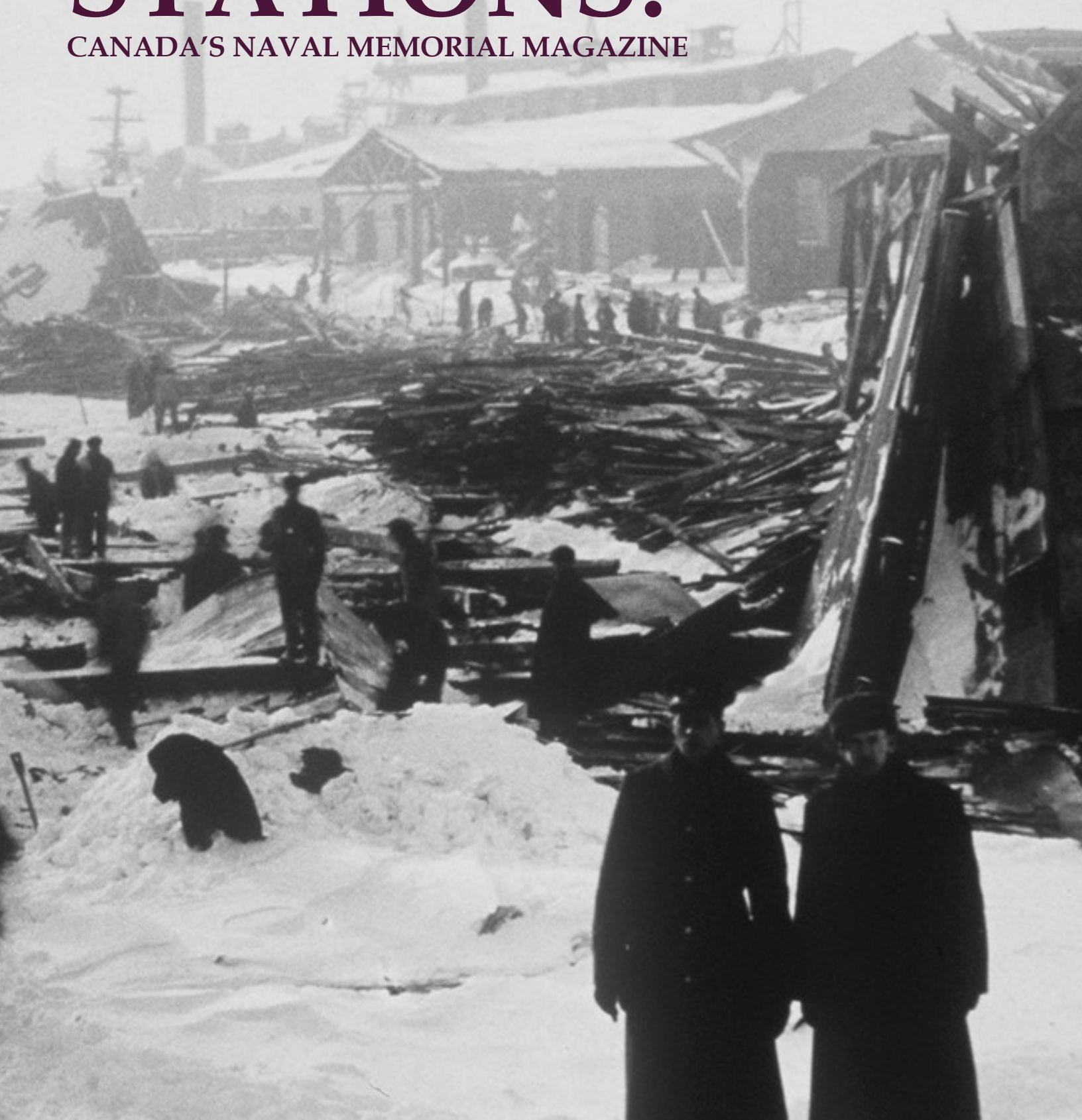


*Volume 36 - Issue 3
Fall 2017*

ACTION STATIONS!

CANADA'S NAVAL MEMORIAL MAGAZINE



ACTION STATIONS!

Issue 3 - Volume 36
Fall 2017

THIS ISSUE:

Shortly after 9 a.m. on Dec. 6, 1917, in the last year of the First World War, the largest man-made explosion prior to the atomic bomb was set off when the munitions ship *Mont Blanc* and the steamer *Imo* collided in Halifax harbour.

The explosion had a catastrophic effect on Halifax, killing as many as 1,600 people instantly and destroying an area of 2.59 square kilometres including 1,630 buildings and 7 ships. 12,000 buildings were damaged. But, as the *Manitoba Free Press* told its readers in the following days, "the calamity was a national one."

This issue of *Action Stations!* is dedicated to the First Responders on that terrible day.



*In the horrific aftermath, the response of the military was immediate and swift. Thousands of soldiers and sailors took to the streets rescuing the buried and tending to the wounded.
Photo credit: DND/Library and Archives Canada / PA-022744*

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HMCS SACKVILLE

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From the Chair by Commander ret'd Wendall Brown



HMCS Sackville, HMS Dockyard, Halifax,
April 2008

After a highly successful summer season, which I am sure the Captain, Jim Reddy, will give you full details in his report, HMCS Sackville has returned to her winter berth in HMC Dockyard.

