CANADIAN
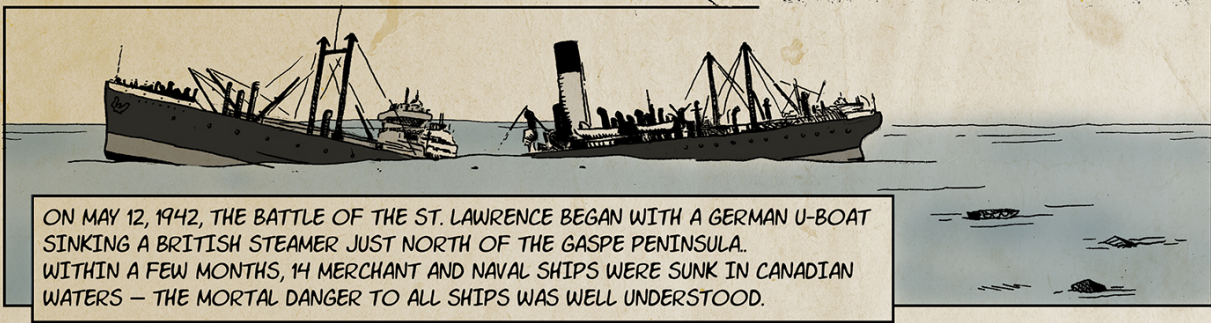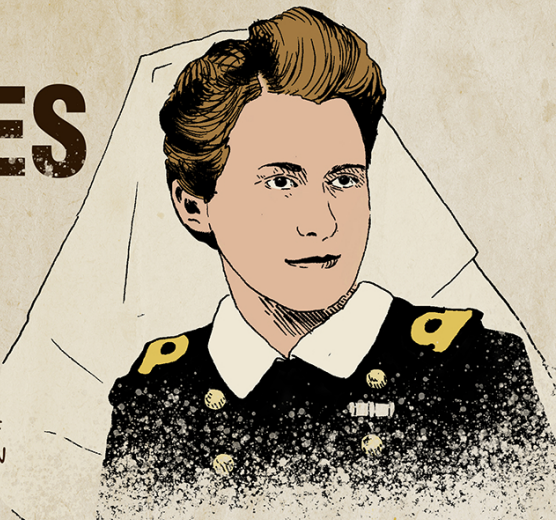# NAVAL ⚓ HEROES

LIEUTENANT–COMMANDER
MARGARET BROOKE
1915–2016

BORN IN 1915 IN ARDATH, SASKATCHEWAN, MARGARET MARTHA BROOKE ENROLLED IN THE ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY AS A NURSING SISTER DIETICIAN ON MARCH 9, 1942, AT THE RANK OF SUB–LIEUTENANT. SHE ULTIMATELY ATTAINED THE RANK OF LIEUTENANT–COMMANDER ON APRIL 1, 1957, WHILE SERVING IN THE RCN FROM 1942 TO 1962.
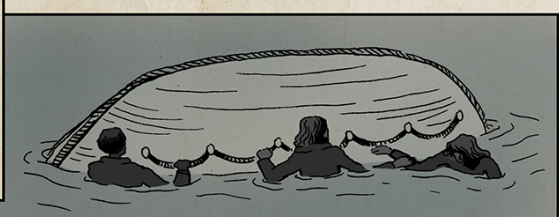
ON MAY 12, 1942, THE BATTLE OF THE ST. LAWRENCE BEGAN WITH A GERMAN U–BOAT SINKING A BRITISH STEAMER JUST NORTH OF THE GASPE PENINSULA. WITHIN A FEW MONTHS, 14 MERCHANT AND NAVAL SHIPS WERE SUNK IN CANADIAN WATERS — THE MORTAL DANGER TO ALL SHIPS WAS WELL UNDERSTOOD.

ON THE NIGHT OF OCTOBER 14, 1942, 75 KILOMETRES OFF THE COAST OF NEWFOUNDLAND, U–69 WAS SEARCHING FOR TARGETS AND AT 3:21 A.M. FIRED A TORPEDO THAT STRUCK NEWFOUNDLAND'S PASSENGER FERRY SS CARIBOU.

BROOKE AND FELLOW NURSING SISTER SUB–LIEUTENANT AGNES WILKIE WERE THROWN FROM THEIR BUNKS WHEN THE TORPEDO HIT AND SCRAMBLED TO THE DECK TO FIND THE REMAINING LIFEBOATS IN SPLINTERS. THEY WERE THROWN INTO THE ICY WATER AS THE SHIP SANK BENEATH THEM.

BROOKE AND WILKIE MANAGED TO CLING TO THE SIDE OF A CAPSIZED LIFEBOAT, HOLDING ON TO ROPES STILL IN PLACE. AFTER A FEW HOURS, WILKIE NO LONGER HAD THE STRENGTH TO HOLD ON AND BROOKE PULLED HER BACK ONTO THE SIDE OF THE LIFEBOAT A NUMBER OF TIMES, WHILE HOLDING ON TO THE ROPES WITH THE OTHER HAND.

AROUND DAYBREAK, A LARGE WAVE CRASHED OVER THE LIFEBOAT AND WILKIE WAS SWEPT AWAY FROM BROOKE'S GRIP, SUCCUMBING TO THE FRIGID WATER. FOR TRYING TO SAVE WILKIE IN THIS SELFLESS ACT, BROOKE WAS NAMED A MEMBER OF THE ORDER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE.