

The Prairie Seaport

by Rear-Admiral John Newton, Commander Joint Task Force Atlantic and Maritime Forces Atlantic



Leading Seaman Lindsay Hansen takes the helm of the 800 horsepower, Nelson River Adventures jet boat

Watching Leading Seaman Lindsay Hansen's face radiate with excitement was worth the effort expended to reach the waters of Port Nelson, Manitoba. More at home driving her 1000 tonne patrol ship, HMCS *Moncton* anchored offshore, she was now at the helm of the 800 horsepower, Nelson River Adventures jet boat. Owned and operated by Canadian Armed Forces Ranger, Clint Sawchuck, he was unknowingly transferring his expert knowledge of river navigation to a sailor of the Royal Canadian Navy energized with a passion for service in the North. This was essential experience for the Leading Seaman as the navy prepares to take delivery of HMCS *Harry DeWolf* in 2018.

The Nelson River estuary is vast, forming a significant indentation in the western shore of Hudson Bay. Lacking navigation aids and modern charting, it was difficult to sense the location of the river's channel and the precise location of the submerged hazards discarded by industrial activity over 100 years ago. Parks Canada employees in Churchill had dutifully informed us that polar bears infest the scrub forests of the bay so getting stranded was more than a theoretical risk. Indeed, prior to departing HMCS *Moncton*, a curious bear had lazily drifted past our ship anchored 25 miles off the port. It was a Hinterland

Who's Who moment and a reminder that this aspect of coastal operations must be experienced as the navy increases the complexity of its northern operations.

Port Nelson, an uninhabited dot on the map was not an easy destination to reach. The waters were last charted in 1914 by CHS *Acadia*. A museum ship today, it is noteworthy that *Acadia's* conception and maiden voyage in 1913 was an essential element of the grand plan to build a prairie seaport at the mouth of the Nelson River. For years, thousands of Canadians grateful for employment toiled on the project.

The work site was as difficult as any imaginable; polar in the winter, wet, muddy, and bug infested in the summer. Ice blocked the sea routes to the site from October through June. As is the case for most northern coastal communities today, resupply relied on ships voyaging for weeks through the storm-tossed Labrador Sea and Hudson Strait. The optimal work season was short. Massive quantities of steel, cement and timber had to be ordered and transported north apace construction milestones. Dredges, cranes, trains, tugs, bridges and barges had to be shipped to the site and maintained for years by resourceful engineers. The camp's food supply was tenuous, supplemented by the support of the nearby Hudson Bay trading post at York Factory and hunting parties.

Gales blowing from the east pile the water of Hudson Bay against the coast, colliding with the river's significant outflow draining a continental-scale area reaching beyond Lake Winnipeg. It's a daunting seamanship experience even today to navigate the estuary, a risk evident in the numerous shipwrecks marked on the chart.

The scale of the undertaking speaks to a nation striving to connect the great agricultural bounty of our land to a hungry global market. But the seaport was the most difficult challenge and after seven years labouring against increasingly onerous challenges, work on Port Nelson was

terminated, an outcome hastened by the onset of World War. Today, massive installations abandoned at the site highlight that the government of the day was courageous, determined and visionary in its drive to shape our country as an economic power and master of its sovereign domains.

In my mind, Port Nelson is a metaphor. It speaks to the importance of the sea lanes of communication that link Canada to global trading partners. It also highlights the audacity required to progress northern programs and infrastructure as key elements of sovereignty. As sailors of the Royal Canadian Navy, and on behalf of all Canadians, we will soon be recipients of a class of ships designed specifically for Canada's northern and offshore ocean estate, a key project within the National Shipbuilding Strategy.



Members of the Royal 22e Régiment during Operation NANOOK in August 2016. HMCS Moncton standing by in the background.

Photo: PO2 Belinda Groves, Task Force Image Tech

The pending arrival of these Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships (the *Harry DeWolf Class*) inspires us to undertake bolder activities on all of Canada's ocean areas. To this end, HMCS *Moncton* is patrolling in Hudson Bay, and HMCS *Shawinigan* is far west along the Northwest Passage, creating new learning experiences for Leading Seaman Hansen and her shipmates in the fleet. For several years now our crews have been increasingly busy familiarizing themselves with the Arctic waterways and the communities that struggle with shifting economies, climate and human activities. We have engaged in new partnerships

with Government agencies that are keen to benefit from the support of the Royal Canadian Navy. In both our patrolling ships this year, Canadian Hydrographic Service teams carry on the traditions of CHS *Acadia* and the challenging task of charting the North. Port Nelson has inspired a ship's company with the story of Canada's North and our role in writing a new chapter in Canada's history.



CSS *Acadia* is a former hydrographic surveying and oceanographic research ship of the Canadian Hydrographic Service, and was busily employed in that role for most of the period from 1913 - 1969. The exceptions were from January 1917-March 1919 and again from October 1939-November 1945 when she was commissioned for service with the Navy as HMCS *Acadia*. In WWI she was employed in anti-submarine patrols in Eastern Canadian waters and in WWII was used as a training vessel and for patrols and local escort in the vicinity of the port of Halifax: the only ship still afloat to have served in the RCN in both World Wars.

As a survey ship, *Acadia* charted the coastline of almost every part of Eastern Canada including pioneering surveys of the port of Churchill and Hudson Bay, and the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador Bay before being retired from service in 1969. Today she is a museum ship, designated as a National Historic Site of Canada and berthed in Halifax at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic adjacent another wartime veteran, HMCS *Sackville*.

NAMESAKE SHIPS *by Doug Thomas*



Sandy McClearn

Action Stations! will be publishing a series of articles about Canadian warships of World War II whose names are perpetuated in today's Fleet. We will kick-off the series with HMCS *Halifax*: (K237): a Revised Flower Class Corvette in WWII and the name of the first of the twelve City-Class Canadian Patrol Frigates (FFGH 330). The current HMCS *Halifax* was commissioned in 1992 and she, like her sisters, has been very busy conducting operations in support of Canada's domestic and foreign policy. She recently completed a mid-life refit at *Halifax's* Irving Shipyard which extensively overhauled her hull and machinery, and also replaced or greatly improved every aspect of her weapons, sensors, and communications systems. It is anticipated that she and her sister-ships will serve into the 2030s.

The first HMCS *Halifax* was a Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) Revised Flower-class corvette which took part in convoy escort duties during the Second World War. She was named for Halifax, Nova Scotia and served primarily in the Battle of the Atlantic. *Halifax* was ordered as part of the 1940-41 Revised Flower class building program. This revised design radically changed the look of the Flower-class corvette.

The ships of this program kept the water-tube boilers of the initial 1940-41 program, but now they were housed in separate compartments for safety. The foc'sle was extended aft, which allowed more space for berths for the crew. The bow had increased flare for better control and dryer upper decks in the North Atlantic's typically rough waters. The revised RCN Flowers received an additional two depth charge throwers fitted amidships and more depth charges. Their anti-aircraft armament was enhanced with two 20-mm Oerlikon guns carried on the extended bridge wings. All of these improvements led to an increase in complement, displacement, draught and length.

Most RCN Flower-class corvettes like *Halifax* were named after communities, to better represent the people whose freedom they were protecting. This idea was put forth by Admiral Percy W. Nelles, Chief of Naval Staff until 1944. Sponsors were commonly associated with the community for which the ship was named, and many communities maintained contact with "their ship" and provided amenities such as



Wartime *Halifax*

record players and wool scarves, mittens and toques. Royal Navy corvettes were designed as open-ocean escorts, while Canadian corvettes were developed for coastal roles - demonstrated by the minesweeping gear fitted early in the war. Eventually Canadian corvettes were modified to improve their sea-keeping performance and capabilities as anti-submarine convoy escorts. Corvette construction in Canada peaked in 1941 when shipyards across the country turned out 56 Flower-class corvettes, bringing to 69 the number commissioned by the end of that year.

Halifax was laid down by Collingwood Shipyards Ltd. at Collingwood, Ontario on 26 April 1941 and launched on 4 October of that year. She was commissioned into the RCN 6 weeks later on 26 November at Montreal, Quebec and was the first Canadian corvette delivered with the extended foc'sle. During her career she had two significant refits. The first took place between May and October 1943 at Liverpool, Nova Scotia. The second began at Lunenburg, Nova Scotia and was completed at Halifax.

War Service

After arriving at Halifax 18 December, *Halifax* was initially assigned to the Western Local Escort Force (WLEF). On 19 May 1942, she rescued three survivors from the crew of the American trawler *Foam* which was sunk by U-432's gunfire south of Halifax. In July 1942 she transferred to Halifax Force as an escort to tanker convoys leaving Aruba. This was during a period of the war when German U-boats sank many oil tankers in the Caribbean and within sight of shore along the US East Coast, and the US Navy asked for help. In August she was assigned to TAW (Trinidad-Aruba-Key West) convoys. While escorting TAW 15, she took part in the only major convoy battle in the Caribbean Sea. In September 1942 she was placed under American control as an escort for convoys between New York and Guantanamo. She remained in this service until March 1943 when she rejoined WLEF. Corvette sailors operating in the Caribbean said "...it was a picnic after the Atlantic runs." *Halifax* crew member Charles Clarke of Winnipeg said: "We were issued tropical gear - shorts, gun-shirts, helmets and black knee-high stockings. Most of the crew

wore shorts on watch so we all had nice tans." Leading Seaman Ted Percival of Sidney, B.C. said *Halifax* had teak decks that had to be holystoned (scoured with soft sandstone); "...a real advantage of wooden decks is they don't get overly hot in the tropics and most of us went around bare-foot." Meanwhile, in spite of canvas wind-catchers, it was unbearably hot in the boiler rooms, and watches below had to be relieved frequently.

After departing for her first refit in May 1943, *Halifax* returned to service in January 1944 with the Mid-Ocean Escort Force (MOEF) when she was assigned to Escort Group C-1. She remained with this group, escorting trans-Atlantic convoys, until August when she departed for another refit. After workups in Bermuda, she briefly joined Halifax Force before transferring back to MOEF as a member of EGC-9 until war's end.

Post-war service

After the cessation of hostilities, HMCS *Halifax* was paid off on 12 July 1945 at Sorel, Quebec. She was transferred to the War Assets Corporation and sold later that year as the mercantile salvage vessel *Halifax*. She continued in this role until 1963 when she was deleted from the registry.



