

HMCS SACKVILLE - CANADA'S NAVAL MEMORIAL  
**ACTION STATIONS**

*Volume 38 - Issue 2  
Spring 2019*



**SPECIAL ISSUE COMMEMORATING THE  
75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE D-DAY LANDING**

# ACTION STATIONS

Volume 38 - Issue 2  
Spring 2019

## The Cover



The 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade disembarking with bicycles from landing craft onto 'Nan White' sector of Juno Beach at Bernieres-sur-Mer, 6 June 1944.  
Photographer: Gilbert Milne Library and Archives



Canadian Troops Landing at Juno Beach June 6, 1944  
Photographer: Gilbert Milne Library and Archives  
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# FEATURES

- 10 A TRIBUTE TO GUY GRONDIN (1925-1943), WELDER,  
UNITED SHIPYARDS LTD., MONTREAL/  
HOMMAGE À GUY GRONDIN (1925-1943), SOUDEUR,  
UNITED SHIPYARDS LTD., MONTRÉAL
- 12 PAST CHAIR LAUDS “THE MANY VOLUNTEERS  
WHO WORKED SO HARD”
- 13 PARK AND FORT SHIPS
- 14 DUNKIRK AND TIMBRELL  
REMEMBERING “OPERATION DYNAMO,”  
THE DUNKIRK EVACUATION
- 15 CONVOY CARGOES - A POEM
- 16 THE ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY IN OPERATION OVERLORD  
JUNE-AUGUST 1944
- 21 MEMBERSHIP
- 22 HMCS LOUISBURG’S FIRST LIEUTENANT REMEMBERS D-DAY
- 24 D-DAY 75TH ANNIVERSARY POSTER FEATURES  
CAPTAIN (N) HAROLD TILLEY
- 25 WARTIME CONVOYS, CONVOYS AND SHIPS STATISTICS
- 26 COLLATERAL DAMAGE: THE SINKING  
OF THE NS FISHING VESSEL LUCILLE M
- 28 RECOLLECTIONS OF A YOUNG CORVETTE CAPTAIN
- 30 BRITAIN’S MIRACLE HARBOUR
- 34 HMCS SACKVILLE - 1944

# DEPARTMENTS

- 4 **Executive Reports**  
**From the Chair**  
**Captain’s Cabin**  
**Executive Director**
- 7 **Crossed the Bar**



*HMCS Trentonian by Marc Magee, [www.marcmagee.com](http://www.marcmagee.com)*

Battle of the Atlantic Weekend closely followed by the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary commemoration of the D-Day landing causes us in the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust (CNMT) to reflect back on these events as well as plan for the future of the Memorial. It was the Canadian commitment to the Battle of the Atlantic that elevated the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) from insignificance to a major contributor to achieving the naval supremacy in the Atlantic that made D-Day possible. A large number of RCN ships and many Canadians serving in ships of Allied Navies took part in the preparations for, the execution of, and the aftermath of the D-Day landing, sustaining casualties including the loss of HMC Ships *Athabaskan*, *Alberni*, *Regina* and *Trentonian*.

A significant factor in the success of the Canadian Navy was the “can do” attitude of the Officers and Men who crewed the ships. The wisdom of using the limited Naval resources available after the First World War and during the Depression to create Reserve Divisions of dedicated people across the nation enabled the rapid recruitment of Officers and Men, moulded in adversity that could survive and thrive in the challenge of rudimentary training and ill equipped ships being thrust into the violence of the foe and the elements.

The CNMT faces different but challenging issues today as we strive to preserve the ship, enhance the Memorial, and tell the Canadian Naval story. The most immediate task is to ensure the watertight integrity of the ship.

I reported in the last issue of *Action Stations* that Maritime Forces Atlantic’s Fleet Maintenance Facility Cape Scott had commenced cladding the existing underwater hull with ¼ inch steel with the intention of completing the cladding in time to allow the ship to be open to the public at Sackville Landing by Canada Day 2019. The syncrolift facility used to take *Sackville* out of the water became unavailable as plans were being made to lift the ship in March. It is now intended to conduct our normal summer program along side Sackville Landing. The next feasible window for underwater hull repair will be either October or December inside the Submarine Shed with the potential of remaining in the shed until spring. The availability of the protected environment of the shed makes it prudent for the Trust to consider the possibility of acquiring the funds and organizing the personnel and material resources to commence replacing the underwater hull plate rather than continue with the interim solution of cladding. This option would require the Trust to raise significant private funds to proceed.

Discussions continue to define the agreement to enable Develop Nova Scotia, the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust and the Canadian Maritime Heritage Foundation to create a designated Canadian Maritime Heritage District on the Halifax waterfront. All partners, individually and cooperatively are developing their programs with a view to operating within the intended memorandum of understanding.

## CAPTAIN'S CABIN by Lieutenant Commander ret'd Jim Reddy



In the winter issue of *Action Stations*, the plan described for the ship was to dock her for a second time in the spring. This would have extended the “cladded” area of the hull and launched *Sackville* in time for the summer 2019 season. However, as the Chair described, technical issues beyond us have delayed the planned docking. So we will carry on directly to our Halifax waterfront 2019 public season, having missed 2018 for a most welcome hull repair operation.

In the meantime, *Sackville* significantly upgraded longstanding relations with our shipmate friends in Hamilton, Ontario. Last summer, a team from the *Friends of Haida* visited during our AGM. They brought Hamilton Mayor Eisenberger and joined our June AGM reception with Halifax Mayor Savage. The underlying theme was to link the two Canadian cities that host Battle of the Atlantic veteran RCN ships. All this was shown in the last issue of *Action Stations*.

Recently, our relationship has been deepened with the gift to us of a Hamilton-built model of our corvette. In February at the RCNA Oakville Branch, I was especially honoured on behalf of the Trust to accept the large model, pictured above, from the owner, Mrs Linda Dean. The model was constructed by her late husband Tom Dean who had served in the RCN. The photo taken on the occasion shows Mrs Dean, me and Trustee and Friend of *Haida*, Bill Thomas. The model is a magnificent rendition and will greatly enhance our collection.

Our challenge now is to safely transport the model to Halifax. We are currently investigating

the possibility of a seaborne transfer to Halifax by way of the RCN vessel that will make the annual Great Lakes Deployment this year. Such a transfer would lend dignity to the arrival of such an important and valuable artefact. An additional challenge will be to display the model where it can effectively draw attention to Canada's Naval Memorial.

This winter, *Sackville* and *Haida* developed another link. Both have received honorary memberships in the Brotherhood of the Allied Convoys. This is a Russian-based organization that commemorates the perilous Arctic convoys from the UK to the Northern Russian ports of Murmansk and Archangel. The Brotherhood takes part in ceremonies onboard HMS *Belfast* in London. These Arctic operations were known for the harsh northern conditions and the meagre port services available in those beleaguered harbours. *Haida* holds pride of place here over *Sackville* as *Haida* actually made that run. I couldn't find evidence of a Canadian corvette having been part of a northern convoy although a few RN corvettes actually made that passage around the North Cape.

As I write, we are preparing for our annual Battle of the Atlantic events followed by a spring weather push to beautify the ship for our shift to *Sackville* Landing next to the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in June. After a year away from our traditional public seasonal operation, we'll be breaking in many new ship's company members.

*See you onboard.*

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

*Do you hear there?*

### MARITIME BLINDNESS

"Maritime Blindness" is an unfortunate reality, which seems to be as pervasive in Veterans Affairs as it is in Canada as a whole. This year's Commemoration of the 75th anniversary of D-Day is being held in Halifax. Upon reading the program, I found it will be all about the 14,000 soldiers who landed, and not about the 11,000 Canadian sailors who got them there, protected their backs, marshalled them on the beaches, ensured a steady supply of supplies and ammunition to sustain the advance, and a myriad of other essential activities. So I wrote the following letter to the head of commemorations in VAC:

*Veterans' Affairs Canada  
To whom it may concern*

I understand that you are responsible for the 75th Anniversary D-Day commemorations program, with the Canadian activities centred in Halifax this year. I have seen the attached program, and was disappointed that it was so heavily army-centric. Yes, 14,000 Canadian soldiers landed in Normandy in conjunction with D-Day, but how did they get there, how were they re-supplied, who guarded their seaward flanks? There is one fleeting mention of HMCS *Sackville* in the program, but no one has asked that she participate. As you may know, the ship is owned and operated by the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust and has been Canada's Naval Memorial since 1985. She is the last of 269 corvettes (123 of them Canadian) that fought in the Allied cause in the Second World War. Two RCN corvettes of similar appearance, HMC Ships *Regina* and *Alberni*, were sunk by U-boats during Operation Overlord, the invasion of Normandy.

I thought that holding 75th Anniversary events here in 2019 was a terrific idea when I first heard of it, as Halifax - and the RCN operating primarily from this port - played a major role in winning the Battle of the Atlantic; one of the pivotal campaigns of the war. More particularly, there were 126 RCN ships and about 10,000 sailors involved in the D-Day landings: transporting soldiers across the Channel in Infantry Landing Craft to the beaches, from large ships to the beaches in landing craft (assault), acting as beach masters to ensure that the actual landings were completed as effectively

and safely as possible, minesweeping, conducting bombardment support for the troops, protecting the amphibious operations area from U-Boats, torpedo boats, and air attack; escorting re-supply shipping and Mulberry Dock components, and in some cases - due to a huge storm in the Channel - towing components to where they formed temporary docks off the beaches. They performed a myriad of tasks - most of them very hazardous - in order to ensure the operation was successful.

If the mandate for this event is only to mark the efforts of those in khaki uniform, fine, but as Michael Whitby concludes in his article on the Navy's contribution to Normandy Operations:

"The great achievement of the Royal Canadian Navy during the Second World War was its contribution to the Battle of the Atlantic. Yet, that feat should not push the RCN's role in the invasion of Europe too far into the shadows. Throughout the summer of 1944, Canadian sailors, meeting many new challenges, fulfilled a wide range of responsibilities with competence and professionalism. Their contribution to the success of the invasion was not as critical as it was to the Battle of the Atlantic, but it was significant and thus deserves a prominent place in Canadian naval history."

I hope that it is not too late to include our iconic ship and some of our volunteer Trustees in the Halifax commemoration. We can be on the Halifax waterfront: available for visitation by participants, a reception, or whatever is needed to enhance the 75th anniversary of this important time in Canada's history. Halifax's role throughout the war was far more than a place where soldiers boarded sea transport and then arrived on Juno Beach some time later. The opportunity exists for the commemorations to reflect that.

Please contact me if you wish to explore some of these or other possibilities.

Best regards,

*Doug*

Douglas S. Thomas  
Executive Director,  
Canadian Naval Memorial Trust  
902-721-1206 / 902-492-1424

## CROSSED THE BAR



*Burial at sea from HMCS Algonquin of a sailor killed during the invasion, 8 June 1944, Library of Canada*

**Mary (Jane) Biggs** of Cole Harbour, NS, who served in the Women's Royal Naval Service before immigrating to Canada as a young bride in 1956, passed away Feb 11 at age 84. She worked as a lifeguard and swimming instructor at the Shearwater Rec Centre and Dartmouth YMCA. Her love of the water led to her passion for scuba diving. For 46 years she logged over 2000 dives around the world with one of her final dives being on the Great Barrier Reef when she was 81. She also spent many years enjoying cycling, swimming, kayaking, cross-country skiing, gardening and beekeeping. She was a member of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust/HMCS *Sackville* and active in a number of community and service support organizations including the Canadian Naval Air Group. She was predeceased by her husband Len; survivors include her sister Susan in England; children Kevin, Erica, Sally, Kitty and Sam, and a number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

**Leading Seaman Kevin Michael Baker** of Eastern Passage, NS, a naval communicator serving in the new Arctic Offshore Patrol Vessel *Harry DeWolf*, passed away March 3 at age 25. He was a graduate of Cole Harbour High School and

a Life Member of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust/HMCS *Sackville*. He was the son of Sherry (Comeau) Baker and the late Mark Baker; in addition to his mother survivors include sister Samantha. Donations may be made to Feed Nova Scotia or HMCS *Sackville*.

**Gerald Arthur Beament**, a graduate of the Royal Military College of Canada (1954) and a 35 year veteran of the Royal Canadian Navy passed away in Ottawa in November, 2018 at age 87. Following retirement from the Navy he was active in the St John Ambulance. He was predeceased by his wife Patricia; survivors include children Geoff and Alison and a number of grandchildren.

**Kenneth Frederick Brown** of Dartmouth, NS, who served 22 years as an officer in the Royal Canadian Navy-- including HMC Ships *Magnificent*, *Bonaventure* and *Sioux*-- passed away January 28 at age 85. Following retirement from the Navy he served as executive director of swimming with Sport Nova Scotia and as a business manager with the provincial public service. He was active in community and military support organizations, including the Shearwater Aviation Museum and the Canadian Naval

## CROSSED THE BAR CONT'D

Memorial Trust/HMCS Sackville. Survivors include children Michael, Danny and Sharon, a number of grandchildren great-grandchildren and sister Shirley.

