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Louisbourg Fishermen Rescue U.S.Seamen,1942 By Jean Kyte and CAPE BRETON'S MAGAZINE January 22nd, 1986, will mark the 43rd anniversary of a dramatic rescue of 26 men from the ice-foundered U.S. subchaser S.C. 709, stranded on a treacherous bar in the mouth of Louisbourg Harbour during a blinding storm in near zero weather. Charlie Bagnell, Ed Levy and Earl Lewis remember the events of that day. The S.C. 709 was commissioned at Elizabeth City, North Carolina in November 1942. Her captain was Lieut. William C. French, Jr., and her ensign Albert D. Jordan, and she had a crew of 24. She was 120 feet long with a beam of 20 feet, and carried one 3-inch and two 20 mm. guns, along with 20 depth charges. She also carried sound gear, radar and submarine detection equipment. She operated out of Portland, Maine, during the fall and early winter, and on January 16, 1943, was ordered to Argentia, Nfld. She got under way on January 18 in company with the U.S.C.G. Storis under a grey sky. On the morning of the 19th the rain and mist commenced. About 1415 (2:15 p.m.) the rain became continuous. At 1756 the commanding officer advised the Storis, "Our radar out of commission will do our best to keep up to you during the night." This was the last time contact was made with the Storis. On January 20 ice was beginning to form and occasional chipping was required. At 1351 land was sighted off the port bow and identified as Egg Island. Ice continued to form and was chipped off and it was felt to be under control. A return to Halifax would have necessitated running into the sea and entering at night, so it was decided to continue up the coast. The official U.S. Navy report records the grim battle with the Atlantic: "Prior to midnight ice commenced to form with such speed that all hands (available) were ordered to chip ice. The ice was of a soft nature making chipping with any haste impossible. ... The deck, particularly along the port side, was covered with about a foot of ice...the bridge ports save two being completely covered with ice.... The crew was becoming physically exhausted and the temperature was well below zero. Before an area could be cleared enough to see anything of the ship proper, the previously chipped area would be filled in again. Chipping teams were established, two men working from five to ten minutes. Sleep was impossible." During the night the storm increased and the ice grip on the ship tightened. Between 0321 and 0410 the engineer officer and gunner's mate succeeded in clearing the depth charge projectors and fired them. At 0504 George Gagnon was washed overboard into the icy water but was rescued. The ship was now listing to port 25 degrees. Ammunition was moved to starboard and amidships, but the ship still listed 5 to 10 degrees. The ice buildup continued and from Egg Island on, navigation was by dead reckoning. At 0755 course was changed for Louisbourg. "Ice continued to form, in fact it was im-

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