Graveyard, Sorel P.Q. by Cdr C. Anthony Law, 1945

After 1945, the RCN shrank to a modest peacetime size. These corvettes soon to be sold for scrap, attest to the scale of post-war demobilization and the sadness felt by many sailors at the paying off of their ships. The artist, a naval officer, was affected deeply by the war and by the changes that followed. The ships are an emotional presence in his work, seemingly aware of their impending fate, but - like Law - buoyed by their record of wartime service.

Beaverbrook Collection of War Art - CWM 19710261-4075

MERCHANT MARINERS CRUCIAL TO WINNING WWII

by David Robinson and reprinted courtesy of Trident

During the Second World War, an estimated 18,000 Canadians served in Allied merchant navies. At least 72 Canadian flagged or owned merchant vessels were lost, most to enemy action. Also lost were 2,200 Canadian merchant sailors. At war's end Rear-Admiral L.W. Murray paid tribute to Merchant Navy, saying "The battle of the Atlantic was not won by any navy or air force; it was won by the courage, fortitude and determination of the British and Allied merchant navy."

This tale recalls one courageous incident of the type Murray saluted in 1945. It is the story of the Canadian National Steamship, *Lady Hawkins*, and her chief officer, Percy Ambrose Kelly.

RMS *Lady Hawkins* was one of five sister ships built during the late 1920's to serve as passenger-cargo liners between eastern Canadian, American and Caribbean ports. By 1939 these elegant vessels had established a reputation for benchmark service. Of the five, only two would survive the war.



Lady Hawkins taking on stores in Halifax.
CN005768

The *Lady Hawkins* departed Halifax on her final voyage on 16 January, 1942. Captain H.O. Griffen set her course for Boston, en route to the West Indies. With the exception of an American destroyer that briefly kept her company off New York, the ship proceeded without escort through submarine infested waters. Griffen set a zig-zag course, rang on 15 knots and hoped for the best.

When his radio officers began picking up calls from torpedoed merchant vessels sailing along their intended route, he took the precaution of clearing away the life boats.

The *Lady Hawkins* was spotted by Fregattenkapitän Richard Zapp of U-66 during the evening of 18 January. His U-boat was one of the five dispatched from Lorient to begin a new defensive against shipping off North America. Setting out on Christmas Day 1941, Zapp arrived off New York on 16 January. The next night he sent a fully loaded 6,600 tonne tanker to the bottom. Now he would add to score. At 0105, he fired on the *Lady Hawkins*. His first torpedo hit the engine room, knocking out all power. Wireless Officer Bob Clayton scrambled to send out an S.O.S., only to find his equipment was dead.

Most of the *Lady Hawkins'* passengers were trapped below decks. The Johnsons and their three yearold daughter, Janet, jumped from the heeling deck and swam for one of the lifeboats. It already contained Bill Burton, the ship's carpenter, who was busy helping other survivors scrambled aboard. Chief Officer Kelly had jumped overboard after doing what he could to get other boats in the water. He too made his way to No. 2 lifeboat. Eventually 76 people found refuge there, in 30-foot craft designed to hold 63 souls. Most had to stand: there was insufficient room to sit down. Kelly recalls the night in his official report: "We pulled them in until no more could be taken. Then I had to give the agonizing order to pull away: the ship was sinking and we dared stay no longer. We had to abandon living humans to suffer the fate of the lifeless *Lady Hawkins* we had left only 10 minutes before. There was nothing we could do. The cries of the people in the water rang in my ears for years."

Zapp played a searchlight over the scene until the *Lady Hawkins* slipped beneath the waves. Then he headed for Cape Hatteras, where he sank four more ships between 22-24 January. Abandoned, even by their foes, the survivors stood in their tiny ark for five hours, fearing to move lest they capsize it. With daylight, they rigged a jury sail and set off to the west. With good conditions they might reach shore in two weeks, if they survived. They only had an oar to

serve as a rudder in the boat that constantly took on water. There was little food - some biscuits and water, a few tins of condensed milk, one bottle of rum and a flask of brandy. Breakfast and supper consisted of half a biscuit and a dipper of water. At lunch each survivor drank a mouthful of milk. When each can had been drained, a little water was poured in and swished around. The resulting mixture was reserved for little Janet.

On 20 January a gale swept in Kelly lowered the mainsail and guided his craft through violent seas with jib and sea anchor alone. Miraculously, they survived the storm. At dawn the bottle of fortified rum was portioned out, but by then, some were gravely ill. Many scantily clad survivors were suffering from exposure. Others had swallowed fuel oil during their escape and were in grave distress. Janet developed a fever. Kelly cleared out a tiny locker and put her and her mother into its shelter and offered the girl a dram of brandy.

Luckily, Janet survived. Others did not. On Tuesday morning one of the ships' stewards, who had been babbling incoherently before lapsing into a coma, died. The next day, two elderly passengers joined him. Before they were committed to the deep, their outer garments were shared out among those who remained.

Around noon on Thursday, Bill Haig, the barman who had selflessly shared his bottle of rum, died. Early the next morning another survivor passed away and was lowered over the side. That night the weakened survivors dozed, water sloshing about their shins, hoping that heavy seas would not swamp them as they slept. "A ship! A ship!" People sprang to their feet cheering and played a flashlight against the life boat's sail.

The passenger ship *Coama* saw their signal. During 20 hazardous minutes it remained dead in the water while the survivors were tenderly lifted aboard. Of the *Lady Hawkins* 321 passengers and crew, they alone had escaped her fate.