The retrospect from the position of the Chair of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust (CNMT) is more complex than the successful summer programme of the ship. In the Trust, we have been becoming increasingly more anxious as our refit which has been scheduled at six year intervals since the ship's designation as the Canadian Naval Memorial in 1985, continued to slip to the right. The refit slippage was the result of both syncrolift availability and issues of authorization and resource commitment from NDHQ. There are some areas of the hull that we can examine with the ship in the water that are showing the 77 year age of the ship. There are other areas that we need to have the ship out of the water to examine thoroughly. The Trust, considering what we know, and what we don't know, about the hull condition determined that the prudent sailor would not return Sackville to her summer berth at Sackville Landing until she has a thorough hull refit.

The complexity in managing Sackville arises from an evolution of changes in the mandate of the RCN and in the Federal Government financial management regulations, and more stringent adherence to and application of financial regulations as resources diminish. Sackville, when she was turned over to the Naval Officer's Association of Canada, ceased to be either a commissioned ship or a naval auxiliary.

The result of this status is that the Navy can not legally fund Sackville as has been done in the past. When the Navy was advised of this legal decision the Commander of the RCN and his staff sought, without success, options within the Department to fund Sackville's refit.

The Commander of the RCN, Vice-Admiral Ron Lloyd, is not abandoning *Sackville*. As *Action Stations* goes to press, he is in negotiations to find a Federal Department whose mandate is more closely associated with heritage and memorials to take responsibility for HMCS *Sackville*, Canada's Naval Memorial.

It is seldom that there are simple solutions to complex issues, *Sackville* is not the exception. The search for a solution continues, as Chair of the CNMT, I recognize with appreciation the time and effort already committed by VAdm Lloyd at National Defence in Ottawa and Rear-Admiral Craig Baines and his predecessor Rear-Admiral John Newton, Maritime Forces Atlantic/Joint Task Force Atlantic and their staffs. The CNMT Board has been diligent and committed in struggling with difficult decisions. We can expect many more meetings and complex alternatives to test our wisdom and resolve before we secure the solution to the permanent preservation of this Canadian icon.

It is possible the CNMT may have to conduct a fund raising drive to raise funds to secure the future of the ship, the Canadian Naval Memorial.

Thank you to all. We will keep you posted.

Captain's Cabin by Lieutenant Commander ret'd Jim Reddy

Cold Move - Clarence Hemeon



With a shift into our Dockyard winter berth on Wednesday October 25, HMCS *Sackville* finished a very successful 2017 summer season on the Halifax waterfront. Visitor numbers were up about 20% over last year. Most of our partners on the waterfront reported similar results. Underlying this busy season were Canada 150 activities, the late July Tall Ships event, and the weak Canadian dollar which kept locals at home and enticed our southern neighbours northward. Certainly the numerous greenbacks in the donation box were evidence of the latter.

The July Tall Ships event bears special mention. This grand assembly of sailing vessels occurs in Halifax and in other Nova Scotia ports every 3-5 years. This year's program started in Quebec and was linked to Canada 150. Because *Sackville* is physically located in the centre of the waterfront action and surrounded by these magnificent vessels, we traditionally offer assistance to the administration of the event. Specifically, we provide our "conference room" as a headquarters for the liaison officer team and we provide support to the opening ceremony and the signature departure ceremony, both of which this year took place on our jetty. Our Tall Ships participation goes a long way to firming up our place as a working Halifax waterfront partner.

Internally, much credit for the successful season must go to the robust "ship's company" of hired students and attached naval personnel, ably led by Chief Boatswain's Mate (CBM) Danny Rowe and A/CBM Kevin Waterman. Supporting the

younger team was our recently established Duty Trustee rotation which provides real depth and background to our "visitor experience". Thanks to Bert Walker for establishing this program last year and for hosting the two winter training sessions. Steve Rowland has very successfully taken this on from Bert.

While the ship internally and externally looks the best she has in years, there are very serious concerns with condition of the deeper hull. The Chair's column outlines the current situation with funding for a much anticipated docking work package this winter.

Finally, I would like to note that it is an ongoing challenge to present the ship and her story in a professional and polished way, given our limited resources in the curatorial department. That is an area where we are aiming to address over the winter months when the ship isn't on display. With the closing of the Cornwallis Naval Museum, we acquired many significant and beautiful artefacts that will surely enhance our onboard experience next summer.

Naval Association of Canada (NAC) AGM, St. John's, Newfoundland.

I was very pleased to represent *Sackville* at the NAC AGM, along with the Editor Pat Jessup and Past Captain Sherry Richardson. NAC, formerly NOAC was the force behind *Sackville* being acquired and restored in the early 1980s. NAC continues to actively support the ship and notably this year has allocated a significant grant to provide us with a modern public address "piping" system to replace our old, unreliable patchwork setup.

The weekend AGM events in historic St. John's were memorable. Gatherings in the Crow's Nest are a treasure for anyone connected to the Battle of the Atlantic. On the current professional knowledge side, a full day was spent attending research briefings and simulator demonstrations at the world class Marine Institute at Memorial University. The working meeting on Saturday was held at HMCS *Cabot*. The magnificent 75th Anniversary Mess Dinner for the Crow's Nest is reported later in this issue. All in all, the AGM was busy, many-sided, and remarkably rewarding.

Executive Director's Report

Do You Hear There?



Life Members Doug Thomas and Stephen Knowles of Aylmer, Quebec, first met in September 1958 as Sea Cadets in RCSCC Chebogue in Yarmouth, NS and have stayed in contact ever since. During visits to Halifax Stephen acts as a Duty Trustee onboard.

