) darling I'm fine as usual.

(unreadable) so far we won 8 strait games. Please do not worry about me, the more you worry the worsed you feel and all for nothing. Be rest assured I'll be home the latest for Xmas. Kiss our son for me when I get home I'll return them to you with % darling I promise. Your last letter only took six days to get to me, so don't forget write all news. So until tomorrow, I remain yours Forever Dave.

During the invasion of Normandy, the Port Colborne took part in Operation Neptune and then worked in the English Channel on submarine detection until June 25. While on patrol, her radar detected what appeared to be a Nazi submarine and attacked it by dropping its hedgehogs and in the process almost destroyed herself. What



H. H. Home Base

My Dearest Wife Son,  
You are both doing? You my darling  
wife and son. To-day I received your mail addressed to G.P.O.  
these letters I was really glad to hear of you and But. Dearest Sarah  
the reason honey why you haven't received mail before was on account  
of the invasion, we were kept for some time  
and after about two week finally the  
came through that is given one of the most important  
of any Canadian overseas, the captain called  
together the ships company and talked to us like a father over  
annusual for a Lt. Commander telling us exactly what and when  
things are to happen and finally wishing us luck and above all  
he said men, do everything with speed and give it your best shot  
I know it's hard to sleep with your life belts on but our assing m  
we must. Just imagine that scene all of us standing on the quadeck  
not a word or murmur for 170 men only silence, and so we got awed  
in the middle of the night and what a rough night never was it so rough  
but we left a day to early as you know now the sea was too rough  
and for my god how long that Monday was and finally Tues  
day was our ship did its duty with precision our  
together including Americans British and Polish we also had  
very good protection from  
I mean we lost a few but they were saved by our ship,  
about men I can't tell you dear. My darling this is a thing of  
the past, and now we really don't know where next, but my  
darling if you don't receive any mail from me for 2-3 week  
please do not worry as long as you have faith in me nothing  
can happen to me, and besides that most likely our next  
trip I'll see Mrs. Schiffman, or our postponed seagal trip

Figure 7. Letter written shortly after D-Day. – Tendler family correspondence, courtesy of the Niagara Military Museum<sup>4</sup>

they thought was a submarine ended up being a sunken destroyer and the hedgehogs they believe struck the destroyer's magazine and nearly blew the *Port Colborne* out of the water. The electrical components of the *Port Colborne* were damaged and she limped to port and ended up in a Belfast shipyard, where she underwent repairs. After repairs, she went on patrol and escort duty until late November, when she formed part of the escort for a convoy to Murmansk, Russia.

Figure 8 shows an Armed Forces Air Letter rated 3d with the 2-line ship censor in black as previous and the large British postal marking POST OFFICE MARITIME MAIL in red. The letter inside is dated November 25, 1944, and written "*Somewhere At Sea*" (Figure 9). Convoy JW-62 left Loch Ewe on November 29 and arrived at Kola Inlet (Murmansk, Russia) on December 7. With the date of this letter November 25, the *Port Colborne* was either at Loch Ewe or on their way there. This convoy was comprised of 68 ships, 34 merchant and 34 escort ships. Figure 10 shows the winter route of the Murmansk convoys from Scotland. The return convoy RA-62, comprised of 28 ships which left Kola Inlet on December 10 and arrived at Loch Ewe on December 19.

In February of 1945 the *Port Colborne* was order back to Canada for a refit. While that work was being done, Germany surrendered. The navy then considered refitting her for duties in the Pacific in the war against Japan. This refit was going to be too costly, and so was abandoned. In November of 1945, the ship was towed to Bedford Basin at Halifax, the crew was paid off, and she was turned over to Crown Assets. In 1950 she met her fate as scrap at Sydney, N.S. Figure 11 shows a photo of the *Port Colborne* at the Dominion Steel Corp. wharf in Sydney.

Battle honours and awards: Atlantic 1944-1945, English Channel 1944, Normandy 1944, Arctic 1944, North Sea 1945.<sup>2</sup>

There was no official HMCS Port Colborne ship badge, the only known identity is a standard jacket patch (Figure 12).