A few days later, a group of survivors wrote to Kelly, expressing their gratitude. "You had terrible decisions to make and you made them calmly and wisely and with such tact that every one of us agreed with them all. You saw to it that the humblest got equality of treatment and shared in

what little comfort was available. Above all you kept our spirits steadfast and our minds cheerful." A newly promoted Kelly carried the letter with him as he assumed command of the *Lady Drake*.

North of Bermuda, on 5 May, 1942, the *Lady Drake* was torpedoed by U-106, placing Kelly in charge of five lifeboats and 260 survivors. Luckily they had good weather and three relatively uneventful days, were rescued by the USS Owl. Kelly was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire in recognition of his leadership in the aftermath of the *Lady Hawkins*' loss. Lloyds of London awarded him its own War Medal for Bravery at Sea and the Canadian government presented him with a Silver Salver. He continued to serve with Canadian National Steamships until the company was wound up in the 1950's.

Captain Percy A. Kelly is one of the 127 Canadian merchant seaman who received honors during the Second World War. May we never forget their bravery, and that of their unsung colleagues, who together did so much to secure victory over tyranny in 1945.



Chief Officer Percy Ambrose Kelly (left) with bandaged head wound suffered during sinking with Captain Nels Helgesen (right), who rescued Kelly and other survivors from the SS *Lady Hawkins*.
George Metcalf Archival Collection
CWM 20040004-005_43

THE SINKING OF THE TANKER BRITISH FREEDOM *by Doug Pemberton*



During the war, Halifax Harbour and its surrounding coastline was the scene of much frenzied activity as the convoys were assembled and marshalled before crossing the Atlantic. This was a complicated procedure as convoy size varied from a few ships to dozens, and included vessels of varying speeds, crews from many nations, and cargoes varying from oil and munitions to food and raw materials. They had to be well-organized and carefully guarded, as the threat of U-boats was always present.

On the morning of 14 January 1945 one of these convoys, the 19 ships of BX-141, approached the entrance to Halifax Harbour. Some of the ships in the convoy would head into Halifax while others would join up outside the harbour with another convoy heading for England. Meanwhile, Kapitän zur See Kurt Dobratz in U-1232 was lurking in wait for assembling or departing convoys. He was no beginner at this. Ten days earlier he had attacked a small convoy nearby and sank the tanker *Nipiwan Park* and ten minutes later the merchantman *Polarland*.

That morning, the seas were rough and the weather was foul. Kapitän Dobratz had positioned himself in the best firing position, two miles east of Sambro Light, where convoys had to assume an in-line formation and maintain a strict route between the many rocky shoals that dot the entrance to Halifax Harbour. As BX-141 passed before him, he closed on the third ship in line, the tanker *British Freedom*, loaded with 9700 tons of

fuel oil and fired a single torpedo. The torpedo struck the engine room, port side, and she quickly began to sink stern first. Dobratz took aim at the next ship in line, the *Martin Van Buren* and 80 seconds later, she too was headed for the bottom.



Kapitän zur See Kurt Dobratz with his crew.

The convoy was now in disarray and the seventh ship in line, the *Athelwiking* with a load of molasses, had left formation. Escort ships were now closing in on U-1232 with a barrage of depth charges and, according to Dobratz's report, the frigate HMCS *Ettrick* was now so close that her bow "filled the periscope sight" as she steamed towards him at full speed. Kapitän Dobratz made a snap decision to fire one last shot at the *Athelwiking*, which was so close that he could clearly make out the American flag flying from the Liberty ship's stern. U-1232 dove immediately after firing but had not quite reached 14 meters depth when the *Ettrick* steamed over him and made contact, smashing the attack periscope, crumbling the bridge combing, tearing off the forward

net guard and destroying the radar-detection antenna. Incredibly, U-1232 survived this plus 134 depth charges and aerial bombs and limped back to Germany where Kapitän Dobratz was awarded the Knight's Cross.

Born in 1904, Kurt Dobratz began his naval career in March 1922. After ten years sea time on the cruisers *Hamburg* and *Leipzig* and the pre-dreadnought battleships *Schleswig-Holstein* and *Hannover*, he was transferred to the Luftwaffe on September 1935. During the next eight years he served in several staff positions, but also commanded combat units, flying 11 combat sorties in 1941. In April 1943 he rejoined the Kriegsmarine to undergo eight months of training before commissioning the Type IXC/40 U-1232 in March 1944. In November 1944 he sailed from Horten, Norway on his first and only patrol, one of the most successful in the final year of the war. In January 1945 he sank four ships in Canadian waters with a total of 24,531 tons, returning after a patrol of 97 days.