On the Waterfront: We had an excellent season, with 2511 visitors on Canada Day and a total of over 25,000 by the end of September – apparently a record! There were many activities to attract locals and tourists alike to the Halifax and the Boardwalk: it was the 150th Anniversary of Confederation, many Canadians wanted to tour their own Country, and there were inducements from Parks Canada through free admission to their sites. The Canada Day weekend included the visit of one of the USN's Aircraft Carriers, the USS *Eisenhower* (known as the Ike to American sailors) and her Task Group were in Halifax for a week and some of her sailors participated in the Nova Scotia Tattoo. Our Duty Trustees did a great job, and enjoyed the experience. Steve Rowland, our "Senior Watchkeeper" and Duty Trustee organizer, ensured that ran smoothly. Our Interpretive Guides, Nicole Cameron and Helen Hillis, were terrific and became key members of our team. In addition, we had two Officer Cadets and a number of sailors from the Fleet who were available to us between training serials. An "Appreciation Barbeque" was held onboard for our summer staff on 10 October, taking advantage of the splendid weather.

Contacts from abroad: The cruise ship season extends to the end of October when multiple large

cruise ships visit Halifax to sample our hospitality and autumn colours. 4 large ships with a total of 11,000 passengers were here on 3 October for example. Sackville is a must-see for quite a few British and American visitors – on 29 September we hosted two groups at lunch whose father / grandfather had commanded British Corvettes in the Second World War. They were amazed that *Sackville* had been preserved and that they could visualize their relatives' experience by walking her decks and viewing spaces and displays. Joel Rogers from Port Townsend, Washington visited for several days and took many photos inside and out: his father had served in one of the USN's Flower Class corvettes.

DEFSEC 2017 – we were at the Cunard Centre at Pier 23 5-7 September as in past years, and it was another successful event with quite a lot of interest in *Sackville* – awareness of our unique ship and what she means is a good thing. Several receptions were held onboard, attendees toured the ship, and business meetings were held in some of our spaces, such as the Trustees' Mess and Conference Room (in what had been #1 Boiler Room).

Website: The new website is now up and running, and I believe you will be impressed with the result. We are currently working out a few glitches to make it as user-friendly as possible.

Upcoming Activities:

Battle of the Atlantic Concert – Central Library from 1400-1600 Sunday 29 April 2018

Battle of the Atlantic Dinner – CFB Halifax Stadacona Wardroom – 1830-2030 Wednesday 02 May 2018

AGM 2018 – at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (AGNS) 1316-1600 28 June; Evening reception following, onboard *Sackville* 1700-2000.

Yours aye,

Doug Thomas
execdir@canadasnavalmemorial.ca
902-721-1206 (weekday mornings)

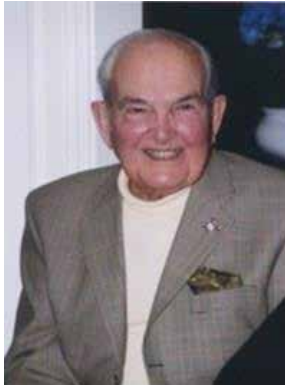
Crossed the Bar



Alexis Andre Bakeeff, a 1952 graduate of the US Merchant Marine Academy, Kings Point, NY who would spend much of his career as a teacher passed away in Halifax Sept 22 at age 89. His early career at sea included delivering supplies and aid to Europe as part of the post WW II relief effort followed by service in USS *Randolph*

and USS *Mattabeset* (executive officer/navigator). Later he worked as a computer programmer at Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, Cambridge, Mass and in 1964 commenced his teaching career in Massachusetts before moving his family to Canning, NS in 1969; he retired from teaching in 1990 after 13 years as a professor at the former NS Teachers College, Truro, NS. Survivors include wife Jean Elizabeth, children Graham Alexis, Greg Alexis and Natalie Alexis, several grandchildren and other family members in Europe and Russia.

Gerald Brushett, who joined the Canadian Army in 1944 and following the end of hostilities transferred to the Navy where he served for 32 years passed away in Dartmouth Oct 12 at age 90. During his naval career he served in a number of ships and shore establishments including HMC Ships *Magnificent*, *Bonaventure*, *Shearwater* and *Stadacona* along with undergoing training in air frames and instruments/electrical in the United Kingdom. His last posting was as a commissioned officer in charge of the aviation electronics section of HU-21 Squadron at CFB Shearwater. Following retirement he worked as a civilian computer programmer at Maritime Command Headquarters and later as a computer systems analyst with the NS Department of Social Services. He was an avid walker, active in the local music community and a volunteer guide at the Shearwater Aviation Museum. He was predeceased by his wife Dorothy; survivors include sons Timothy and Paul and daughters Julie, Angela and Jane.



Joseph A. (Joe) Carbury, who was one of five Winnipeg brothers to serve in the RCNVR during the Second World War and would go on to an extensive career as a sports announcer passed away in Calgary Oct 17 at age 91. He joined the Navy at 17 and served in DEMS (defensively equipped merchant ships) as a convoy signalman. Following the end of



hostilities he commenced his broadcasting career in Medicine Hat, later announcing football games in Edmonton, Hamilton and Calgary before being hired by the Calgary Stampede to call the chuckwagon races and other events. He was inducted into the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame in 2003. He was predeceased by his wife Rose; survivors include daughters Colleen and Kathleen, several grandchildren and a brother Tom.