When the nine letters of this correspondence were purchased for the Niagara Military Museum, their historical importance was not known; these were purchased for a future project for the Museum. Only when I read the letters and checked the dates did I find the military-historical importance. It goes to show that postal historians never know what important information may turn up. For those who are not aware I do volunteer work at the Niagara Military Museum as their Director of Research and Archives and hopefully this will result in more military-postal history articles in the future from the museum.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Niagara Military Museum for allowing me to use these letters for this article. I also thank the Port Colborne Archives, St. Catharines Museum and Archives and the Welland Public Library.

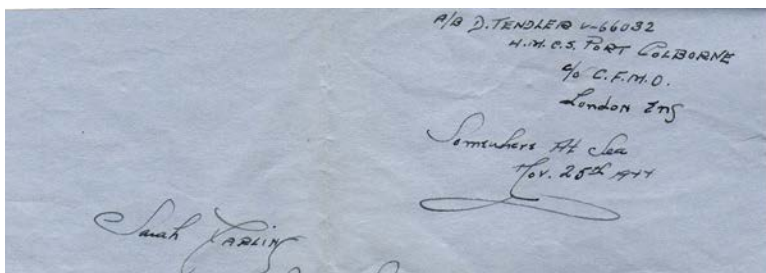
1. L. R. Wilson Heritage Research Archives & Visitor Centre, 286 King Street, Port Colborne, ON, (Port Colborne Archives).
2. [www.forposterityssake.ca/navy/HMCS\\_PORT\\_COLBORNE](http://www.forposterityssake.ca/navy/HMCS_PORT_COLBORNE)
3. Welland Public Library
4. Tendler family correspondence of Radar III Class Dave Tindler to his wife in Montreal, in the Niagara Military Museum Archives.
5. St. Catharines Museum and Archives





Figure 8. British Armed Forces Air Letter form rated 3d with large red postal markings. – Tandler family correspondence, courtesy of the Niagara Military Museum<sup>4</sup>

Figure 9. Top portion of letter written in late November when the Port Colborne was on escort duty on a convoy to Murmansk. – Tandler family correspondence, courtesy of the Niagara Military Museum<sup>4</sup>



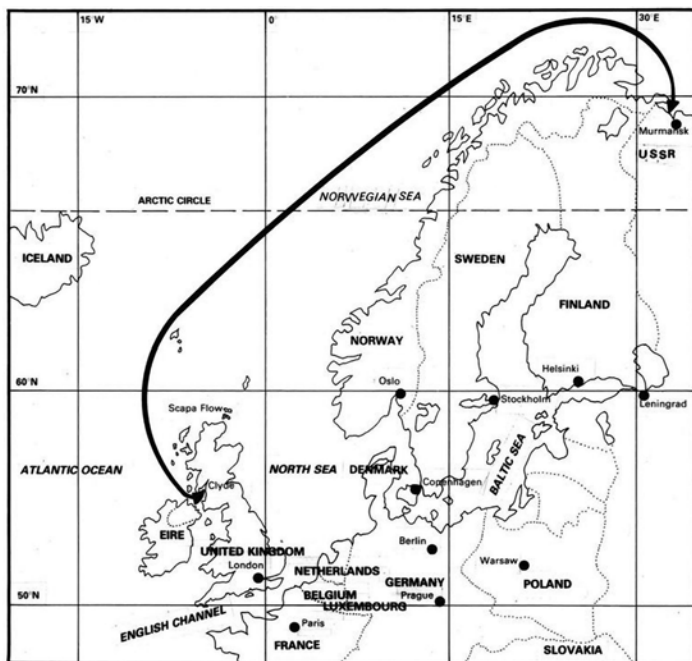


Figure 10. Map of convoy routes. – Source unknown



Figure 12. Jacket badge patch of the Port Colborne.<sup>1</sup>



Figure 11. Photo of the Port Colborne at the scrap yard in Sydney, N.S. – St. Catharines Standard<sup>5</sup>