**Rear Admiral William Borden Christie (ret'd)**, a Second World War veteran who held senior appointments in Halifax and at National Defence Headquarters passed away April 10 in Ottawa at age 99. Born in 1919 in Calais, Me., U.S.A. and raised in Digby, he went off to sea in the Merchant Navy in 1936 until joining the Canadian Navy in 1941, serving in several ships in the Atlantic and in Korea (1950-51). He was much involved with ship system design and construction, particularly the aircraft carrier *Bonaventure* and "O" Class submarines in the United Kingdom, and went on to positions of increasing responsibility in that field. In the latter 60's he was in command of HMC Dockyard Halifax and CF Base Halifax, later became Chief of Engineering for the Armed Forces in Defence Headquarters, Ottawa, and then Associate ADM (Materiel). After leaving government service he served as president of several engineering and defence systems companies. He was predeceased by his wife Maxine; survivors include children Peter, Andrew and Susan, sister Dorothy and a number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

**Frances Pearl Clappison**, wife of former HMCS *Sackville* crew member Philip Clappison and a Life Member of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust passed away in Waterloo, ON July 10, 2018 at age 91. She was a registered nurse and a graduate of the University of Waterloo. In addition to her husband, survivors include children Philip, Stephen, Susan, Elizabeth and Margaret; several grandchildren; sisters Jean and Pauline and brother Sheldon. Philip Clappison was serving in *Sackville* in 1944 during a convoy escort when he discovered a leak in one of the boilers that impacted the ship's operation.

**Dr John Montgomery Dugan**, recognized as Alberta veterinarian of the year (2014) and active in a number of community and military support organizations passed away in Red Deer, AB March 12. Following graduation from the Ontario Veterinary College and service in the RCN, he established the Red Deer Veterinary Clinic, retiring in 2015 after 61 years in practice. He was a National Director of the former Naval Officers Association of Canada and a Life Member and

National Councillor of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust/HMCS *Sackville*. He supported and participated in CNMT special events including Battle of the Atlantic remembrance pilgrimages to Londonderry, Northern Ireland and the Newfoundland Escort Bell. Among awards and honors he was a Knight Commander and Officer of Merit of the Military and Hospitaller Order of St Lazarus and Commander Brother of the Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John. Survivors include his wife Anna, daughter Sharon, sons John, Patrick and Michael, brother Lawson and several grandchildren.

**Liam Desmond Dwyer**, a Second World War RCNVR engine room artificer (ERA) who took up a writing career in retirement, passed away in Bracebridge, ON April 9 at age 96. He joined the minesweeper HMCS *Sarnia* in 1943 and served until the end of hostilities. In 1946 he commenced a career with AV Roe at Malton Airport (now Pearson International Airport) working on the AVRO Arrow program. At age 80 he commenced writing mysteries, completing eight books including an account of the sinking of HMCS *Esquimalt* off Halifax in April 1945. He was predeceased by his wife Mary Carol; survivors include children Jim, Gregory and Joseph and a number of grandchildren.

**Sub Lieutenant Alexander Gordon Douglas (Doug) Hain (ret'd)**, a career teacher and described as having "endless energy and commitment to the UNTD Association" passed away in Etobicoke, ON March 21 at age 77. He joined the University Naval Training Division at HMCS *Star*, Hamilton, ON in 1960 while attending McMaster University and spent three summers training on the east and west coasts. He served on the UNTD Association board in different capacities for 24 years, including president, and was a Life Member of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust/HMCS *Sackville*. Survivors include his partner Jill, children Cara, Bain and Gordon and several grandchildren.

**Captain (N) Raymond C. Hunt (ret'd)**, who commenced his career as a cadet in the Merchant Navy in the UK and would serve 26 years in the Royal Canadian Navy passed away in Halifax March 1 at age 86. He obtained his foreign-going master mariners certificate in 1959 and joined the RCN in 1961. He served as commanding officer of the submarines HMCS *Rainbow* and *Okanagan*, First Canadian Submarine Squadron

and HMCS *Preserver* followed by defence attaché at the Canadian Embassy in Oslo, Norway. After retiring in 1987 he pursued a number of interests including learning to fly. Survivors include his wife Jean (and his stepchildren Donald, Cathy, Sharon and David), daughters Lindsey and Kerry and several grandchildren.

**Captain Cecil Hugh Lemuel Ritcey** of Riverport, NS, who served in the RCAF marine section during the Second World War, passed away April 12 at age 97. Following the end of hostilities he commenced a lengthy career with Imperial Oil as a master mariner sailing tankers around the world, retiring in 1978 as captain of the Imperial Ottawa. He was active in a number of church and community organizations and the Royal Canadian Legion. He was predeceased by his first wife Doris and second wife Phyllis; survivors include his children Karen, Hugh, Tom, Bert and Ritcey; stepson Robert and stepdaughter Judy, and a number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

**Vice Admiral Robert St George Stephens (ret'd)**, who commenced his career as a naval cadet in 1941 and following the end of the Second World War would go on to hold a number of senior appointments, passed away in Madingley, England April 9 at age 95. He attended the Royal Naval College Dartmouth (1941) and trained and served in several ships during the war, including Arctic convoys to Russia. Following the end of hostilities he served in HMC Ships *Iroquois*, *Magnificent* and *Huron* (including an operational tour in Korea). Following attendance at the Imperial Defence College (1964), his appointments included Commander HMC Dockyard, Halifax (1966), Chief of Staff Materiel Command (1967), Director General Logistic Services (1969), Commander Training Command (1972) and Canada's Military Representative to the NATO Military Committee, NATO HQ, Brussels. In retirement he pursued writing, including a family history (his father was Engineer Rear Admiral George Stephens) and poetry. He was active in establishing the Admiral's Medal in 1985, awarded for outstanding achievements in Canadian maritime affairs. A naval acquaintance described his friend as "...a fascinating mixture – a warrior, historian, a raconteur... and uniquely a poet." He was predeceased by his wife Clotilde, a son and a daughter; survivors include sons Nicholas and Michael.

**Hon William Charles Wingard** of Guelph, ON, who joined the RCNVR at 17 during the Second World War and would go on to a distinguished academic and public service career passed away Jan 31 at age 94. He went to sea as a coder, was commissioned and served in HMC Ships *Stratford*, *St Boniface* and *Saskatoon* in the North Atlantic. Following the end of hostilities he received his PhD in metallurgy and taught at the University of Toronto; later he served as president of the University of Guelph (1967-1975), was elected a Member of Parliament in 1984 and served as Minister of Science. He was appointed to the Order of Canada in 1998, active in community organizations and was a Life Member of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust/HMCS *Sackville*. He was predeceased by his wife Elizabeth; survivors include sons Bill and Charles, brother Charles and several grandchildren.

**Captain (N) Keith Young (ret'd)**, born in England in 1928 and a 37 year veteran of the Royal Canadian Navy passed away in Victoria, BC February 8. He graduated from the RCN-RCAF College Royal Roads in 1949 and served principally in Halifax and Esquimalt, including command of five HMC ships and three years as Commander CFB Halifax. Following retirement from the Navy in 1986 he worked with the Canadian Coast Guard for several years. Survivors include his wife Gillian, children Nicola, Ian and Catriona, a number of grandchildren, brother Gavin and his step-grandchildren.

**Robert (Bob) Edward Sykes**, who served as a RCNVR telegraphist in the North Atlantic during the Second World War, passed away in Prevost, Quebec March 27 at age 93. Unable to join the Navy early in the war due to his age he was accepted in the Army reserve as a wireless radio operator but a year later he applied again and was accepted by the Navy. Following training at HMCS *St Hyacinth*, QC he joined the corvette HMCS *Giffard* in the UK. One of his most memorable experiences occurred in May 1944 during the rescue-recovery operation following the sinking of the frigate HMCS *Valleyfield* off Cape Race, Newfoundland. After VE Day he volunteered for the Pacific theatre but the war ended before he could deploy. Survivors include daughters Daryl and Lorayne and a number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

## A tribute to Guy Grondin (1925-1943), Welder, United Shipyards Ltd., Montréal

Introduction - This personal account by Colonel Marc Grondin, my good friend and colleague, is a reminder that war not only occurred on the high seas and overseas. It was also felt, in a very real way, on the homefront, through the sacrifices of a collective war effort that impacted families and family life all across Canada. That too is an important but often forgotten part of our history. An interesting side note to this story, also, is that Canadian shipyards were not only launching our Corvettes, but also over 400 high tonnage merchant ships for Britain (Fort Class) and for Canada (Park Class), between 1941 and 1945.

*Capt(N) Rick Payne (ret'd), OMM, CD, RCN*

In Memory to my uncle Guy Grondin, who died on October 28th, 1943 at the United Shipyards Ltd., in Montreal, working as a welder on the construction of cargo vessels engaged in the Battle of the Atlantic. Upon reaching his 18th birthday, Guy left his native East-Broughton, an asbestos mining village 80 km South of Quebec City. Born on July 25th, 1925, beloved son of Napoléon Grondin and Eva Poulin, he was the 10th child of a family of 18 children.

Working under adverse conditions at the shipyard because of the operational urgency and the weather conditions along the St-Lawrence River, Guy accidentally poisoned himself from the inhalation of toxic fumes while welding on a scaffold under a protective tarp. Upon regaining conscience after his fall, the foreman sent him home to rest. He never came back. At his residence, he asked the land lady for medical help. Evacuated to Saint-Luc Hospital, he passed away three days later, having the time to bid farewell to his parents.

His family endured difficult times during the fall and winter 43-44. At the exact same moment of Guy's tragic death, his two elder brothers, Jean-Rock and Gabriel (my father) were sailing in a convoy from Scotland to North Africa to fight in Italy as infantrymen with the Royal 22e Régiment. Fortunately and in spite of severe gun shells wounds sustained by my father Gabriel on December 1943, both brothers survived the war. The contribution of the United Shipyards Ltd to the Battle of the Atlantic is significant. In fact, "the shipyard delivered a total of 45 vessels, mainly 7 000 tons cargo ships, from December 8th, 1942 till September 1st, 1945". One can

imagine that Guy participated in the building of Fort Ticonderoga or Fort Esperance, or any other vessel under construction at the time, who knows? In total, Canadian shipyards built up to 198 Fort-class and 182 Park-class ships during the war. By the end of the war, 57,000 men and women were employed in building or repairing merchant ships in Canada, not including several thousand more being employed building ships for the Royal Canadian Navy.

Our family story is representative of the contributions and sacrifices of the Canadian population throughout this conflict, resulting in the peace we cherish still to this day. Dear Uncle Guy, your nieces and nephews join with your sisters Louise and Céline, to acknowledge our deepest admiration and thankfulness. We shall remember!

Your nephew,  
*Colonel Marc Grondin (ret) CD, RCN*



*Guy in 1943, age 18, before joining the United Shipyard in Montreal/ Guy en 1943, à 18 ans, avant de rejoindre la United Shipyard à Montréal*



*A Welder from United Shipyards, by Louis Muhlstock, OC/ Un soudeur de la United Shipyard à Montréal Shipyard, par Louis Muhlstock, OC.*



*Fort Esperance*

*Adjacent page: Eight year old Guy Grondin, (center of the front row) with his parents Napoléon and Eva, Sister Yvette and nine of his sisters and brothers./ Photo adjacente - Guy Grondin, à l'âge de 8 ans, au centre du 1er rang, avec ses parents Napoléon et Eva, Soeur Yvette, et neufs de ses frères et soeurs.*

## Hommage à Guy Grondin (1925-1943), Soudeur, United Shipyards Ltd., Montréal

Introduction – Ce témoignage personnel du colonel Marc Grondin, mon grand ami et collègue, nous rappelle que la guerre ne s'est pas déroulée seulement sur la mer et outremer. Elle fut aussi vécue, au quotidien partout au pays, par les sacrifices des familles et la contribution de la population à l'effort de guerre. Cet aspect est trop souvent oublié dans notre histoire. Un élément intéressant qui ressort de ce récit, est le fait que les chantiers navals canadiens n'ont pas seulement livré nos Corvettes, mais ont livré plus de 400 navires de haut tonnage aux gouvernements britannique (classe Fort) et canadien (classe Park) de 1941 à 1945.

*Capo Richard Payne (ret), OMM, CD, RCN*

À la mémoire de mon oncle Guy Grondin, décédé accidentellement, le 28 octobre 1943, au chantier naval de la United Shipyards Ltd, à Montréal, où il travaille comme soudeur pour la construction de cargos engagés dans la Bataille de l'Atlantique. Guy naît le 20 juillet 1925 dans la maison familiale d'East-Broughton, comté de Beauce, un village minier (amiante), situé à 80 km au sud de Québec. Fils bien aimé de Napoléon Grondin et d'Eva Poulin, il est le 10e enfant d'une famille de 18 enfants. À l'âge de 18 ans, il quitte son village natal pour la grande ville afin de participer à l'effort de guerre.



Travaillant dans des conditions difficiles au chantier naval en raison de l'urgence opérationnelle et des conditions météorologiques automnales le long du fleuve Saint-Laurent, Guy s'empoisonne involontairement par l'inhalation de fumées toxiques alors qu'il soude, monté sur un échafaudage installé sous une bâche protectrice. Ayant repris conscience après sa chute, son chef d'équipe le renvoie chez lui pour se reposer. Il ne reviendra jamais. Se sentant très mal en point, il demande de l'aide médicale à sa logeuse. Évacué à l'hôpital Saint-Luc, il décède trois jours plus tard, ayant le temps de faire ses adieux à ses parents qui sont venus d'urgence à son chevet.