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Brigadier General Colin M. Curleigh (ret'd)



OMM CD, who commenced his career in the RCN, and following flight training in 1963 flew the first Sea King helicopter to Shearwater and would go on to hold a number of senior appointments during his military career passed away in Parrsboro,

NS Aug 9 at age 81. He was born Aklavik, NWT, son of the late Assistant Commissioner (RCMP) George Curleigh and Jean Curleigh. A graduate of College Militaire Royale de St Jean, he served in several ships prior to qualifying as a helicopter pilot. He served in four Sea King squadrons, flew from HMCS *Bonaventure* and destroyers and had a posting to the US flying off several US aircraft carriers. His appointments included the Canadian Liaison Staff, Washington; directing staff of the Canadian Forces Staff College, Toronto; Commander of Maritime Air Group, Halifax and defence attache to the Canadian High Commissioner at the Defence Liaison Staff, London, England. He was a board member and active in a number of organizations and community groups including the Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo, Aeronautical Institute of Nova Scotia, Parrsboro Shore Historical Society/Ottawa House, Parrsboro Band Association/The Hall, Fundy Geological Muse-

um, RCMP Advisory Board and the Royal United Services Institute-NS. Survivors include his wife Nancy, children George, Jon, James and Sara; a number of grandchildren; sisters Mary and Sue and brother Alan.

Sage (Ley) German, who joined the Navy in 1944 and after Womens Royal Canadian Naval Service (WRCNS) training at HMCS Conestoga, Galt, ON and at St Hyacinthe, QC served on the West Coast as a telegraphist intercepting encrypted Japanese radio messages in Morse Code passed away in Toronto Sept 10 at age 91. For her wartime service in Victoria, BC and Bainbridge Island off Seattle,



Wash she was one of 50 Canadian and American telegraphists awarded the Bletchley Badge (named for Bletchley Park (England) that housed the Government Code and Cypher School). Following hostilities she married the late Commander Tony German, naval historian and author including *The Sea is at our Gates The History of the Canadian Navy*. She was involved in a number of business and community undertakings over the years, including marketing research, assisting the Canadian Ski Museum and managing several family businesses (hovercraft operation at Expo 67 and house boating in the Virgin Islands). Survivors include children Rick, Kiloran, Sarah and Andrew and a number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Commander James Bernard Grover (ret'd), a career naval logistics officer passed away in Ottawa Aug 24 at age 74. His career included serving in HMCS Ships *Iroquois* and *Nipigon* and postings in Lahr, Germany and Washington, DC; while serving at the latter he lectured at the National Defense University specializing in acquisition reform and shipbuilding. In retirement he was active in the Logistics Branch Association and an endurance walker. Survivors include wife Christine, children Heather Diane and Christopher Bruce and brothers Leo, Ira, Melvin, Brian and Nicky.



Larry Hartman. Word has been received of the passing of Larry Hartman, 93, one of the early crew members of HMCS *Sackville* during the Battle of the Atlantic. A Prairie youth, he joined the Navy at 17 and trained as a signalman. After first



being posted to HMCS *Baddeck* he joined *Sackville* in 1942 and served during eight of the corvette's convoy escorts across the U-boat infested North Atlantic. In 2015 during events marking the 70th anniversary of the Battle of the Atlantic in Halifax he travelled from Vancouver with family members to return to *Sackville* for the first time in 71 years and to share his experiences with fellow veterans, serving members and the media. Following hostilities he commenced a career with CBC in western Canada.

Diana Eloise Hennessy, who along with her late husband Vice Admiral Ralph L. Hennessy was a strong supporter of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust/HMCS *Sackville* and active in a number of military support and community organizations passed away in Ottawa Sept 5 at age 77. A graduate of Trafalgar School for Girls and the University of Toronto where she received her



bachelor and master's degrees in education, she served as a program director at Ryerson University, Toronto from 1971 to 1995. In 1996 she and her husband moved to Ottawa where she was active in the Royal Ottawa Golf Club, Church of St Bartholomew, Perley Rideau Veterans Health Centre, the Navy League of Canada and other naval organizations including the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust as an associate editor of *Action Stations*. Survivors include sister Deidre, stepchildren Diana and Michael, step-grandmother of Brendan and Twyla and a number of extended family members. In addition to her husband, she was predeceased by stepchildren Terence and Timothy.

Commander James Chapman Walter (Jim) Hesel



tine (ret'd), who joined the RCN in 1952 and would have a lengthy career in the public service and private industry following retirement from the Navy passed away in Ottawa Sept 21 at age 91. Following his 20 year naval career he served

with the Treasury Board secretariat and National Research Council and later worked in the private sector, including shipbuilding, the Canada arm project and anti-counterfeiting technologies. Survivors include his wife Inez, former wife Pauline, sons Nigel, John and Nicholas and granddaughter Julia.

Chief Petty Officer Ronald Albert Robertson (ret'd)



who served in the Navy from 1947 to 1983 and was a duty Trustee in HMCS *Sackville* for a number of years passed away in Halifax Aug 6 at age 88. During his naval career he served in a number of ships and shore establishments including HMCS *Naden*, *Stadacona*, *Portage*, *Micmac*, *Hunter*, *Magnificent*, *Quinte*, *D'Iberville*, *Haida*, *Algonquin*, *Margaree*, *Scotian* and *Nipigon*. In civilian life he was a supervisor with several shopping centres in the metro area. He was a charter member of the Atlantic Chief and Petty Officers Association and active in St Michael's Church, Spryfield. Survivors include Frances (Pat), sons Mark, Lance, Sidney and daughters Bernice, Nancy, a number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren, brother Douglas and sisters Lavena, Ella and Patricia.