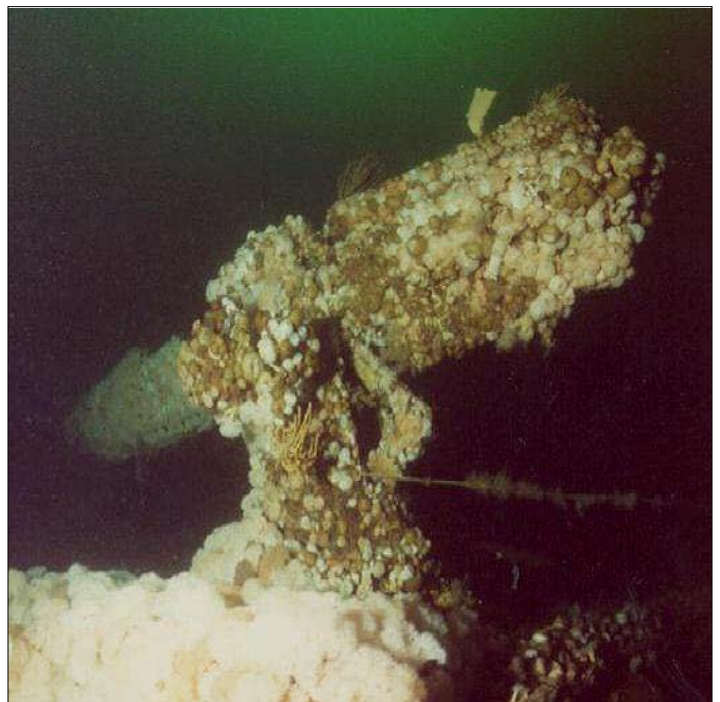
After returning to base in February 1945 he left U-1232 to become chief of staff at U-Boat Headquarters BdU. He was the last Commander of U-boats during the final days of the war (after Fleet Admiral Doenitz had succeeded Hitler as Fuhrer). He then spent nine months in captivity. When he returned to Germany he studied law, eventually earning a doctorate. He died at the age of 92 in Bremen.

Kapitän zur See Dobratz was one of the oldest U-boat commanders of WWII to see active service. It may be that his time in the Luftwaffe stood him in good stead while on patrol. His unusual success and survival rate for this stage of the war is shared by other U-boat commanders with aviation experience.

For two days the *British Freedom* floated with her stern dragging along the bottom and her bow protruding nearly 100 feet out of the water. HMCS *Goderich* was dispatched to sink the remains and did so with a few well-placed depth charges. And there she lay, in 200 feet of water, virtually undisturbed for over fifty years until she was pinpointed in 1995 during a hydrographic survey of the approaches to Halifax Harbour.

The wreck of *British Freedom* has become a recreational diving destination, and those who have explored it report amazement at the variety and quantity of sea life that covers the ship. The raised stern gun platform is now almost indistinguishable under a cloak of anemones, sponges and barnacles. Ten feet below, the wood and metal of the quarterdeck has suffered some damage but much of the stern superstructure is still intact. Unused ammunition can be found scattered in some areas. Penetration is possible but given the condition of the ship not recommended without proper training and equipment. Forward of the stern superstructure on the port side is where the torpedo exploded and the area is extensively damaged, not much more than a pile of bent and crumbled railings, pipes, metal plating and other pieces of the ship. Forward of this, the mid-ships superstructure is still recognizable although the bridge has fallen away and lies on the sand nearby. Forward of the bridge was severely damaged by the subsequent depth charging. Reports are that this area is most heavily damaged.

For years the shipwrecks of Nova Scotia have attracted divers from all over the world. Every ship is a part of the rich maritime history of the area and testament to those who shaped that history. The *British Freedom* is one more page in that colorful and endless story.

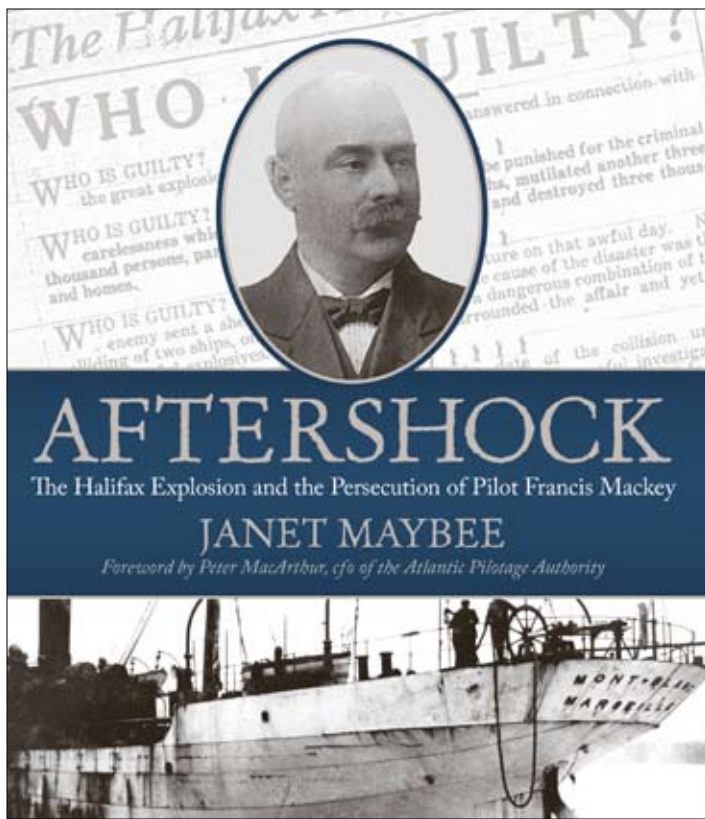


Stern gun *British Freedom*

AFTERSHOCK:

The Halifax Explosion and the Persecution of Pilot Francis Mackey

06 December 1917 is forever etched in the history of Halifax. On that date, the Norwegian vessel SS *Imo* and the French freighter SS *Mont-Blanc*, laden with high explosives – including some on the upper deck – collided in the harbour narrows near Tufts Cove. It was the worst man-made disaster in history until Hiroshima in 1945.