La famille vit des moments difficiles durant l'automne et l'hiver 43-44. En effet, au même moment de la mort tragique de Guy, ses deux frères aînés, Jean-Rock et Gabriel (mon père) voguent dans un convoi, d'Écosse en Afrique du Nord, pour combattre en Italie en tant que fantassins au sein du Royal 22e Régiment. Heureusement et malgré les graves blessures par éclats d'obus subies par mon père Gabriel en décembre 1943, tous deux survivront à la guerre.

La contribution de la United Shipyards Ltd à la Bataille de l'Atlantique est fort importante. En effet, « le chantier naval a livré un total de 45 navires, principalement des navires cargo de 7 000 tonnes, du 8 décembre 1942 au 1er septembre 1945 ». On peut imaginer que Guy a participé à la construction, en 1943, des navires cargos Fort Ticonderoga ou Fort Esperance, ou de tout autre navire en construction à l'époque, qui sait ? Au total, les chantiers navals canadiens construisent jusqu'à 198 navires de classe Fort et 182 de classe Park pendant toute la Seconde Guerre mondiale. En 1945, 57,000 personnes travaillent à la construction et à la réparation de navire marchand au Canada, ce qui n'inclut pas les milliers d'autres personnes engagées dans la construction des navires pour la Marine Royale Canadienne.

L'histoire de notre famille est représentative des contributions et des sacrifices de la population canadienne lors de ce conflit, ce qui nous permet d'obtenir la paix que nous chérissons encore aujourd'hui. Cher oncle Guy, vos nièces et neveux se joignent à vos sœurs Louisette et Céline pour reconnaître notre profonde admiration et reconnaissance. Nous nous souviendrons!

Votre neveu,  
*Colonel Marc Grondin (ret) CD, GEMRC*

## PAST CHAIR LAUDS “THE MANY VOLUNTEERS WHO WORKED SO HARD”

*The following is the second in a series of articles reflecting on the acquisition of HMCS Sackville in 1983 by the Canadian Naval Corvette Trust – later renamed the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust-- and the individuals and events that have played a significant role in the operation of Canada's Naval Memorial.*

*Commodore Charles Westropp provides the following account of his time as Chair of the Trust 1991-1997.*

In 1988 when I became the Navy's liaison officer for the Trust, the chair, Vice Admiral Andy Fulton, was in the process of negotiating a berth for the ship downtown at Sackville Landing.

In 1990 Commodore Andy McMillin took the helm and with the help of the Waterfront Development Corp (now Develop Nova Scotia) we planned and built the Interpretation Centre for the ship. This was a splendid concept and initially all went well. The sound and light show narrated by Frank Stolley (former CBC producer) was most realistic and worked well for the first 18 months. Unfortunately, the building became costly to maintain including cracks in the structure, leaks, faulty plumbing and broken plate glass windows. Chief Petty Officer Dick Aldhem-White spent countless hours looking after the building maintenance. (Some years later the Province assumed responsibility and the building now serves as a tourist information centre).

During the period under Fulton and McMillin's leadership steady progress was being made making the spaces in *Sackville* more historically accurate and improving the appearance and maintenance of the ship. The energy of all the volunteers who did this work was truly amazing. The Navy was very much onside signing a MOU to assist maintaining the ship and providing a berth, heat and light in HMC Dockyard during the winter and related administrative support.

In December 1990 Andy McMillin advised that he was moving to New Brunswick and asked if I would I take over as chairman. As I was close to retirement but still a serving officer, Admiral John Anderson gave me permission to head the Trust as a serving officer. I retired in early 1992 and continued as the chair for another five years.



During this period we remained an almost entirely volunteer group. Lieutenant Commander Jim Bond relieved Max Corkum as commanding officer and we continued to employ Maurice McGaffney as the ship keeper. Russ Wilcox was the hard-working secretary, Gerry Etienne ran the gift shop, and Ted Smith looked after the exhibits while Russ Wagner acted as the engineer officer and liaised with the Dockyard for the ship's maintenance. With the help of the Navy and the many volunteers the ship improved in every way.

Members of the Board believed the Trust should have an endowment fund (of \$5 million) so that we would have funds for unexpected maintenance and other unforeseen expenses. With the help of Mel Baird we established the Endowment Fund and started canvassing potential donors. In a fairly short order we had raised about a quarter million dollars. The intent was that this fund was not to be used for the ship's operations but to be put aside.

Half way through my term Jim Bond retired as commanding officer and I recommended/the Board approved the appointment of Lieutenant Commander Sherry Richardson, who had done a fine job as 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant (XO) as the first female Captain.

Throughout the period work on improving the ship and visitor experience continued. We placed microchip audio systems at strategic stations in the ship explaining what the purpose of a weapon or space was. One issue that arose during this time was whether to charge admission to the ship rather than rely on voluntary donations. The Board approved a fee in conjunction with the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic.

Early in my mandate I saw the need for fundraising/raising national awareness of the Trust and that it would be useful to have an influential representative in the Toronto area. As I knew Sonja Bata I asked if she would become the vice chair. She accepted and energetically went about her duties in spite of her busy work and travel schedule. Her wise counsel was much appreciated up until the time of her passing.

While the ship and the Trust were making good progress, the myriad duties started to become too much for an all volunteer board. It became obvious that we needed a "general manager" to look after the business end of the Trust. The Board agreed to establish an executive director position and hired Ray Soucie, a retired chief petty officer signalman who turned out to be an inspired choice. While the details of running the ship were obviously the commanding officer's, it enabled the day-to-day business of the Trust and the nitty-gritty details of an increasingly complex organization to be addressed by the executive director.

In 1997 I felt it was time for a change in leadership and new ideas. I asked my good friend Captain (N) Hal Davies if he would take over as chair. He agreed providing I assume his duties as the president of the Navy League of Nova Scotia.

When I retired as chairman I was pleased to say that thanks to the many volunteers who worked so hard during my tenure the ship was in every way better than when I took the helm. Hal Davies with considerable energy and business acumen accelerated the progress of the ship and the Trust during his time as chair (1997-2000) and continued to contribute up until his untimely passing in 2011.

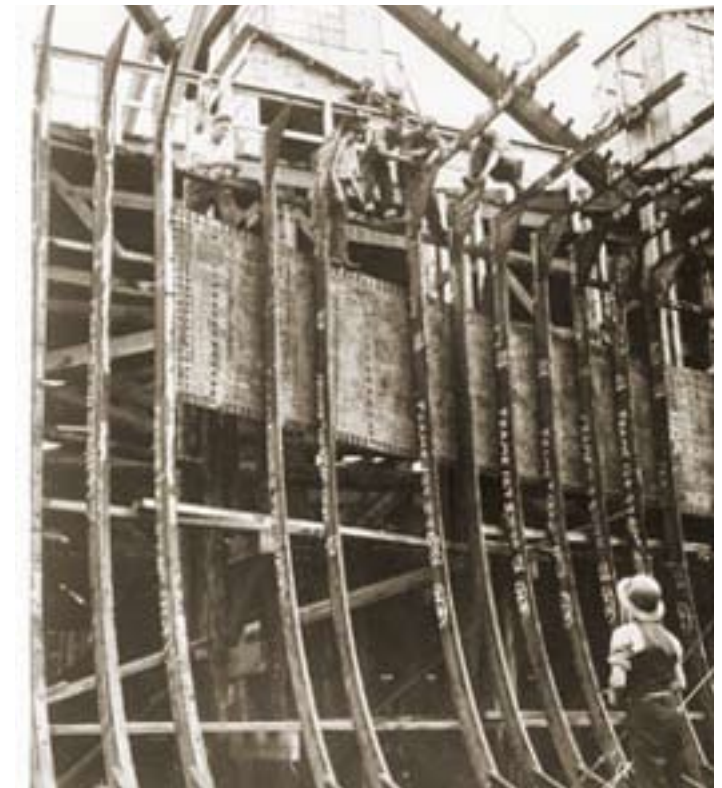
Looking back I see considerable progress has been made to preserve the ship in perpetuity.

## PARK AND FORT SHIPS

Park ships were merchant steamships constructed for Canada's Merchant Navy during the Second World War. Park ships and Fort ships (built in Canada for operation by the British) were the Canadian equivalent of the American Liberty ships.

Built for the Canadian Park Steamship Company, SS Avondale Park, completed in the Foundation Maritime Limited shipyard in Pictou, NS in May 1944, was sunk a year later in the Firth of Forth on 7 May 1945 – the last British Commonwealth ship to be lost in World War II. She had sailed on the 7th in a convoy bound for Belfast and was torpedoed that same evening, sinking in 10 minutes. The torpedo hit on the starboard side, between the engine room and #3 hold, destroying a lifeboat. Rafts were released but some jammed in their rails. Of the 34 British crew, 4 DEMS gunners, and 3 Maritime Regiment Royal Artillery gunners, the chief engineer and a stoker were lost. Survivors were picked up by one of the convoy escorts."

Another Pictou-built ship, SS Taber Park, was lost in March in another coastal convoy out of the Firth of Forth. In that case 24 crew and 4 DEMS gunners were lost, only 4 survived.



*Ribs of the merchant ship Victoria Park at Pictou shipyards, Pictou, N.S., 1942. Photo: National Archives of Canada*

## DUNKIRK AND TIMBRELL

### REMEMBERING “OPERATION DYNAMO,” THE DUNKIRK EVACUATION

by Len Canfield

In May 1940 when German forces invaded Holland and Belgium forcing Allied forces to withdraw to the southwest, Acting Sub Lieutenant Robert (Bob) Timbrell was undergoing training at the Royal Navy Gunnery School at Whale Island, Portsmouth. Three days after “Operation Dynamo” was implemented on May 26 the 20 year-old Canadian officer assumed his first command, the 77-foot private yacht “Llanthony.”

His task was to head to Dunkirk on the French coast to assist in the massive evacuation of approximately 400,000 British Expeditionary Force and other Allied soldiers before they were overpowered by the onrushing German juggernaut.

Timbrell, who would go on to a distinguished wartime and peacetime career in the RCN, didn't have much time to train his crew that included six newly recruited Newfoundland members of the Royal Navy (RN), two volunteer diesel (bus) engineers and a petty officer (supply). After loading barrels of fresh water at Ramsgate for the troops on the French beaches the Llanthony headed for Dunkirk. It would be the first of several trips Timbrell and his crew would make to evacuate troops.

More than 900 ships, yachts and just about every form of craft were employed in “Operation Dynamo:” during a nine day period 338,000 troops were evacuated to UK ports. Llanthony was able to load and transport roughly 100 per transit.

As the late Rear Admiral Timbrell noted in his memoirs his first trip nearly ended in disaster. Soon after they arrived off the beach at Dunkirk a German shell exploded nearby that ruptured the fuel lines to the twin screw propellers grounding the vessel. With the help of soldiers ashore who used an abandoned tank to stabilize the vessel, repairs were hastily made and Llanthony got underway with the first load of troops on board.

Timbrell and his crew would make two more crossings accompanied by five Scottish trawlers each capable of carrying 75 troops. The crossings were not without danger, as the vessels attempted to avoid numerous minefields and attack by German ships and aircraft; during one return transit they engaged and drove off an E-boat attack.

For his action during Operation Dynamo, during which he directed the rescue of some 900 troops, Timbrell was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Later in 1940 he survived the sinking of the destroyer HMCS *Margaree* and served the rest of the war on convoy duties. He was awarded a Mention-in-Dispatches involving the sinking of U-621 in the Bay of Biscay and U-984 in 1944.

Following the end of hostilities, Rear Admiral Timbrell held a number of senior appointments and served as Commander Maritime Command 1971-1973, retiring the following year. He passed away in 2006.



*RAdm Timbrell commented during the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Operation Dynamo in 2000, “it was a delight to again see and ride my first command...” (the restored Llanthony).*



*Ceremonial Gun salute fired from HMCS Sackville during the funeral of RAdm Timbrell.*

## CONVOY CARGOES

by Carl Anderson

The British poet John Masefield (1878-1967), in his short poem *Cargoes*, described what might be found in the hold of a British coastal freighter of 1903.

*Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke stack,  
Butting through the Channel in the mad March days,  
With a cargo of Tyne coal,  
Road-rails, pig-lead,  
Firewood, iron-ware, and cheap tin trays.*

Throughout the Second World War Britain's survival depended absolutely on the uninterrupted conduct of maritime trade, carried largely in privately-owned British merchant ships sailing in convoy. During that war every occupant of Britain knew the importance of the safe and timely arrival of the convoys. What cargoes did they carry?

### Convoy Cargoes WW2

#### HX.13

Eastbound convoy, Christmas '39,  
Ships laden down to their North Atlantic line,  
Halifax to Liverpool, Swansea, and Loch Ewe,  
With cargoes of corn, steel,  
Newsprint and fish,  
Copper and cotton, molasses and wheat.