George Robert Churchill (Bob) Sircom



who commenced his naval career at Royal Roads Naval College, served in HMCS *Magnificent* and in the Naval Reserve, followed by a lengthy career in corporate human resources, passed

away in Wolfville, NS July 4 at age 88. His civilian career included assistant personnel superin-

tendent with Fundy Gypsum Company, followed by senior positions with Minas Basin Pulp and Power Company Ltd and Canadian Keyes Fibre Company in Hantsport. He served as chair of the Halifax District Personnel Association and was active in the community, including church warden at St Andrew's Anglican Church, president of the Hantsport Memorial Community Centre and the Navy League of Canada. Survivors include wife Hilary, children Elizabeth, Katharine and Gillian and several grandchildren.

Master Warrant Officer John H. Smith, MMM, CD (ret'd)



a 30 year veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces and brother of CNMT trustee Don Smith passed away at Cold Lake, Alberta at age 59. He joined the CAF in 1977, completed basic training at CFB *Cornwallis* and qualified as a radio technician at the CF School of Communications and Electronics, Kingston, ON. During his career he served at a number of wings and stations across the country, including CFS Debert, 8 Wing Trenton, 5 Wing Goose Bay, 4 Wing Cold Lake and did a tour at CFS Alert in far Arctic. He was appointed to the Order of Military Merit in 2005 and finished his career as squadron warrant officer (SWO) for 12 Radar unit at Cold Lake; he was active in the RCAF Association. Survivors include his wife, daughters and brothers.

Sidney Wallace



a naval veteran of the Second World War, Life member of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust and a strong supporter of advancing the health and welfare of former service members passed away in Calgary Aug 21 at age 96. He is remembered by friends and associates as a strong supporter of HMCS

Sackville and all things Navy. He was very active in the Calgary naval community as well as the medical community and in particular the establishment of the Colonel Belcher Society and the Belcher Veterans Care Centre to serve veterans. He also served on the boards of the Naval Officers Association of Canada and the Royal Alberta United

Services Institute and was active in the Calgary Naval Veterans Association (RCNA) and the Naval Museum of Alberta Society. Survivors include his wife Beverley, sons Bob and Laurie, daughter Carolyn, several grandchildren and stepson Scott. His ashes will be scattered at sea (Halifax) in 2018.

Meredith Tilton Westlake, a member of a well-



known naval family, Life Member of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust and described by family and friends as a lifelong caregiver passed away in Ottawa Oct 16 at age 71. She was the daughter of the late Lieutenant Commander Murray Knowles and Josephine Knowles (Tilton) and was

part of the Centennial Year graduating class of the IWK Hospital for Children, Halifax. She married naval officer John Westlake in 1970 and was active in community and social groups in Halifax and Ottawa as well as three years in England during her husband's posting in the United Kingdom in the 1980s. In addition to her husband, survivors include sons Scott and Craig, several grandchildren and brother Stephen

Jane Lee Westropp, an educator and wife of Com-



modore Charles Westropp, a past chair of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust passed away in Halifax Sept 26 after a short illness. She attended the Halifax Ladies College and Queen Elizabeth High School and was a graduate of Dalhousie, McGill and Mount Saint Vincent Universities. She taught

in the Halifax school system and at the Trafalgar School for Girls, Montreal. During her early years she was an equestrian specializing in dressage and an active skier and later sailing with her husband. She worshiped at St George's Round Church, Halifax. In addition to her husband, survivors include children Amos and Rachel and five grandchildren. A memorial service is planned for June, 2018.

Lieutenant Commander Lloyd Williams, who enlisted in the RCNVR in Vancouver in 1941 and served in different theatres of operations during



the Second World War passed away April 28 at age 95. After training at Royal Roads in early 1942 he was loaned to the Royal Navy, serving in Canadian combined operation flotillas, on landing craft in amphibious assault and support landings in North Africa, Sicily, Straits of Messina and Salerno. In January

1944 he was appointed in command of HMCS LCI 310 of the 264th Canadian Landing Craft Flotilla that was assigned to the British sector of the D-Day landing at Gold Beach. Following hostilities he became president of the BC Rugby Association and later was inducted into the BC Rugby Hall of Fame. He joined NOABC in 1946 and served on various committees over the years and in 2015 was awarded the French Government Legion of Honour.

Warrant Officer Electrician Ernest Wooding GC,



a native of Toronto who was awarded the Albert Medal (later converted to a George Cross) for rescuing two men during an explosion in the engine room of a Fairmile motor launch at a boat yard in Orillia, Ontario in October, 1943 has passed away at age 99. The citation for the award noted that Wooding entered

the burning motor launch and demonstrated outstanding courage and presence of mind in saving the two lives. After training as an electrician he joined the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve in Halifax during the Second World War and progressed to warrant officer in charge of the installation of electrical equipment in the Fairmiles, some 80 of which were built in Ontario and other provinces. In civilian life he was employed with Honeywell as a technical services manager. He was predeceased by his first wife and remarried in 1995.





THE LAST POST FUND, A HISTORY OF SERVICE AND DEDICATION

by Rear-Admiral Barry Keeler (ret'd), National President, Last Post Fund

This national not-for-profit organization originates from an act of compassion and respect. On a cold night in December 1908, an unconscious homeless man is taken by two police officers to the Montreal General Hospital. Allegedly inebriated, he is left in a room to sleep it off. Later on, the Head Orderly Arthur Hair – a Veteran of the South African War – noticed an envelope sticking out of the poor man's coat pocket. It contained an honourable discharge certificate issued to Trooper James Daly by the Great Britain War Office. Daly had served for 21 years under the British flag and this document was his sole possession.