Trustee Janet Maybee's book, *AFTERSHOCK: The Halifax Explosion and the Persecution of Pilot Francis Mackey*, recently won the prestigious 2016 Atlantic Book Award for Non-Fiction, presented in Moncton, New Brunswick on April 27.

This book does not contain more detailed description of the Explosion but instead it is an attempt to change the narrative in order to restore the reputation of a wrongly blamed harbour pilot. On December 6, 1917, pilot Francis Mackey was guiding *Mont Blanc*, a French munitions ship, into Bedford Basin to join a convoy across the Atlantic when it was rammed by Belgian Relief vessel *Imo*. The resulting massive explosion destroyed Halifax's north

end and left at least two thousand people dead, including pilot William Hayes aboard *Imo*.

Federal government and naval officials found in Pilot Mackey a convenient target for public anger. Charged with manslaughter, he was imprisoned, villainized in the press, and denied his pilot's license even after the charges were dropped. A century later he is still unfairly linked to the tragedy, and the damaging stories will no doubt surface again with the approach of the hundredth anniversary.

Through interviews with Mackey's relatives, transcripts, letters, and newly exposed federal government documents, author Janet Maybee explores the circumstances leading up to the Halifax Explosion, the question of fault, and the impact on the pilot and his family of the unjust, deliberate persecution that followed.

The website (www.pilotmackey.ca) includes a unique interactive story map illustrating the movements of the two ships toward collision, with narration in Mackey's own words, along with reviews and photographs.



Pictured with Janet is Peter MacArthur, Chief Financial Officer of the Atlantic Pilotage Authority; Peter wrote the book's introduction, a brief history of the pilotage service in Halifax.



The Norwegian steamship SS Imo, chartered by the Belgian Relief Commission to bring supplies to war-ravaged Europe, lies beached on the Dartmouth shore after the Halifax Explosion, 1917.



Photos have emerged from a private collection in the UK which show the Imo and Mont Blanc shortly after impact. Taken from ashore by Royal Navy Lt Victor Magnus based in Halifax at the time, the photographs captured the plumes of smoke from the fire onboard and later, a devastated Halifax, left in ruins from the blast.



A clock found in the rubble, the time of the explosion etched in its face. Collection of the Maritime Museum of Nova Scotia

100 YEAR COMMEMORATIVE EVENT

Wednesday, December 6, 2017, will mark the 100 year anniversary of this tragic catastrophic event. Plans are underway to commemorate the tragedy that devastated the Richmond District of Halifax, decimated the Mi'kmaq community in Turtle Grove and badly damaged adjacent areas of Dartmouth and Africville.

For further information see:
<http://www.halifax.ca/HalifaxExplosion/index.php>

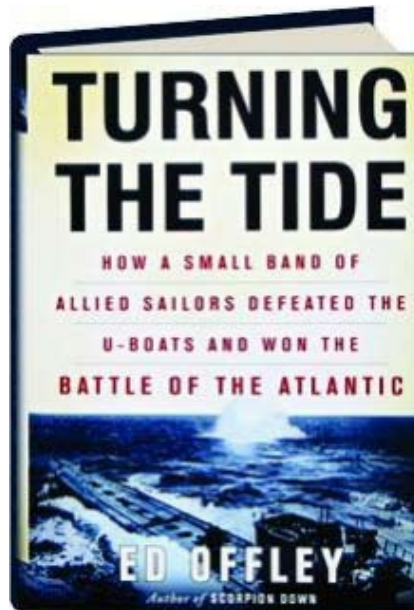
BOOK REVIEW *by Stephen Knowles*

Turning the Tide: How a Small Band of Allied Sailors Defeated the U-Boats and Won the Battle of the Atlantic, by Ed Offley, New York, Basic Books, 2011, 477 pages, maps, black and white photos, \$33.50 Cad, ISBN 978-0-465-01397(hard cover)

It is gratifying to see the Battle of the Atlantic receiving greater attention in recent years, many of the more recent accounts being written by American authors who have turned their attention from the Pacific to the Atlantic. *Turning the Tide* by Ed Offley, a journalist who has written extensively on contemporary naval subjects, is a typical example. In his book Offley tells the story of the pivotal convoy battles of the late winter and spring of 1943 when the Allies went from disaster to triumph in a few weeks. Although the book is a lively operational account, Offley helpfully sets the stage by underlining that winning the Atlantic battle was crucial to victory and by describing the organisation and management of the convoy system as the curtain rises for those at sea, both defenders and attackers. How the crisis in the Atlantic was addressed at the highest political and command levels is also well covered.

It is at sea however where Offley spins an exciting tale of hardship, despair and victory, the latter initially for the U-Boats until the tide of battle turned. Focusing on the contrasting fortunes of Convoys HX229 and SC122 in March and ONS5 and SC130 in April and May we learn how this came about. While most of the book is written using available sources from the time, the author skilfully weaves in the personal experiences of a few still living veterans, British, Canadian and American. As well he includes personal stories from the diminishing pool of the 12,000 U-Boat men who lived to come ashore at the end of hostilities. This makes for gripping reading. Offley describes the factors which caused the allies to

initially despair and ultimately Admiral Dönitz to acknowledge defeat and withdraw the wolf packs. Decisions taken at the highest political levels, partly in response to the willingness and ability of Admiral Max Horton, C-in-C Western Approaches, to confront power in the person of Prime Minister Churchill himself, were immediately effective. Destroyers were reallocated to form support groups and President Roosevelt directed that enough VLR Liberators be assigned to ensure sustained air operations over the Atlantic Gap. The arrival of the escort carriers and support groups in sufficient numbers; adequate escorts equipped with HF/DF which made all the difference in rapidly triangulating the position of a transmitting submarine; the generalized fitting of hedgehog forward firing mortars and increased proficiency in decrypting the U-Boat codes were all measures which, coupled with the skill, determination and courage of the escort and merchant ship captains and crews turned the tide.