#### SC.11

Slow wartime convoy, 1940, Fall,  
Merchant transports, thirty-six in all,  
Bound for 'Derry, Ipswich, London and the Tyne,  
With pit props and lumber,  
Iron ore and grain,  
Paper pulp and phosphates, sugar and scrap.

#### HX.126

Springtime convoy, 1941,  
Thirty ships together on the North Atlantic run,  
Bound for Barry Roads, Manchester and the Clyde,  
Carrying benzene, phosphates,  
Gasoline and steel,  
Fuel oil, wheat, sugar and meat.

#### HX.175

Fast convoy of merchantmen, winter '42,  
Twenty-seven ships, merchant navy crew,  
Halifax to Iceland, Liverpool and Scapa Flow,  
Shipping petrol and paraffin,  
Avgas and mail,  
General cargo, passengers, lube oil and grain.

#### SC.72

Slow convoy of merchant ships, summer '42,  
Twenty vessels, six-knots, all that they can do,  
Sydney to the Mersey, Manchester and Hull,  
Cargoes of pig iron and nitrates,  
Grain and steel,  
Timber, sugar, manganese and mail.

#### RA.55

Convoy from Russia, March '43,  
Thirty merchant ships on the cold Barents Sea,  
Kola Inlet, Murmansk, Nordkapp to Loch Ewe,  
With magnetite, apatite, timber and stores,  
Pit props and potash, pulpwood, chrome ore,  
Arsenic and cotton, lumber, horsehair.

#### HX.242

Fast convoy eastbound, June of '43,  
Sixty-four ships, two thousand men at sea,  
New York to the Clyde, Cardiff and Loch Ewe,  
With petrol and sulphur,  
Alcohol and oil,  
Explosives, ammo, sugar and steel.

#### HX.297

Fast convoy ex Halifax, June '44,  
Bound for the Clyde, Belfast, and the Tyne,  
Ten dozen transports in zig-zag line,  
Shipping diesel oil and food,  
Aircraft and meat,  
Explosives and grain, lumber and lead.

#### YY.123

Fast winter convoy, 1944,  
Deep laden tankers, side by side,  
From Curacao, Aruba, bound for the Clyde,  
Carrying crude oil and gasoline,  
Furnace fuel and rum,  
Sugar and tin, potash and sand.

#### HX.339

Eastbound ex New York, winter '45,  
Seventy-nine transports laden to their marks,  
For Barry Dock, Newport, Antwerp and Cherbourg,  
With oats and explosives,  
Rations and steel,  
Boats and locomotives, ammo, food and fuel.

*Dedicated to the memory of Arnold  
Hague, with gratitude to the team  
responsible for the website:  
[www.convoyweb.org.uk](http://www.convoyweb.org.uk)*

# THE ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY IN OPERATION OVERLORD

## JUNE-AUGUST 1944

by Dr. Michael Whitby, Chief of the Naval History Team at the Directorate of History and Heritage, DND, and co-author of the Official History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War.

The Royal Canadian Navy provided 126 vessels and almost 10,000 sailors, about one third of its fighting strength to Operation Overlord, the invasion of Normandy. Quite apart from the boost this gave the Allied forces, Canadian naval leaders thought that participation in the most important operation of the war would enhance the Navy's credibility and increase its profile among the Canadian public. That is what happened. By contributing to almost every aspect of the invasion, winning a number of engagements and carrying out their assignments with skill and success, RCN ships contributed to the overall victory. As a result, the Overlord experience ranked as one of the most positive in the Navy's history.

### North Atlantic Experience

The main reason for this success was that the Navy had recovered from the quick growth that had hindered its performance earlier in the war. At the outset of hostilities in 1939, the RCN was a small, professional force quite capable of carrying out its coastal defense commitments, but increased responsibilities and rapid expansion stretched the service thin.

As the RCN became increasingly involved in the Battle of the Atlantic the great majority of officers and ratings not only had to learn how to fight this challenging technology-driven anti-submarine war but had to learn how to become sailors, and this on the north-west Atlantic, one of the harshest maritime climates in the world. Exacerbating this was the fact that there were

never enough ships and those there were lacked modern equipment. Not surprisingly, these shortfalls, and some questionable leadership resulted in poor performance.



*D-Day* by Canadian War Artist Thomas Wood, June 1944, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, CWM 19710261-4857

By June 1944 the situation had improved dramatically. Most ships had modern equipment and were of relatively new design or had modifications that enhanced their fighting efficiency. More importantly, Canadian sailors had acquired skill and experience to make effective use of their weapons. The best example of this lies in the critical position of commanding officer. The captains of the

RCN ships assigned to Overlord had, on average, 16 months command time; a significant amount which was backed up by the previous sea-time required to qualify for that position. Moreover, many junior officers also had plenty of sea time behind them, and although a high proportion of ratings were still new to the sea, they were led by veteran killicks (leading seamen), petty officers and chiefs. There was no conscious decision by Navy leaders to send the most-seasoned ships to Europe - those assigned to Overlord were just a reflection of a more experienced service - but the knowledge and skill they took with them paid dividends. From the hard-won experience flowed confidence, adaptability and a desire to get the job done.

### Allied Naval Advantages

A number of advantages that the Allied navies held over their German counterparts also contributed to the RCN's good showing. Throughout the war they had steadily built up a significant numerical superiority over the opposition. Signals intelligence consistently revealed enemy movements, allowing flag officers to place superior

forces in an effective intercept position. Control of the air restricted German operations to night where they were at a disadvantage due to the technological gap between them and the Allies. British and Canadian destroyers, for example, had far superior radar which usually enabled them to help manoeuvre through opposition. Finally, allied sailors had superior training and their ships were better maintained.

The advantages of the experience of the Canadians, were particularly significant in the small unit war the RCN fought during Overlord. The largest formations Canadian ships worked in were flotillas of eight vessels, and only on rare occasions did such units operate as a whole. The German formations they encountered were equally small. In such fighting, experience, strength and surprise, each of which Allied naval forces consistently had on their side, were key factors. A negative aspect of the small unit war was that, even if commanded by a Canadian officer, RCN units were under the higher direction of commanders from other nations, which meant that senior Canadian officers lost the opportunity to gain valuable experience in planning and conducting a major combined operation.

The RCN carried out a surprising number of roles throughout Overlord, some in which it had not previously been involved. Space does not permit an outline of operations in detail but a sense of the different contributions that the Canadian ships made, and the impact and experiences of a few key individuals can be given.

### Clearing the Way to the Beaches

On the night of the invasion, 10 minesweeping flotillas led the way across the channel, clearing and marking lanes for the assault groups that followed. One of these was the 31st Canadian Minesweeping flotilla consisting of 10 Bangor-class minesweepers (six other RCN Bangors served in British flotillas). Only one of the RCN minesweepers had been engaged in sweeping operations prior to Overlord and, upon their arrival in England during the spring, their senior officer recalls the British commanders “sucking their teeth wondering if these Canadians were really up to it.” However the Bangors had spent months at sea on local escort duties in Canadian waters, and quickly absorbed the required skills in a comprehensive training program.



*Bangor-class minesweeper HMCS Caraqueet. Initially constructed for the Royal Navy during the Second World War Caraqueet transferred to the Royal Canadian Navy in 1942. The ship served on both coasts of Canada, and took part in the Battle of the Atlantic as a convoy escort and English Channel for invasion duties. National Archives of Canada, PA-125863.*



*Canadian 262nd LCI flotilla awaiting departure from Southampton.*



*Assault landing craft leaving HMCS Prince Henry during a training exercise in May 1944*

The 31<sup>st</sup>'s assignment was to sweep Channel 3 into Omaha beach. Although minesweepers were expected to suffer 30 to 50 per cent losses - the final duty of one Canadian Bangor officer before casting off was to leave an up-to-date crew list in a green box at the end of the jetty - the 31<sup>st</sup>'s passage across the English Channel was unopposed. Despite this, their job was extremely challenging. Strong tidal currents made navigation sweeping problematic; radio aids such as Decca helped, but it was the skill of the flotilla senior officer, Commander A.H.G. Storrs RCNR, who had learned his seamanship in the pre-war merchant service, proved critical. Although tension ran high, the 31<sup>st</sup> completed its assignment without incident. This success was repeated throughout the minesweeping fleet and, despite the dire predictions only one Allied sweeper and a few other vessels were lost to mines on D-Day.

### Landing the Assault Troops

Canadian landing craft also faced a difficult challenge on D-Day, including having to penetrate the German beach defences to get their assault troops ashore. All told, the RCN provided two landing ships infantry (medium), HMCS *Prince David* and *Prince Henry*, each carrying eight small landing craft (assault) capable of transporting 40 soldiers, and 44 landing craft (infantry), or LCIs, that could each carry about 60 soldiers. Many of the landing craft personnel had participated in the combined operation in the Mediterranean but they were still staggered by the violence of the Normandy landings.

The experience of two LCIs can be taken as typical. As LCIs 298 and 121 of the RCN Flotilla 260th approached Juno Beach, the crews could clearly see rows of beach obstacles - mined iron or wood stakes dubbed 'Rommel's asparagus' by the Germans - stretch before them. Rather than carefully picking their way through the barrier, landing craft captains were under orders to breach it at top speed; even if damaged they would maintain enough momentum to reach the flat shallow beaches.



*HMCS Prince David off Bernières-sur-Mer, Juno Beach, 6 June 1944.*

LCI - 298 successfully pierced the defences, glancing off a couple of obstacles avoiding any mines; her 51 soldiers disembarked without any

casualties. LCI -121 was not so fortunate. Her second-in-command was washed overboard, and then the vessel struck a mined obstacle. Six soldiers were killed and three wounded, but speed carried her aground and the other soldiers disembarked into four feet of water. Such experi-

ences were repeated along the beaches. Of the 26 RCN LCIs that landed on D-Day, 12 were abandoned, too severely damaged to return to England. But, as their crews had been told, the survival of their vessels was not important; landing their troops was.

### Bombardment Support

Offshore, the destroyers HMCS *Algonquin* and *Sioux* were among the many warships providing bombardment support. The disaster at Dieppe had reinforced the value of naval gunfire, and an incident on D-Day involving *Algonquin* showed how effective it could be.

When soldiers of Le Regiment de la Chaudière attempting to move inland from Juno Beach were forced to ground by Germany self-propelled guns, an Army forward



*Lieutenant Commander Desmond Piers addresses the destroyer HMCS Algonquin's Ship's Company off France.*

observation officer radioed the enemy's coordinates to *Algonquin* four kilometres offshore. Within minutes, six accurate salvos from the destroyer's four 4.7-inch guns shattered the German formation allowing the Chaudières to resume their advance. One Army observer described the shoot as "an example of perfect naval support."

### After the Assault: Securing the Build-Up

"Invasion", according to one historian, "is not merely a matter of putting troops ashore on hostile beaches." In the days, weeks and months following the assault, RCN forces were among those carrying out some of the many tasks associated with a major, combined operation: defending the assault anchorage, securing the long seaward flanks and escorting vessels feeding the build-up of forces in Normandy. These operations have never received the amount of attention as the actual assault but they were equally important to the success of Overlord.

On the western flank, four powerful German destroyers based in Bay of Biscay ports posed the main surface threat to the beach head but eight ships of the 10th destroyer flotilla, including HMCS *Haida* and *Huron*, blocked the path when they attacked up-channel on the night of 8/9 June. This Allied formation had been specifically created to face this threat throughout the spring and had honed their night-fighting skills in many exercises and two successful actions. On this night signals intelligence and the Allied destroyers' superior radar placed them in an ideal intercept position, and in the long, confused

action that followed, one German destroyer was sunk by British ships, while *Haida* and *Huron* forced another aground and severely damaged the third. This victory, along with other much-publicized successes, lifted *Haida* to the status of Canada's most famous warship, and made her captain, Commander Harry DeWolf, the country's most celebrated naval officer.

### 29th MTB Flotilla

In the weeks following the invasion, the motor torpedo boats of the RCN 29th MTB flotilla patrolled the 15km distance between the eastern edge of the assault area and the German naval base at Le Havre. Each night three or

four of the small, fragile fast attack craft waited until mother ships vectored them onto German surface forces attempting either to attack the assault area or transport supplies into Le Havre. Typically, short, sharp engagements followed, with the Germans turning back to safety once they realized Allied forces were in place. The 29th carried out this duty through August and, as the memoirs of the flotilla commander, Lieutenant Commander Anthony Law, RCNVR, indicate, the grueling operation took its toll.