Trooper Daly was not drunk but suffering from malnutrition and hypothermia. He died two days later at age 53. His unclaimed body would be turned over to medical researchers before disposal in a pauper's field. Deeply shocked by the Empire's disregard for its Veterans, Hair raised money from friends and colleagues to give the soldier a dignified burial worthy of his many years of patriotic service. This was the catalyst for the creation of the Last Post Fund (LPF) in 1909.

The early work of the LPF was exclusively supported by private donations. Then in 1921, it was federally incorporated and began receiving regular financial support from the Canadian Government.

Since its humble beginnings, the LPF has ensured that no eligible Veteran is deprived of a dignified funeral, burial and headstone for lack of financial resources. Its primary mandate is to deliver the Funeral and Burial Program on behalf of Veterans Affairs Canada. To date, over 160,000 Veterans from across Canada have received financial assistance under this Program.

Eligible Veterans Include:

- A former member of the Canadian Forces
- A Canadian Merchant Navy Veteran
- An Allied Veteran who meets certain conditions

In addition, the LPF owns and operates the National Field of Honour located in Pointe-Claire, Quebec. Established in 1930, this beautiful military cemetery, the first of its kind in Canada, has become the final resting place for more than 22,000 Veterans and loved ones. The Field of Honour is available to Veterans from across Canada.

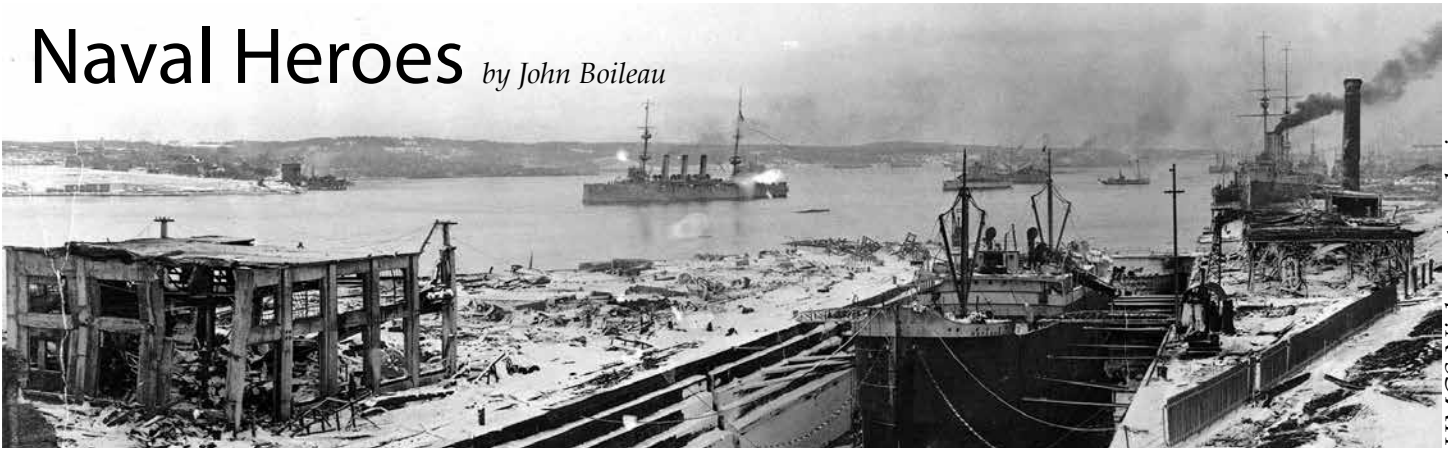
In 1996, the LPF created a program mandated to place a military headstone on the gravesite of Veterans who do not have a marker. It is estimated that there remains some 4000 unmarked graves in Canada. It is a huge challenge to find these sites and the Fund looks to everyone for help in making their discovery and reporting their whereabouts.

Please do whatever you are able to ensure Veterans and their families are aware of the LPF. After all, "To honour and protect in death seems but a small return to those who have protected their country in life", wrote Arthur Hair, founder of the LPF.

You are invited to visit: www.lastpostfund.ca or call 1-800-465-7113 for additional program details and information on how to make a charitable donation.



Naval Heroes by John Boileau



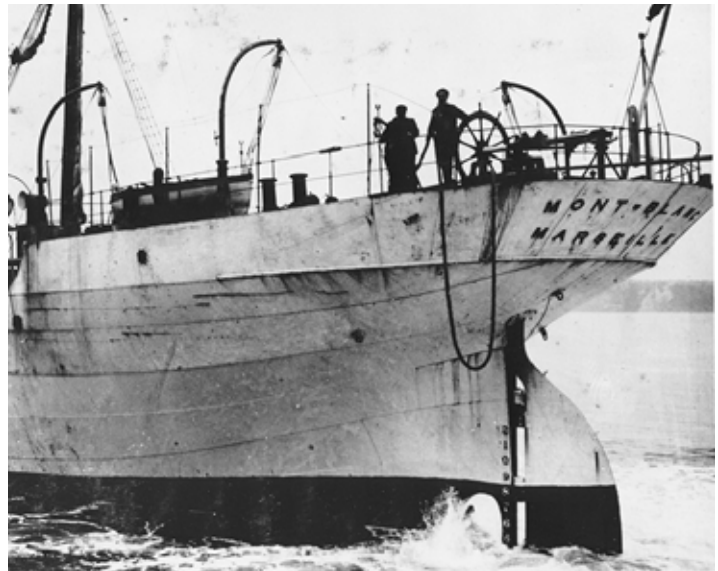
HMCS Niobe post explosion

Many city residents blamed the fledgling RCN for the Halifax Explosion of December 6, 1917, believing it had failed to adequately control shipping in the harbour. Yet, at the individual level, several sailors – Canadian and British – performed acts of heroism immediately before and after the devastating explosion.