British escort groups predominate in the story. Sadly Canada's overstretched and under-equipped escort groups, which had shouldered the brunt of the U-Boat onslaught during the last half of 1942 were largely absent from the crucial early 1943 battles, having been withdrawn from the North Atlantic convoy routes to refit and retrain. This not to say that individual Canadian ships and sailors were not involved nor that the Canadian staffs in Halifax and St. John's did not play important roles. One Canadian officer LCDR James Plomer RCNVR is signalled out as a particularly effective sea fighter in command of the corvette HMS *Sunflower* in Escort Group B-7 lead by Cdr Peter Gretton RN, one of the most distinguished escort commanders and the officer whose name is most associated with the May 1943 victories. However contrary to the author's assertion, Plomer was never captain of HMCS *Bonaventure*. He did command HMCS *Cayuga* during her second tour in Korean waters when, as many trustees will recall, Ferdinand Demara,

the ship's medical officer was exposed as the "Great Imposter". His postwar notoriety came when after his retirement in a 1963 he wrote an article Maclean's article critical of postwar Canadian naval leadership.

In reading *Turning the Tide* Canadian readers will find other surprises. For example St. John's was not a Canadian port in the 1940's and therefore none of the 50 old US destroyers turned over to

the RN and RCN were in exchange for bases in Canada. Cape Breton is not a city. No ship flies the "English" flag. English and British are not synonymous. Hurricanes not Swordfish were launched from CAM ships. These are some of the quibbles I found in the book. Nevertheless it tells a great story in which both the general and expert reader will find much of interest in a lively narrative which is supported by extensive and helpful appendices.

Call for Papers

CNRS-SCRN CONFERENCE AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

10 - 12 AUGUST 2017

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

"CANADA AND CANADIANS IN THE GREAT WAR AT SEA, 1914-19"

This promises to be the only gathering to be held in Canada providing opportunity to survey the various maritime dimensions of the First World War. The conference will be held in affiliation with the Royal Canadian Navy, in historic Admiralty House, the home of the Naval Museum of Halifax https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naval_Museum_of_Halifax.

Papers should not be restricted to military operations and related issues. Indeed, the timing and location are chosen with regard to 2017 being the centenary of the Halifax Explosion, a defining moment in that port's long history, and several presentations on that subject are anticipated. As always, subjects other than the main theme will be given due consideration. CNRS encourages publication of expanded versions of the final papers in *The Northern Mariner* or *Argonauta* and publication of all abstracts and biographies in *Argonauta* before the conference is held.

Please send a working title, brief abstract, and a short biographical sketch no later than 1 March 2017 to:

Dr Richard Gimblett
Richard.Gimblett@forces.gc.ca /
richard.gimblett@rogers.com
33 Greenaway Circle
Port Hope, ON
L1A 0B9



Olympic with Returned Soldiers
by Arthur Lismer in 1919
Beaverbrook Collection of War Art
CWM 19710261-0343

SS Olympic, sister ship of the Titanic, is pictured arriving in Halifax filled to the brim with jubilant soldiers from the Front. Halifax, though devastated by the explosion in 1917, has now partly recovered. Its docks are back in operation and the reality of peace just starting to take hold.

Olympic's multi-coloured dazzle camouflage was intended to make the ship more difficult to identify and target by enemy U-boats. Affectionately known as "Old Reliable," Olympic transported over 200,000 British, American, and Canadian troops to and from war-torn Europe.

CROW'S NEST, FINALLY, AFTER 71 YEARS! by Lou Howard, MID, RCNVR

Imagine a young Navigating/Asdic Officer on the bridge beside his captain who is conning the small Bangor Class class mine sweeper HMCS *Sarnia* through the entrance to St. John's welcoming harbour several times in the last five months of the Battle of the Atlantic, breathing a sigh of relief each time the ship was safely docked.

As usual he would be the Duty Officer on the ship during the entire time in port as he was the youngest officer on the ship at 21 and married to boot, so the fact that he would be unable to visit the already famed Crow's Nest was a given. Actually, it gave him a space of time to think longingly of his high school sweet heart - now deceased - who he had married on Christmas Eve, 1944. Through the years however a small nagging thought crept into his mind occasionally. It would have been great to be a part of that exclusive club, and, one day he would make it happen. In 2016 he did.

This fall my wife and I went on a 12 day tour of Newfoundland and Labrador and spent 5 days in St. John's before coming home. I told her that I was determined to visit the Crow's Nest this time. Unbeknownst to me, Hyacinth had already contacted the Crow's Nest of my war time non-visits and advised that we planned to be there for lunch Friday, September 9, at noon, and would



Pictured: Lou and Hyacinth at their home in Ottawa.

bring a young couple with us. After climbing the 59 steps to the "Nest" we were greeted warmly by the President of the Club, LCdr (ret'd) Margaret Morris and, led to a reserved table for 8 in the crowded room. There we met Arthur Barrett another 92 year old veter-

an, but of the Air Force, having flown Lancasters during the war, and Allan Hatfield a young guy of only 90 who was a seamen gunner on *Matane* then on the Murmansk run. We had a wonderful brief time together. Susan Flanagan from 48 Degrees Inc. joined us as well as Chris Hughes and Sharon Newman the couple who live in St. John's who were our hosts. Susan took many pictures.