*"The officers and men were beginning to show the strain caused by months of these nerve wracking operations, and this combined with irregular meals was responsible for many of us losing weight. The 29th was battle-weary, and we were beginning to feel that we could not last much longer under the severe conditions: mines going off, shore batteries pounding on us; and dive bombers, like vicious bats, roaring out of the night and putting the fear of God into us...the*



*Canadian War Artist Oroville Fisher landed on Juno Beach with the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division on 6 June 1944. Strapped to his arm was his water proof sketch pad and charcoal pencil enabling him to capture the chaos and bloodshed of battle and destruction unfolding before him.*



*Windy Day in the British Assault Area by Cdr Anthony Law, 29th Flotilla Motor Torpedo Boats approaching HMS Scylla - RN's Coastal Force Command and Control ship - to gather intelligence and plan the next operations .*

*personnel of the 29th were falling victim to horrible, haunting fears, and the boats, whose arduous task of defending the anchorage had almost burned them out, were badly in need of repair."*

## 65th MTB Flotilla

The experience of RCN 65th MTB Flotilla was quite different. They operated out of the Plymouth area on the western flank, either patrolling the Allied convoy routes or conducting sweeps against German shipping moving along the coast of northern Brittany. Although they achieved a number of successes and sank several coastal vessels, action was generally sparse and the commander attempted to get them transferred to the far busier Eastern flank where they could fight alongside the 29th Flotilla. Unhappily, other flotillas went and the 65th remained in the west. Although they were disappointed not to go, their operations throughout the summer were important. Along with the 10th Destroyer Flotilla and other units, they implemented a close blockade of Brittany ports that virtually choked off all enemy movements. Consequently, when General George Patton's Third US Army swept across Brittany in August 1944, the beleaguered Germans could not even escape by sea.

## Inshore Anti-Submarine Warfare

During the invasion campaign Canadian anti-submarine forces had to adjust to inshore anti-submarine warfare completely different war from what they had experienced on the North Atlantic. After the invasion the Germans began deploying snorkel-equipped U-boats that could stay submerged for days at a time. This effectively removed maritime patrol aircraft from the anti-submarine war and the onus for hunting U-boats fell to escort groups. They had their own set of problems as the powerful tidal currents and severe temperature gradients of the English Channel made for notoriously poor sonar conditions. U-boat commanders soon learned to turn this to their advantage, lying in wait on the bottom or drifting with the currents.

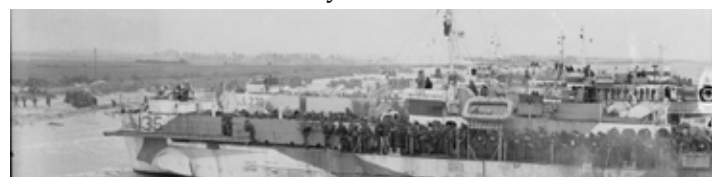
In his classic memoir *50 North*, Lieutenant Commander Alan Easton, RCNR, captain of the destroyer HMCS *Saskatchewan*, described well the frustration of scouring the Channel for a U-boat that had fired a number of torpedoes at his ship: *"where was the enemy who was so persistently endeavoring to sink us? ... Here was a submarine almost below us, and here were we, a modern anti-submarine vessel, quite unable to find it."*

EG-11, one of four RCN escort groups involved in Overlord, proved particularly adept at solving the riddle of inshore anti-submarine warfare. Its leader, Commander J.D. (Chummy) Prentice, RCN, a cagey veteran of the Atlantic convoy battles, realized that patience and tenacity were the key. According to an officer who served under him, *"Chummy had one rule - persist! Attack anything that gives you an echo, however bad; keep attacking it as long as you have it; if you lose it don't go away; search and search and search."* In early July, ships under Prentice's direction destroyed U-678 in a relentless 60-hour hunt that featured many slow, deliberate depth charge attacks. Such prolonged engagements became the norm in the Channel, and U-678 was one of five submarines that the RCN ships destroyed, or shared in the destruction of, during the invasion campaign.

## A Significant Role

The only major warship losses suffered by the RCN throughout the summer were two corvettes. Nineteen Canadian vessels of this type participated in Overlord and they performed valuable duty, escorting literally hundreds of convoys across the Channel to Normandy. Although one corvette shot down a German bomber and another beat off an attack by E-boats, for the most part they were on the periphery of events. This changed in August. On the 8th HMCS *Regina* was torpedoed while escorting a convoy southwest of the Bristol Channel and 13 days later a U-boat sank HMCS *Alberni* south of Portsmouth. Both ships went down within a minute, taking 47 sailors, most from their engine room complements, with them.

The great achievement of the Royal Canadian Navy during the Second World War was its contribution to the Battle of the Atlantic. Yet, that feat should not push the RCN's role in the invasion of Europe too far into the shadows. Throughout the summer of 1944, Canadian sailors, meeting many new challenges, fulfilled a wide range of responsibilities with competence and professionalism. Their contribution to the success of the invasion was not as critical as it was to the Battle of the Atlantic, but it was significant and thus deserves a prominent place in Canadian naval history.



Canadian LCI(L)s going ashore on D-Day. Photographer: Gilbert Alexander Milne



Commander "Chummy" Prentice, PA151743



HMCS Hamilton sailors, nd

### New Members

Welcome Aboard to our latest members and thank you for becoming part of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust.

### Life Members

Kevin Baker, Halifax, NS  
 Alexander Cochrane, Waverley, NS  
 Brian Jones, Beaverbank, NS.  
 Leo McTaggart, Dartmouth, NS  
 Rolfe Monteith, Plymouth, UK

### Annual Members

Scott Brousseau, Halifax, NS  
 Donald Ellis, Dartmouth, NS  
 Zane Fanning, Lower Coverdale, NB  
 Art Forward, Eastern Passage, NS  
 Brad Forward, Elmsdale, NS  
 Charles Goldberg, Middle Sackville, NS  
 Gregory Jenner, Dartmouth, NS  
 Kimberley Jenner, Dartmouth, NS  
 C. Douglas Maginley, Mahone Bay, NS  
 Michael McCluskey, Dartmouth, NS  
 Glen Patrick Michiel, Prince George, BC  
 Jim Muckle, Chester Basin, NS  
 Nancy Timbrell-Muckle, Chester Basin, NS  
 Derrick Shillington, Hammonds Plains, NS



HMCS Regina



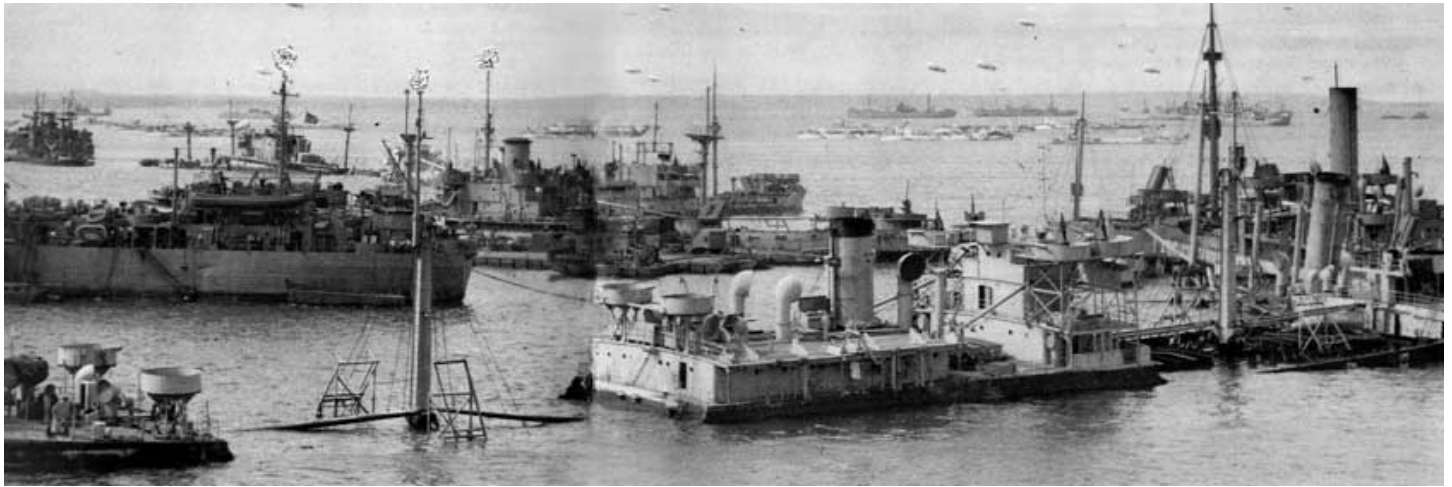
HMCS Alberni



WRCNS signallers, nd

## HMCS LOUISBURG'S FIRST LIEUTENANT REMEMBERS D-DAY

*Adapted from the memoirs of his late father and Life Trustee LCdr Murray Knowles RCNR ret'd  
by his son Stephen*



**31 May-2 June, 1944**

*Arromanches Gooseberry Blockships*

*Louisburg* (K401) sailed out of Oban with a convoy of 60 block-ships heading south through the Irish Sea. Daily signals on known enemy submarine dispositions on our course were received, a cause for serious concern among the escorts as we watched and herded our flock of ships day and night, through fog and darkness, not a light to be seen, just dark awesome black hulls. We sometimes wondered what the officers and seamen on those ships were thinking—so brave in their duty.

**3-4 June, 1944**

The escorts consisted of the corvettes *Louisburg*, *Mayflower*, *Lindsay*, *Trentonian*, *Alberni* and *Regina*. The latter three were eventually sunk by torpedo several months after "D" Day. A signal in code, of course, to the entire invasion fleet of some 4,000 allied warships was finally received. The "Invasion would commence on June 5th". This was now June 3rd and into June 4th, we were still progressing slowly with our convoy when a signal from SHAEF "Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force" ordered a 24-hour delay because weather in the English Channel was unsatisfactory for the landing of thousands of soldiers. So therefore June 6th, one day later, was "D" Day.

**4-5 June, 1944**

During the night of June 4th, suddenly and silently from our bridge we watched in great admiration and respect while 6 battleships, 7 cruisers, 10 destroyers, many destroyer escorts

and the 14th Canadian Minesweeping Flotilla passed our convoy, truly a wonderful sight to behold. The 24-hour delay meant a further convoy speed reduction to 4 knots, making it terribly difficult for some of the ships to steer a steady course and maintain proper station keeping.

**6-7 June, 1944**

Early on June 6th "D" Day we were anchored with our convoy of 60 block-ships in Poole Bay, on the south coast of England. Some hours earlier we suddenly began observing large formations of allied planes, bombers, and fighters crossing overhead - probably 2,000 or more. All day we stood in amazement and watched the planes heading across the English Channel for the Normandy Coast. Finally at 2200 a signal from Admiralty ordered the convoy to weigh anchor and proceed. Needless to say tension all over and throughout our ships was high. Many thoughts ran through the minds of the entire ship's company wondering how many would survive or even if our ship would get through the expected invasions, battles and anticipated attacks by the enemy. We cautiously proceeded, strictly maintaining the designated course which took us through the mine-swept channels marked by low-to-the-sea dim blue bobbing floating lights dropped by the Canadian Navy minesweepers some hours ahead of our convoy.

I believe our convoy speed was 6 or 7 knots as we sailed on through the night, hour by hour coming closer to the Normandy Coast. One must

remember that since before dawn hundreds of allied infantry soldiers, marines, commandos, beach-masters, etc., had already by this time gotten ashore under a terrible onslaught of machine gun fire, surmounting miles of beach mines and obstacles. This action of course, cost hundreds of lives and many casualties as brave men tried to scale the walls of these huge cliffs, all heavily fortified. Gunfire, tracers and bombs could be heard and the sky lit up like northern lights, all of course an awesome sight.

All the while on the bridge, very little: only essential orders were spoken by the Captain and myself, the navigator, officer of the watch, signalman, and lookouts. The ship had been closed up to Action Stations many hours previous.

As we approached the enemy shore we could see hundreds of ships, mostly allied warships close inshore firing thousands of rounds of ammunition trying to protect our shore troops and defending landing ships and craft which were not heavily armed. In the distance perhaps another corvette or destroyer would be attacking with depth charges possible enemy submarines. However, being busy and determined to get our 60 block-ships through helped keep our minds occupied so we had scarcely time to notice what was happening in other areas as we crossed the Channel.

Soon we were about one mile from the French Coast and the Allied - established beach head at Arromanches, our final destination. As the dawn of day had just broken - for miles we could see the mind-boggling array of perhaps 4000 Allied ships, some at anchor, some manoeuvring with difficulty, signal lamps flashing from bridges and of course the heavy continuous thunder of 16-, 15-, 14-, 12-, 8-, and 6-inch guns firing from allied battleships, monitors, and cruisers etc., truly a display and sight beyond one's mind. We were now close into the position, a few hundred yards from the beach with our 60- block ships. The Captain of each ship precisely positioned their ships in line-ahead, dropped fore and aft anchors at what seemed almost a simultaneous signal. Engineers in the engine rooms opened specially-designed and installed valves and sea cocks which would ensure that all hulls (ships) would settle quickly on the ocean floor thus creating a formidable sea wall. This would substantially break the heavy sea swells and rough seas, crashing and creating havoc on the beaches while

the endless flow of landing craft and troops continued.

As we did not anchor, we were to lay off about a half mile or so while all block ships were "sunk" as planned. We watched closely with binoculars as small rescue craft moved quickly in and around the sunken ships taking off the captains and officers and entire crew of naval and merchant seamen and transporting them to awaiting larger transports for the return journey across the channel to Portsmouth and Plymouth. These valiant sailors who were so highly expendable carried out their tasks flawlessly and miraculously without loss of life. We remember at the time that no doubt these brave merchant seamen would soon be manning other merchant ships sailing in convoys all over the submarine-infested oceans.

The huge WWI - vintage French battleship *Courbet*, one among the 60 block ships, while sinking as planned, simply broke in two parts about amidships-quite an interesting scene as we looked at the huge open side.