HMCS *Niobe*, seen raising steam in the above photo, was permanently moored in the Dockyard about 640 metres away from Pier 6 – where the abandoned and burning French munitions ship *Mont-Blanc* drifted after her collision with the Belgian relief vessel *Imo* in the Narrows at 8:45 that morning. *Niobe* was the first ship to raise the alarm after collision. First officer Lieutenant-Commander Allan Baddeley sent *Niobe's* steam pinnace with six volunteers – Stoker Petty Officer Edward Beard and five seamen – under Acting Bosun Albert Mattison, to see if they could help the stricken vessel.

Tom Triggs and Lieutenant James Ruffles – both volunteers – in *Highflyer's* whaler to see if anything could be done to assist.

There were five sailors in the whaler with Triggs and Ruffles. They pulled with a will toward *Mont-Blanc*, at the time drifting helplessly about 1,200 metres away.



The *Mont Blanc's* deadly cargo included 2,300 tons of wet and dry picric acid, 200 tons of TNT, 10 tons of gun cotton and 35 tons of benzol.

By the time the whaler got near *Mont-Blanc*, now engulfed in 30-metre-high flames, the ship had grounded onto the harbour bottom on south side of Pier 6. Only the forward part of the vessel touched the pier, leaving a gap between the stern and the wharf.

The RCN-contracted tug *Stella Maris* was already there and had tried to squeeze into the space between the stern and pier, but backed off due to the intensity of the fire. Captain Horatio Brannen and his crew valiantly – and vainly – played their small, single hose on the roaring flames from what Brannen's son estimated was 45 metres away.



HMCS *Niobe* - Recruits

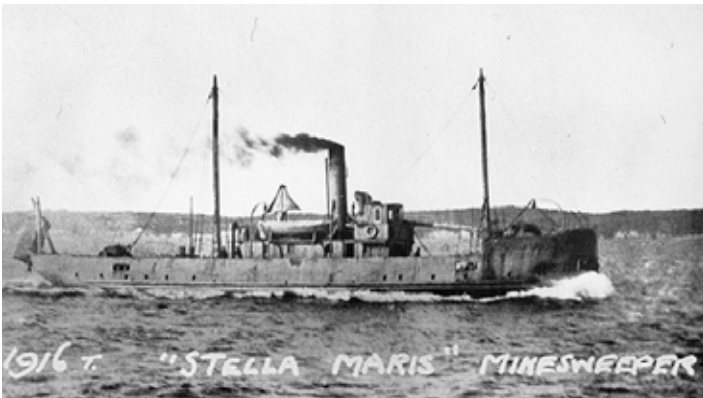
Aboard the protected cruiser HMS *Highflyer* anchored in mid-stream, Captain Herbert Garnett saw the fire from the bridge of his ship. Although unaware of the burning ship's cargo, he inherently knew the situation could quickly become extremely dangerous. He sent Acting Commander

It proved useless.

Then the tide came in and forced *Mont-Blanc's* stern against the pier as well. Even then, a considerable length of the ship projected beyond the end of the pier, maybe "a quarter of the ship," according to *Stella Maris's* Second Mate William Nickerson.

As *Stella Maris* reversed, Triggs came alongside in *Highflyer's* whaler and boarded the tug to confer with Brannen for about "four or five minutes." What they said to each other is unknown, but in the end, they must have decided that nothing could be done to fight the fire, as the next action saw *Stella Maris* tow the whaler – backwards – about halfway to *Imo*, likely so Triggs could assess the damage to that ship.

When *Stella Maris* was on her way back to *Mont-Blanc*, *Niobe's* steam pinnace came out from Pier 6 and hailed the tug. Mattison had already sent two of his sailors aboard *Mont-Blanc*. Due to the scorching heat emanating from the burning vessel's metal hull, they had climbed slowly up the port ladder – left dangling when *Mont-Blanc's* crew abandoned their ship – to avoid touching the hot steel.



As Brannen and Mattison conferred, the *Niobe* sailor suggested the best they could hope to do would be to pull *Mont-Blanc's* stern away from the pier. That way, the fire department could handle the now-burning pier, while other ships with proper fire-fighting equipment could deal with the burning vessel. Mattison's two sailors already aboard *Mont-Blanc* would be able to secure the hawser to her stern so *Stella Maris* could pull her away from the pier.

Brannen agreed, but after the five-inch cable was passed up, the two seamen decided it would not be strong enough to do the job; they needed the heavier 10-inch one. Brannen sent Nickerson below to get the thicker cable.

Minutes after the fire started on *Mont-Blanc*, Captain Fred Pasco, temporary Captain Superintendent of the Dockyard in the absence of Captain Edward Martin, was called at Martin's home in the Dockyard, where he was living temporarily, and informed of the blaze. He immediately tried to telephone Lieutenant James Murray, the Sea Transport Officer, but instead made contact with Lieutenant Poole, Murray's second-in-command.

With the Dockyard and all its resources under his temporary command, Pasco ordered Poole to send the tugs *W.H. Lee*, *Gopher*, *Musquash* and any other available ones with pumps to the burning vessel as quickly as possible.

At 9:04:35 a.m., *Mont-Blanc* blew up.



Photograph taken by Royal Navy Lieutenant Victor Magnus show the moment the *Imo* and *Mont Blanc* collide 6 Decembe 1917.