There was an almost surreal quality to the scene as I surveyed the storied mementos around me; the names and adventures of historic ships; the brave men, some who returned and some who did not; the glorious history of Canada's magnificent Navy and the overwhelming awareness that I had been privileged to be a small part of Canada's great story.

My joy was unbounded because I was finally there. In the corner I saw the periscope from U-190. A surge of personal memories swept over me from that part of my life 71 years before. I was connected to that periscope in the following manner:

Late in March 1945, HMCS *Sarnia* was taken off the Triangle run and joined the Local Halifax Defence Force. The assignment was to patrol outside the gates of Halifax harbour, four days out, three days in. On April 14, 1945, HMCS *Sarnia* and HMCS *Esquimalt* sailed together on one of these harbour patrols. We agreed to meet at "C" buoy at 08:00, April 16. *Esquimalt* did not rendezvous as planned having been torpedoed by U - 190 at 0634 that morning using the periscope now in the Crow's Nest to see *Esquimalt* on a direct course towards it. After advising captain D that *Esquimalt* had not arrived, we waited for authority to go and look for her. At 0920 the captain took it on his own to leave our search area and I gave him a bearing to the search area given to *Esquimalt*. Authority to leave our assigned patrol area finally came at 1125. At 1350 *Sarnia* left the area of the Halifax East Light Vessel with 27 survivors and 13 dead from the crew of *Esquimalt*. Forty four young men slowly lost their lives to hypothermia that morning after being in the 34 degree water for more than 6 hours. *Esquimalt* was the last Canadian warship sunk during that war.

As I looked through that periscope I was filled

with extreme emotions, because, once again, as I have done millions of times since, I questioned the uselessness of those deaths and the extreme cruelty of war. I am sure I am not the only one who has been there, seen death and experienced the horror of war, to be filled with the desire for peace, and I questioned, once again, those horrors and silently renewed my pledge of pacifism.

Too soon our visit ended. As we said our “good-byes” and promised to meet again I realized what a gift for me that visit had been.

1917 NAVAL TRAGEDY COMMEMORATED IN ST. JOHN'S by Pat Jessup

Hardly seven months after the massive losses at Beaumont-Hamel in the Somme, Newfoundland was struck once more by tragedy overseas. On 25 January 1917 the armed merchant cruiser HMS *Laurentic*, enroute from Liverpool to Halifax, NS was diverted to the Royal Navy Base in Lough Swilly, County Donegal, Ireland to land four sailors who had taken ill with “spotted fever”. Carrying 475 officers and ratings and a secret cargo of £5,000,000 in gold bullion - to pay for war munitions for Britain - the *Laurentic* made a quick turn-around to continue her journey. Shortly after leaving the safety of the lough she struck two mines placed by the German submarine, U-80. *Laurentic* sank to the bottom within an hour. Caught in foul weather, conditions couldn't have been worse for the survivors and casualties were high. Among the 354 who perished were 21 members of the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserves, 35 Irish and one sailor from Quebec serving in the Royal Navy.

A service to commemorate the loss of HMS *Laurentic* was held at the National War Memorial in St. John's on 22 September. While a similar ceremony is held annually in Co. Donegal this was a first in Newfoundland and in concert with a visit by a delegation from the Northwest of Ireland of educators, social and economic enterprise agencies and entrepreneurs. Attendees at the cenotaph included the Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland Labrador Frank Fagan representing Her Majesty the Queen, Commodore Marta Mulkins representing the Royal Canadian Navy, federal, provincial and municipal representatives, and a large number of military and other local dignitaries. Mrs. Ruth Green, who lost two

The Crow's Nest more than fulfilled the expectations I might have had. The care with which it is maintained, the wealth and importance of the material on its walls and the warmth and appreciation with which I was greeted, will always be a cherished memory for me.

Hyacinth and I are looking forward very much to visiting next year for the 75th anniversary of the Crow's Nest. May it continue to tell the story of Canada's Royal Canadian Navy for many years to come.

relatives in the tragedy, read the Newfoundland and Canada Roll of Honour while Andrew Ward, Green Castle, Co Donegal, Ireland read the Irish Roll of Honour. The former Ambassador to Ireland, the Honourable Loyola Hearn acted as Master of Ceremonies.

“It was truly an honour for HMCS *Cabot* to be involved with the ceremony remembering HMS *Laurentic*,” said LCdr Tony Young, Commanding Officer of HMCS *Cabot*. “The fact that there were 21 members of the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve among those lost makes this an exceptionally poignant event for HMCS *Cabot* as a Naval Reserve unit to remember.”

By all accounts the *Laurentic* ceremony was most memorable. Even the weather was perfect.



Be a part of history
Join the ship
Become a Trustee
<http://hmcSSackville.ca/>

Return Undeliverable
Canadian Address To:
HMCS Sackville
PO Box 99000 Station Forces
Halifax NS B3K 5X5

CANADA POSTES
POST CANADA



Postage paid
Publication Mail

Port paye
Poste-publications

40016521