## 8 June, 1944

Our first of many Channel crossings to come successfully completed, we shaped our course for Portsmouth England, passing within a few hundred yards of a large hospital ship displaying a huge RED CROSS on its sides. It was obvious she had been mined or struck mines and had settled her stern on the ocean floor close to shore and her bow abnormally rising out of the water. All her decks, bridge and superstructure appeared intact. Many of the ship's crew could be seen to be busy on the various areas and decks.

During the night our radar reported bearings of many ships passing enroute to Normandy-probably LCIs, LCTs, LSTs, and destroyers, frigates and corvettes escorting convoys and as for ourselves the sea was fair probably 4 to 5' seas and a light swell.

*Louisburg* entered Portsmouth Harbour at noon, working our way through many anchored merchant ships and escort vessels of all types: a sight to behold as they stood by awaiting the signal to head for the Normandy Coast. Finally we dropped anchor in a position which seemed far too close to other ships.

## D-DAY 75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY POSTER FEATURES CAPTAIN (N) HAROLD TILLEY



Second World War veteran Captain (N) Harold (Hal) Richard Tilley's service to Canada began at the age of 17 and continued until his death in 2013.

After graduation from Lakefield College School in Ontario in 1941, he joined the Royal Canadian Navy and was one of the last groups of Canadians that was trained during the war at the Royal Navy College Dartmouth, England.

Upon completion of shore training at the Royal Navy College, Midshipman Tilley proceeded to sea training in the battleship HMS *Anson*, followed by training in the hunt-class destroyer HMS *Melbreak*. As he noted his time in *Anson* and *Melbreak* may have lacked excitement, but that was about to change with the Allies plans for Operation Overlord.

On June 6, 1944, Sub Lieutenant Tilley was one of the 10,000 Canadian sailors who risked their lives as a part of Operation Overlord – more commonly known as D-Day. He had volunteered as a landing craft navigation officer for LCI (L) 263 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian (262<sup>nd</sup> RN) Flotilla but his unit's landing on Juno Beach, Normandy did not go as planned.

What was meant to be a quick drop off of troops and a return run back to England, ended up being a week on Juno Beach. His unit got two miles offshore before realizing the hull had sustained damages and the landing craft was slowly sinking... so they made the decision to turn back to the beach. While avoiding mines, booby traps and bombs from German aircraft, the crew were kept busy on the beach doing ship repairs, acting

as a prisoner of war camp and serving as a temporary injury treatment centre.

Capt (N) Tilley's craft was one of the few vessels that carried an official photographer and commented, when referring to the photos of D-Day on display in the War Museum in Ottawa, "That's exactly how it looked. That was my D-Day."

In a letter to his parents, Capt (N) Tilley noted that the many German pillboxes along the beach were booby-trapped, and to avoid becoming a 'booby,' he had to be very careful. This letter, along with several more of his D-Day artifacts, can be found at the Naval Museum of Halifax.

The war, including serving in HMCS *Huron* on the Murmansk Run, was the beginning of Capt (N) Tilley's 39 years of service in the RCN. Following hostilities he served in HMC Ship *Nootka* during the Korean War, was commanding officer of HMC Ships *Jonquiere* and *Saguenay* and the Seventh Escort Squadron, and Base Commander of CFB Cornwallis. Following retirement from the Navy in 1980 he continued his commitment to community service at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Ottawa and as an active member of the Naval Association of Canada.

The Veterans Affairs Canada statement notes, in part: "In honor of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy, Capt (N) Harold Tilley is featured on the official Veterans Affairs Canada poster that highlights this important moment in our history."

*"From the day he  
was born to the  
day he died he was  
a naval officer."*

*LCdr (ret'd)  
Richard Tilley (son)*

## WARTIME CONVOYS, CONVOYS AND SHIPS STATISTICS

*edited by Len Canfield*

Commander Fraser McKee (ret'd), a veteran of the Second World War and untiring chronicler of matters naval, has compiled a list of statistics concerning wartime convoys, ships and related Battle of the Atlantic facts.

Utilizing a range of British, American, German and Canadian sources, Fraser notes: "The Battle of the Atlantic lasted for 2,072 days, 69 months, from the sinking of the liner *Athenia*, Sept 3, 1939 in the Western Approaches (off Ireland), to the loss of the Canadian merchant ship *Avondale Park*, May 7, 1945, in the Firth of Forth."

Included among the approximately 50,000 members of the Allied merchant services who lost their lives, 22,490 were British; 6,093 Indian, 5,662 American; 4,795 Norwegian; 2,000 Greek, 4,693 from The Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark, and 1,437 Canadian. In addition, about 4,000 DEMS (Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships) and Royal Artillery Maritime Regiment gunners were lost. The main figure is low because usually tallies don't necessarily include small fishing boats sunk by enemy gunfire.

*Other stats of note:*

- Britain and the Commonwealth had about 6,700 vessels at the outbreak of hostilities
- In the opening four months of the war four ships were sunk by U-boats when in convoy, against 102 unescorted "independents" sunk
- 89.3 per cent of all Allied and neutral merchant shipping losses occurred in the Atlantic theatre; of all ship losses world-wide, 64.5 per cent were due to U-boats
- While the ratio of losses of ships in convoy to independents (not in convoy) varied widely with time, place and circumstance, typically it was at least about 10 to 1; a "straggler" was a ship that dropped back or wandered away from the convoy; a "romper" was one that elected to steam faster than convoy speed and moved away ahead
- Convoy and ship speed was a factor in losses; if speed dropped below 13 knots the loss rate rose sharply; the designation SC indicated slow eastbound convoy and HX fast eastbound convoy
- Halifax to Liverpool, England transit was 2,485 nautical miles direct (Great Circle Route); with zig-zag, diversions, slowed by gales, etc the distance was approximately 3,300 miles; a slow convoy could take up to 21 days
- In the North Atlantic area (excluding convoys to Gibraltar and other ports south) there were 381 HX eastbound convoys, with 17,744 ships of which 206 were lost while in convoy; the 177 SC eastbound convoys included 6,806 ships of which 211 ships were lost; of the 934 OA, OB and ON westbound convoys that included 30,809 ships, 429 ships were lost
- The "worst" convoy of the trans-North Atlantic passage was SC-7 which sailed from Sydney, NS on Oct 5, 1940 and lost 15 of 34 ships, with 94 seamen killed; the "worst" HX convoy was HX-229 in March 1943, with 12 of 38 ships lost and 249 seamen perished. Of the total 1,492 convoys, 131 had one or more ships sunk, thus 91 per cent of convoys crossed with no losses, although many ships were damaged but survived.
- 23 per cent of all supplies to Russia went via the Murmansk convoys; there were 98 convoys or independent ship movements to and from Russia; the ship loss rate was 6.3 per cent
- Regarding casualties, if a ship was sunk there was a 32 per cent chance of crew loss, of which 6 per cent was death after reaching a lifeboat or raft. For the RCN, if a warship was sunk, the chance of loss was 55 per cent
- Weapons success rate in sinking a U-boat (between July, 1943 and May, 1945) included: depth charges 5.7 percent; hedgehog 19.8 per cent and squid: 36.2 per cent (late in war)
- By war's end Germany had built 1,162 U-boats, of which 784 had been destroyed (about 820 U-boats went on actual operations); one source indicates 28, 728 crew members "died in their boats"



## COLLATERAL DAMAGE: THE SINKING OF THE NS FISHING VESSEL LUCILLE M

by Carl Anderson

What were the chances that the men who fished the waters of the Atlantic would become casualties in the world wars of the 20th century? They were afforded protection by the 1907 Hague Convention XI, which stated that vessels "used exclusively for fishing along the coast or small boats employed in local trade are exempt from capture, as well as their appliances, rigging, tackle, and cargo." That exemption was forfeited, however, "as soon as they take any part whatever in hostilities." Hague XI was observed capriciously, or ignored, in both world wars, by both sides, resulting in many civilian casualties and large material losses.

In early January 1942 the 4,500 ton British merchant vessel *Silveray* sailed for America with 2,200 tons of general cargo for New York via Halifax. She made her North Atlantic crossing in convoy escorted by Royal Navy and US Navy and Coast Guard ships. Following a call at Halifax, *Silveray* was sailing 35 nautical miles (n.m.) off the coast of Nova Scotia proceeding to New York when she was attacked by the German submarine U-751. *Silveray* was torpedoed and sank at 0430 on 4 February approximately 70 n.m. SSW of Halifax. Eight of her crew of 49 died in the attack. Her Captain and 31 crew were rescued by the USCG vessel USS *Campbell* and taken to Argentia, Newfoundland. Six other crew were rescued by the Nova Scotia fishing schooner *Lucille M* and taken to Lockeport, NS.

The 1,950 ton Norwegian merchant vessel *Torungen* was trading in the West Indies when Germany invaded Norway on 9 April 1940. She did not return to occupied Norway, and in early 1942 was sailing between Canadian and east coast U.S. ports. *Torungen* departed Halifax unescorted on 21 February 1942 for Charleston SC, carrying a cargo of paper and cellulose. At 0245 the next morning when she was 41 n.m. SSE of Halifax *Torungen* was torpedoed by U-96 and shelled until she sank. Her Captain and 18 crew took to their lifeboats and began rowing towards land. None were seen again until March 2<sup>nd</sup> off Lockeport NS when the *Lucille M* came upon a swamped lifeboat containing the body of *Torungen's* first engineer.

Surely the fishermen of the *Lucille M* knew by now that they were trying to earn their living

in a war zone. How did each of them calculate the risk of working on the fishing banks of Nova Scotia in 1942? *Silveray* and *Torungen* were "fair game" in Germany's submarine war against the Allies, but what about the *Lucille M*? She took no part in the war, but did the Hague Convention XI really offer her any protection?

The schooner *Lucille M* was built at Meteghan NS in 1918. She was 75 feet long, 17.5 feet in breadth, 9 feet deep, and had a gross tonnage of 54 tons (5400 cu ft cargo capacity). She had a small engine and in 1942 fished for swordfish by harpooning.

*Lucille M* departed her home port of Lockeport NS on the night of 24 July 1942. Around midnight she hove to roughly 80 n.m. south of Cape Sable NS to await dawn before starting to fish on Georges Bank. Not far away lay the German submarine U-89 (Dietrich Lohmann, Capt.), charging her batteries on the surface. The *Lucille M's* crew heard U-89's engines but thought them to be those of a friendly patrol vessel.

When Lohman discovered the *Lucille M* he opened fire on her without warning at a range of about 100 yards. Shells from U-89's 8.8 cm (3.5") deck gun first hit *Lucille M's* main sail and brought down her mast top. The eleven men of the fishing vessel immediately launched two dories and abandoned ship. Four of the men were wounded by flying shrapnel, but no one was killed. Over the next hour, Lohman



*Cape Sable Fog Alarm and Lighthouse*

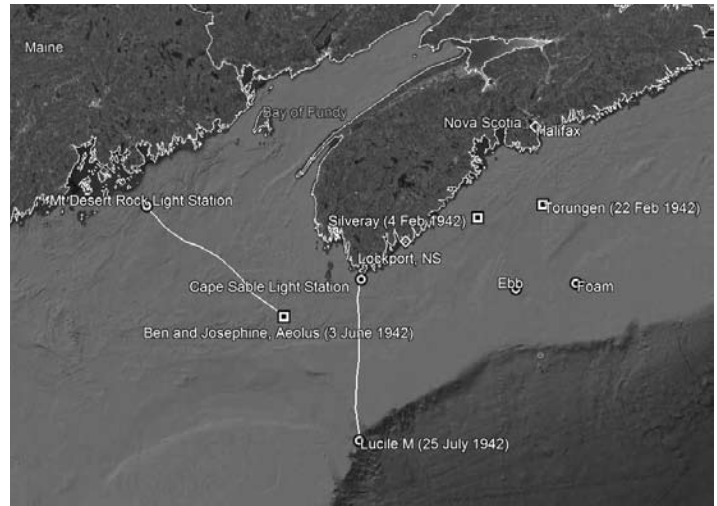
fired approximately 20 shells into the Lucille M's hull and sprayed her with machinegun fire. The men in the dories could hear the German sailors working the breech of their gun and heard the spent shell casings clattering on the deck. One sailor was reported to exclaim in English that "The damn thing won't sink." Lucille M's survivors didn't stay around to see her go down, but began rowing to the north.

In the afternoon of the next day, Sunday 26 July, two young boys at the Cape Sable Light Station happened to spot tiny specks on the horizon to the south. The boys were Gerald Smith, age 13, (who would in 2003 become my father-in-law) and his brother, Sydney, 11. Their father, Benjamin Smith, was Head Light keeper at the station, which stands at the south western-most point of Nova Scotia. The specks gradually became identifiable as two boats being rowed toward the lighthouse. They were the Lucille M's survivors. When the boats approached the beach west of the light, Benjamin Smith shoved a pistol in his hip pocket and headed for them on foot, followed by Gerald and Sydney. The boys were sent back, as Gerald once recalled, with a stern "You get back in the house NOW!"

Benjamin met the boats and brought the men to the house where they were fed. Gerald and Sydney's mother, Lottie Smith, a trained nurse, administered first aid. The Lucille M's captain said that after rowing about 24 hours they had heard the fog whistle of the Seal Island light house, which lies 17 n.m. due west of Cape Sable. Another 12 hours or more of rowing brought them to Cape Sable Lighthouse, 80 n.m. from the Lucille M's last position. They reported having heard the Cape Light Station's powerful fog horn some 40 n.m. out at sea.

All eleven of the Lucille M's men survived their ordeal. In January 1944 the boat's captain, Percy Richardson of Shelburne NS, was awarded a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE). The citation read "For outstanding service when his fishing schooner, the Lucille M, was sunk by an enemy submarine. This seaman collected his crew in the dories, gave first aid to the wounded, and then gave an example of courage and leadership which enabled them to proceed 97 [statute] miles to land."

In the years following the Lucille M's loss, rumour and speculation called into question the accuracy of official accounts. Some doubted the



*Lucille M draft chart*

men could have rowed more than 80 n.m. in the 36 or so hours between taking to the boats and landing at Cape Sable. Others speculated that the Lucille M had been on some sort of "secret mission" for the Navy, reporting the positions of enemy submarines. By the summer of 1942 both the British and Americans had armed many of their merchant vessels, manning them with gunners and signalmen. Radiotelephone equipment was installed in many U.S. fishing vessels. For them, the 1907 Hague Convention XI offered no protection – they were considered to be ships of war. The schooner Lucille M was neither armed nor fitted with communications gear, but could easily have been taken to be such a ship, especially at night, unlit, and not under way, as she was on 25 July 1942. Indeed, four U.S. fishing boats were sunk along the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia in the first seven months of 1942: Foam (U-432, 17 May), Ben and Josephine (U-432, 2 June), Aeolus (U-432, 2 June), and Ebb (U-754, 28 July). Six men died and eleven were wounded in those attacks. The Lucille M (U-89, 25 July) had the misfortune of being snared in the same net.

*Suggested reading:*

Charles Dana Gibson. *Merchantman? Or Ship of War*. Camden, Maine: Ensign Press, 1986.

Charles Dana Gibson. *Victim or Participant? Allied Fishing Fleets and U-boat Attacks in World Wars I and II*. *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord*, Vol. I, No. 4 (October 1991).

# RECOLLECTIONS OF A YOUNG CORVETTE CAPTAIN

by RJ Pickford (*Reginald John but always was called Jack*) and  
extracted from *Salty Dips*, Vol. 2 by Capt(N) ret'd John Pickford



Lt RCN/RCNVR Jack Pickford  
Commanding Officer

HMCS *Rimouski* (02 Dec 1942 – 09 Sep. 1944)

*Jack Pickford, my father, was born in Montreal in 1920. He joined the Montreal Division of the RCNVR in 1936 and was sent overseas, in April 1940, to HMS King Alfred for further training. This was interrupted when he was seconded to HMS Broke and led an RN demolition party ashore blowing up cranes and gantries in the Brest naval dockyard as the Germans approached the outskirts of the city. He was an Acting Temporary Sub-Lieutenant at the time! Later on, as the Executive Officer, he was sunk in HMFS Listrac (His Majesty's French Ship – a French prize manned by Canadian, Free French and English sailors) in the English Channel by German E-boats while conducting channel sweeps. After that and prior to joining Rimouski in December 1942, he spent time in HMS Stoke City conducting northern patrols between the Faroes Islands and Iceland and in HMCS The Pas escorting convoys on the Triangle Run and between St. John's and Londonderry.*

*He was awarded Mention-in Dispatches and the French Legion of Honour for his wartime service. Post war, he held several sea (HMCS Uganda and*

*Ontario) and shore appointments in Halifax, Ottawa and Victoria. He was the first commanding officer of HMCS Kootenay, commander of the Second Canadian Destroyer Squadron and later of the Canadian Atlantic Fleet. He held positions in Canadian Forces Headquarters Ottawa, the Royal Naval College in Greenwich, UK and as the Canadian Naval Attaché in Washington, DC. He concluded his career as Commander Maritime Forces Pacific and retired in 1975. He passed away in Ottawa in 2012.*

“We left Londonderry by ourselves one day and proceeded to Portsmouth - feeling very much alone and lonely. We were leaving behind familiar things in facing the unknown; we knew the north Atlantic and always had had a Group Commander to take us to take care of us. Now we were on our own, not knowing what to expect. On the other hand, I clearly remember the feeling of excitement and anticipation throughout the ship. This, we felt, was to be the big adventure! Captain (D), Portsmouth, became our operational authority and we were employed for some time escorting convoys in the Channel. But still no word or orders about “Neptune”. Finally, one day while at anchor at Spithead and at immediate notice for steam, we were ordered to proceed immediately to Oban on the west coast of Scotland. As the anchor was being weighed, a boat was seen coming our way at high speed with Wren officer in the sternsheets waving her hat frantically. The boat came alongside and third officer Beryl Carter, Captain D's Confidential Book Officer, handed over a sealed bag of books, which they had almost forgotten to give us. At last, these were the orders for the invasion of France!

The First Lieutenant, Navigating Officer, Signals officer and I had a lot of reading to do in a hurry. The orders were remarkably concise but were necessarily voluminous because so much had to be covered. I thought they were brilliant and left no questions unanswered or situations uncovered. Luckily, we had a couple of days in Oban, which gave us time to digest as much as necessary and to mark up the charts, etc., before the great adventure began. I was to permit no one to go ashore after that bag was opened. I had to go ashore once, to attend the forthcoming convoy conference, but was glad to get back on board. I felt uncomfortable ashore, knowing all the details of the operation.



*Mulberry Harbour, Omaha Beach. Row of Blockships in place, 15 June, 1964.*

I have read since that we sailed from Oban on the 31 May and were amongst the first ships to set the complex operation in motion. We escorted the original block ships, HMS *Centurion* and a Dutch cruiser amongst them, which were destined to be scuttled to form the first breakwater off Omaha beach - the westernmost beach, where US forces landed.

One lovely summer evening as we were steaming sedately down the Irish Sea, we were passed at some speed by the bombardment force of battleships and cruisers. A more awesome or splendid site I have never seen nor will it ever be seen again. We felt awfully insignificant, but a minute later felt like kings again when one of those giants took the trouble to send "Good luck" by light.

You all know that the invasion was postponed 24 hours due to weather, but even the postponement was well organized. Our orders designated an anchorage for us in that eventuality - I think Lyme Bay. So we anchored there for 24 hours and then picked up the original timetable one day later.

The scene in the channel the next morning was wondrous to behold and is far beyond my powers to describe. As far as the eye could see were hundreds of ships of all descriptions heading towards France. Aircraft in the hundreds, all with their new recognition black-and-white stripes, heading in the same direction. It was a display of stupendous power and a tribute to brilliant planning.

My only problem getting to Omaha beach was navigational. It was essential to find the dimly-

lit buoys marking the swept channels through the minefields off the French coast. I must admit that *Centurion* did most of the navigating and we arrived at the right place at the right time.

Then *Rimouski* went back to Sheerness and worked from there for the next two or three months. Our main job, working with one RN corvette, was escorting "Mulberry" blockships under tow from the Thames Estuary to the beaches. We made several of these trips and it was exacting, tiring, monotonous work. No E-boat or direct air attacks were encountered and, once again, our constant concern was finding the swept channels through the minefields in the face of strong currents, sometimes with high winds and poor visibility, with our slow, cumbersome tows. I remember going ashore on leave only once in the two or three-month period, and then only for a couple of hours one afternoon.

On one occasion, steaming alone somewhere off the south coast of England, I stumbled into a newly-laid British minefield which, somehow, was not on our charts. A radar station ashore immediately gave me a call and vectored me out of danger. My corvette was being vectored, just like an aircraft! Our main concern still was minefields and precise navigation around them to get where we were going.

It all came to an end for us sometime in August, 1944, when we left the Channel and proceeded to Londonderry to join the escort of a westbound convoy. We went right on to Halifax and *Rimouski* went into refit. I left her on the 9th of September".



*HMCS Rimouski*

# BRITAIN'S MIRACLE HARBOUR

by Christopher Hewitt

On the afternoon of D-Day, June 6, 1944, a bizarre convoy set off from various locations along the south coast of Britain: 60 decrepit ships sailed under their own power while tugs hauled massive floating concrete caissons, 200 foot long steel breakwaters, steel pier heads and 480 foot long sections of floating roadway. The whole ensemble proceeded slowly out into the English Channel on its way to the Normandy coast of France where, over the next few days, the pieces were positioned to form two enormous artificial harbours, each capable of handling 7,500 tons of stores per day. These were the Mulberry harbours, to some the essential ingredient that ensured victory in Normandy, to others a great white elephant that ate scarce resources which would have been better used elsewhere. However, regardless of which view you hold, the engineering achievement was magnificent. Despite working under war time conditions of limited manpower and sometimes even under enemy fire, two harbours, each the size of the port of Dover, were created on hitherto open beaches and were operational in a mere seven days and handling over 2,000 tons of cargo each day after only ten days!

## Background

The story of the harbours began in the autumn of 1941 when a branch of the British War Office named Transportation was tasked with constructing two military ports in Scotland where much-needed supplies from the Canada and other Allies could be landed. However by early 1942 Transportation was also engaged with investigating the problems of sustaining the 'second front' for it was realised that in the early days of any amphibious invasion logistical issues would likely dominate - and any disruption to the flow of fuel, munitions or re-enforcements could spell disaster.

The catastrophic failure of the Dieppe raid emphasised the impracticality of making a frontal assault against a defended port and the planners stepped up their efforts to design a means of efficiently landing stores on sandy beaches. This work now included the provision of pre-fabricated breakwaters to provide shelter for the beaches.

As the Allies developed their plans for the invasion of France they eventually settled on

Normandy as the location for the initial assault. The beaches in the Calvados region were wide with a low gradient while the relative remoteness and absence of any major port resulted in the defences, although still substantial, being less formidable than elsewhere.

## What did the harbours consist of?

The design of the harbours contained four main elements; blockships, floating breakwaters, concrete breakwaters and floating roadways/pierheads. To limit the strain on any individual service the responsibility for the different components was divided with the navy having responsibility to provide the blockships (called Corncobs) and floating breakwaters (called Bombardons) while the army was responsible for providing the large concrete caissons (called Phoenix) and the pierheads and floating roadways (collectively called Whale).

## Blockships (Corncobs)

Blockships, codenamed Corncobs by the planners, were to provide instant breakwaters (called Gooseberries) not only at the sites chosen for the Mulberry harbours but also at the other three invasion beaches. Using blockships offered several advantages to the planners. Firstly, being self propelled they would not require the use of tugs which were in very short supply. Also, if the ships were scuttled so that their superstructure remained dry at all states of the tide, they would provide accommodation for the crews of the small vessels that they were designed to shelter.



*The first block ship, SS ALYNBANK, just after sinking, Imperial War Museum (A 24167)*

## Floating Breakwaters (Bombardons)

Because of the high tidal range found in Normandy it was considered impractical to build breakwaters that were sufficiently tall to allow very deep draught vessels to anchor in all states of the tide. Consequently the idea of using floating breakwaters was raised. The bombardons required careful anchoring and heavy steel anchors were used, attached to the bombardons with massive steel chains. To add flexibility, each bombardon was connected to its neighbour by large manila springs (ropes).



*Mulberry Harbour Installation - Bombardon, Arromanches, June, 1944*

## Concrete Caissons (Phoenix)

Most stores were to be transported to France in deep-draught Liberty-type ships. When loaded these ships drew about 26 feet and the harbour had to allow them to unload in sheltered water at all states of the tide. The rise and fall of the tide was up to 23 feet and this meant that to provide sheltered water any breakwater needed to be at least 60 feet high, allowing for adequate free-board at high water.

Breakwaters were tested with each being checked for effectiveness against waves and its ability to be towed. In the end the final design was for a rectangular concrete caisson as seen below.



## Floating Roadways and Pierheads (Whale)

The final design had pierheads made from spud pontoons – a 150 foot long steel pontoon supported by four legs, or spuds, one at each corner. The legs stuck into the seafloor and held the pontoon firmly in place while allowing the pontoon to be raised or lowered to keep it in synch with the tide. Simple concrete pontoons connected successive pierheads creating a longer quay wall while connecting the pierheads to the shore were long ribbons of floating roadway. These were made up of 80 foot steel bridging spans supported on steel or concrete floats known as “beetles.” Steel was the preferred material but shortages meant that where they would always be floating many of the beetles were made of concrete.

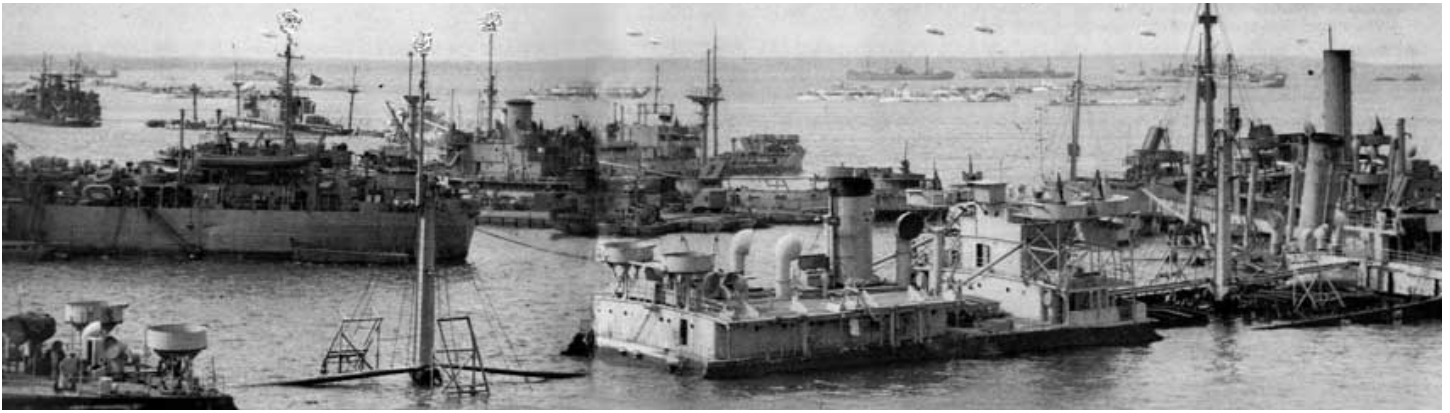


*Wharf formed of seven pierheads in a line', showing a view along the line of the Mulberry Harbour Spud pierheads at Arromanches, Gold Beach*

A variation of the pierhead was the LST pier, a form of artificial beach on which a Landing Ship (Tank) could be 'beached' and so discharge its vehicles directly as if on a natural beach but without the possibility of becoming stranded until the next tide.

## Assembly

All units were complete and at their south coast assembly points by D-1, the last items to arrive being some of the slowest corncocks. To ensure that all items were in place the navy had amassed some 200 tugs from both British and US sources and these were kept fully employed moving items around – 600 individual tows being needed to position the various components. On D-Day and beyond they would be similarly employed



towing the units across the channel and positioning them off the Normandy beaches.

It was expected that units would be lost during the tow, especially if bad weather should descend upon the region – which it did. However, the expected 20% losses varied considerably with only 2 Phoenixes being lost, one to a mine and the other to a torpedo. However nearly 40% of all roadway sections despatched failed to arrive, almost all due to the weather.

In Normandy the planting of the corncobs proceeded to plan, with the first units being scuttled on D+1, some while still under fire from German guns. Indeed some German gunners reported having sunk various merchant ships which in reality were simply corncobs being scuttled! All corncobs were planted by D+4 providing essential shelter for the many small craft plying the beaches.

With the blockships in place the larger Phoenixes began to arrive and were each carefully placed before the scuttling valves built into each were opened and the unit settled onto the floor. Such sinkings soon became routine and took only between 10 and 20 minutes per unit according to size. Hence the breakwaters rapidly grew allowing the piers and roadways to be positioned in the calm water and by D+7 the first stores were landed at Mulberry B which were not part of the port itself. By D+10 2,000 tons of stores was achieved and this never ceased until the harbour was finally closed to traffic on D+178.

Although most components were arriving to, or even ahead of schedule, the same can not be said of the floating roadway. These unwieldy tows required calm weather and little of this existed on or immediately after D-Day. As the days passed and the roadway still failed to arrive off Normandy the pressure grew and so it was much

to the delight of the UK despatching officer that he received notification from the met men of a 48 hour period of calm weather starting on D+12. Relieved he immediately organised the largest tow so far despatched with 22 tows, nearly 2 miles worth of roadway. Unfortunately the met men were wrong and at 03:00 on D+13 the worst storm to strike the English Channel for at least 80 years, and maybe only equalled by the storm which wrecked the Armada in 1588, descended on the region.

### **The great storm**

The storm came from the north-west and for three full days blew as a full gale. With the Mulberry harbour components only designed to survive half-gale conditions, damage was assured.

Mulberry A suffered terribly. The winds and waves tore the Bombardons from their moorings and, due to the direction of the wind, drove several of them against the Gooseberry and Phoenix breakwaters. The 2,000 ton metal monsters acting like giant battering rams broke the concrete walls of the Phoenix causing the structure to fail before they moved on either to sink or ride up on the beach. The seas then drove through the gaps in the breakwater twisting and capsizing the few roadways that had been delivered.

Mulberry B suffered less. The direction of the wind brought the waves over the nearby Calvados reef which reduced their power and although the Bombardons here were also ripped from their moorings they missed the main breakwater as the wind drove them further west. Furthermore the British had taken great care when planting their Phoenix units, leaving minimal gaps – something which had drawn criticism from the Americans building Mulberry A as they were progressing faster. The British care now paid off for the breakwater held up and continued to

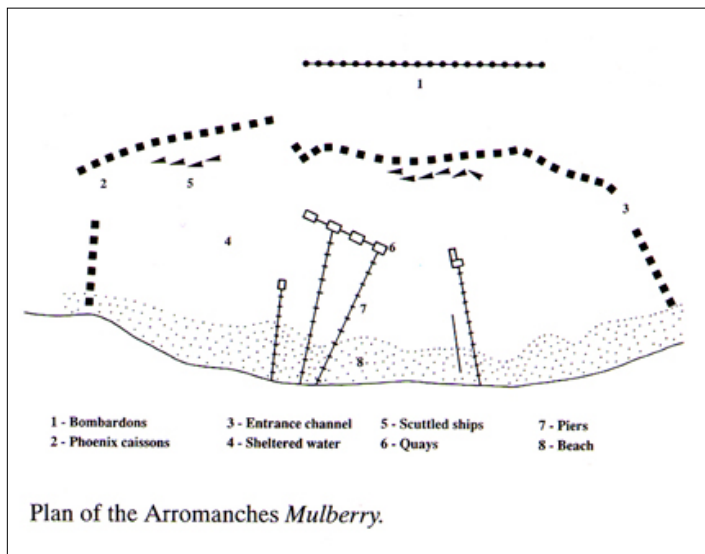
provide shelter within the port – so much so in fact that landing of stores never ceased and even on the worst day, when all other beaches landed nothing, 800 tons of stores came ashore through Mulberry B.

After the storm blew out the engineers assessed the damage. Mulberry A was mortally wounded. It was considered better to divert all remaining port material and what could be salvaged from Mulberry A to bolster Mulberry B, which continued on as the only functioning artificial harbour.

### In operation

Following the storm much repair work was needed to the port and although it never ceased to land stores its output was kept at approximately 50% of the planned total to allow the engineers to repair and, in many ways, improve the port facilities. Once repairs were complete, the port comfortably handled 50% in excess of its original design load with average daily rates being 9,100 tons and the maximum daily tonnage being 11,000.

The western arm of the harbour was allocated to coastal forces which set out nightly to defend the port and other beaches from attack by German light forces. Enemy interference was a regular feature for the first six weeks with nightly attacks by between 30 or 40 enemy planes as well as human torpedoes, circling torpedoes and even V-1 flying bombs. The balloon barrage and AA guns kept the attackers at high level and the coastal forces deterred most seaborne attacks but several bombs and mines fell into the harbour. These were generally only a nuisance and never prevented the harbour from operating.



### Conclusion

The success of the Mulberries lies perhaps not in their actual operation but rather in the confidence it gave the allied planners prior to the invasion. The planners were facing two powerful enemies; the Germans and the weather. They were confident they could beat the former providing the flow of stores was not interrupted and to ensure this they needed to beat the weather. Having a port allowed them to do this and hence allowed them the confidence to go ahead with the operation. Perhaps the ports greatest accolade can be taken from a quote by Albert Speer, the extraordinarily-effective German Minister of Armaments and War production, who said of the Mulberries that they were “an idea of simple genius”.



For further information on the construction of the Mulberry Harbours please see: [https://www.ths.org.uk/documents/th.s.org.uk/downloads/southern\\_region\\_-\\_mulberry\\_harbour\\_\(then\\_and\\_now\)\\_by\\_chris\\_howlett\\_-\\_feb\\_2016.pdf](https://www.ths.org.uk/documents/th.s.org.uk/downloads/southern_region_-_mulberry_harbour_(then_and_now)_by_chris_howlett_-_feb_2016.pdf)

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International, a hydrographic survey company based in Bordon, UK. Previously Chris was Head of Bathymetry at the UK Hydrographic Office and it was while he was there that he lead a survey to record the remains of the Mulberry Harbour at Arromanches which

spawned an interest in all aspects of the harbours and the vital, and often overlooked, role they played during the D-Day invasion.

## HMCS Sackville – 1944

by LCdr Bill Murray, First Lieutenant,  
HMCS Sackville, wartime

*Sackville* was ordered back from British waters to Halifax for repairs to one of her boilers in mid-1944. Excerpts of Bill Murray's self-published memoir "Naval Nuggets" describe the events of that return passage:

"It was late July (1944) when we assembled in Lough Foyle for a westbound convoy. We were out a couple of days when the Engineer Officer reported problems in number one boiler. When steam was raised the chamber was found to be leaking. This had happened before and repaired, tested and found satisfactory. ....the pressure in the boiler failed at 150 psi when raising steam. We were ordered back to Londonderry and left the convoy. There was a rumour that we would go to Liverpool, England for repairs, but the RCN ordered *Sackville* home so that they could assess the problem".

"In a week we were to sail with Convoy ONS 248 and act as plane guard for two small aircraft carriers operating with the convoy. Initially the sea was too rough for flight operations, but after about four days, the sea conditions and wind had abated. There were reports of two U-Boats in the vicinity of the convoy. As a result, two Fairey Swordfish bi-planes took off from one of the carriers and carried out Anti-Submarine sweeps around the perimeter of the convoy. They must have spotted a periscope as they were dropping bombs about two miles off the port quarter. We kept screening across the rear of the convoy but no contacts were picked up. I guess these attacks must have scared them off. It was around 1600 when the planes finished their patrols and then proceeded to return to the carriers".

"In the meantime, the sea was starting to act up again and the swells were getting longer and

rougher. This did not affect us, but the poor aircraft had to attempt landings on those small carriers. From their line of vision the flight decks must have looked like postage stamps".

"One of the Swordfish (nick-named Stringbags) made a couple of approaches toward the heaving flight deck. He veered off and on the third attempt he made a bumpy landing. I thought, "These guys really have guts." The second plane made his approach but had to climb and try again. He made a broad swing and got aligned with the flight deck, but just as he was about to touch down, the flight deck seemed to lift right up and the plane disappeared over the port side. I was Officer of the Watch and I immediately rang "Full Ahead" and called the Captain. I really thought those poor guys were goners. We steamed toward the spot where the plane went down but still no sign of it or the airmen. We had scramble nets rigged on the starboard side and hoped for the best. All of a sudden, we saw a little yellow life raft and there were the two airmen! How they got out of that old biplane unharmed I'll never understand".



*Swordfish air crew rescue by HMS Illustrious using a life saving net. The pilot and air gunner are seen swimming toward a second net in the rear of the photo. 18 Jan., 1943, IWM (A 15064)*

"We brought them aboard and took them below for warm blankets and a noggin of rum. When I got off watch, I joined them in the wardroom. These two young fellows were members of the Dutch Fleet Air Arm serving in British carriers. They were not in the least traumatized by their harrowing experience and took everything in stride. Without a doubt they were a special breed. They were shaken up a bit, but were returned to their ship in good condition. We received a "well done" from the Senior Officer of the Escort."

*Naval Nuggets from World War II, self-published by A. William Murray, Canadian Naval Memorial Trust Life Member, and a member of HMCS Sackville's Wardroom 1943 -1944.*

# 2019 CANADIAN NAVAL MEMORIAL TRUST Essay Competition

*Canadian Naval Review* will be holding its annual essay competition again in 2019. There will be a prize of \$1,000 for the best essay, provided by the **Canadian Naval Memorial Trust**. The winning essay will be published in *CNR*. (Other non-winning essays will also be considered for publication, subject to editorial review.)

Essays submitted to the contest should relate to the following topics:

- Canadian maritime security;
- Canadian naval policy;
- Canadian naval issues;
- Canadian naval operations;
- History/historical operations of the Canadian Navy;
- Global maritime issues (such as piracy, smuggling, fishing, environment);
- Canadian oceans policy and issues;
- Arctic maritime issues;
- Maritime transport and shipping.

If you have any questions about a particular topic, contact [cnrcoord@icloud.com](mailto:cnrcoord@icloud.com) or [naval.review@dal.ca](mailto:naval.review@dal.ca).

## **Contest Guidelines and Judging**

- Submissions for the 2019 *CNR* essay competition must be received at [cnrcoord@icloud.com](mailto:cnrcoord@icloud.com) or [naval.review@dal.ca](mailto:naval.review@dal.ca) by Monday, **30 September 2019**.
- Submissions are not to exceed 3,000 words. Longer submissions will be penalized in the adjudication process.
- Submissions cannot have been published elsewhere.
- All submissions must be in electronic format and any accompanying photographs, images, or other graphics and tables must also be included as a separate file.

The essays will be assessed by a panel of judges on the basis of a number of criteria including readability, breadth, importance, accessibility and relevance. The decision of the judges is final. All authors will be notified of the judges' decision within two months of the submission deadline.

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