The explosion tore through the ship and her cargo at speeds of approximately 7,600 metres per second, created temperatures in excess of 3,000C



Stella Maris wrecked

and vapourized the water surrounding the ship. The vessel simply disappeared.

The first victims were those closest to the burning vessel: crews of *Highflyer*, *Niobe* and *Stella Maris*. *Highflyer*'s whaler was lifted into the air and propelled towards the Dartmouth shore before crashing down onto the water. Only Able Seaman William Becker survived, although he nearly drowned before struggling ashore through icy water.

Mont-Blanc exploded as *Niobe*'s whaler pulled towards *Imo*, about 275 metres away. The force of the explosion blew *Niobe*'s pinnace and its crew to pieces.

Half a second

Although these seamen were the first to die, the time between their deaths and 1,600 others was imperceptible. It only took half a second for the blast wave to reach its maximum destructive power.

Some of the crew of *Highflyer*'s whaler received posthumous awards. Acting Commander Triggs received the Albert Medal in Gold, while Becker – the lone survivor aboard the whaler – received the Albert Medal in Bronze.

Similarly, for their actions that morning, the crew of *Niobe*'s pinnace also received posthumous awards. Acting Boatswain Mattison and Stoker Petty Officer Beard received the Albert Medal in Bronze, while the five other sailors with them received letters of appreciation.

The citation for the Albert Medal in Bronze for Mattison and Beard reads in part: "The boat's crew were fully aware of the desperate nature of the work they were engaged on, and by their gallantry and devotion to duty they sacrificed their lives in the endeavour to save the lives of others."

Aboard the tug, Second Mate Nickerson was just about to come up from below with the 10-inch hawser when *Mont-Blanc* exploded. Brannen and 18 of his 24-man crew were killed. The five injured survivors were below deck or shielded by the funnel, although two of them died of their injuries a few days later. Nickerson survived.

The explosion also set afire the ocean-going tug *Musquash*, which carried ammunition. *High Flyer*'s captain asked another tug to take *Musquash*



Niobe divers suiting up before the explosion

in tow, but the crew were unwilling to board the disabled vessel. Two British sailors, Leading Seaman Thomas Davis and Able Seaman Robert Stones, volunteered to board *Musquash*, now broken loose from her moorings. They secured a line and the tug towed *Musquash* into the middle of the harbour. Then they went forward, pulled the ammunition – by now badly scorched – away from the flames and threw it overboard.

The tender *W.H. Lee* arrived and Davis and Stones broke down doors to allow *Lee*'s fire hoses



Rows of army canvas tents on the Commons provided emergency shelter from the blizzard. People who still had their homes, covered broken windows with anything they could find. Photo credit: Nova Scotia Archives V/F vol. 243 no.18

Meanwhile, the surviving and uninjured crews of Canadian, British and American warships in harbour – and those that arrived in port shortly afterward – went ashore to render any assistance they could to the citizens of the now-devastated city.

Besides these sailors, about 5,000 Canadian soldiers – plus a few British ones – as well as some 600 army doctors, nursing sisters, orderlies and their treatment facilities provided immediate, organized and disciplined rescue, recovery and re-

lief operations, as well as devastated area access control and guarding against looting.

The crucial role naval and army personnel played in the immediate aftermath of the Halifax Explosion has never been formally or properly acknowledged and recognized, an oversight that has gone on far too long.

Editor's Note: The material in this article was excerpted from various chapters of John Boileau's latest book, 6•12•17: The Halifax Explosion.

During a 37-year career in the Canadian Army,



Colonel John Boileau served across Canada, in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Cyprus, in various command, staff and training appointments. He is a graduate of the University of New Brunswick, the United States Army armour officer advanced

course, the Canadian Forces Command and Staff College, the British Army Staff College and the British Royal College of Defence Studies. During his last five years of service he was military attaché at the Canadian High Commission, London, Eng, and accredited as Canada's first military attaché to the Republic of Ireland.

In his second career as a writer he has authored several hundred magazine and newspaper articles, as well as 11 books, including *Valiant*

Hearts: Atlantic Canada and the Victoria Cross, Old Enough to Fight: Canada's Boy Soldiers in the First World War and a companion volume, *Too Young to Die: Canada's Boy Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen in the Second World War*. He is active in a number of community and military support organizations including a governor and past chair of the Nova Scotia Division of the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires, the Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo Society, the Nova Scotia Army Cadet League, Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) Regimental Society, a life member of the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps Association (Cavalry) and the Halifax Rifles Armoury Association, the Royal United Services Institute of Nova Scotia, Halifax Military Heritage Preservation Society and the Titanic Society of Atlantic Canada. He is currently the honorary colonel of the Halifax Rifles. In 2012, he received the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for his contributions to the history and heritage of Nova Scotia.

Commemorating Historical Figures

by Len Canfield



Edward Cornwallis by Joshua Reynolds (1756)

The gleaming glass and steel structures rising in downtown Halifax overlooking the world-recognized port would not have been envisioned by British authorities when they dispatched Colonel Edward Cornwallis and 2,500 settlers to establish a fortified town at Chebucto/Kipuktuk (the big harbour) in 1749. The settlement occurred during an uneasy peace between the British and French and the lead up to the Seven Years War (also known as the French and Indian Wars). While many view Halifax's building boom as progress others want to ensure the high-rise structures in the historic downtown area will not 'overshadow' the city's multi-faceted heritage including a military presence dating back to the city's founding.



When the settlers arrived in late June 1749 they found pristine forests and no other permanent settlements in the area. Governor Cornwallis selected a protected site for the town close to the harbour shores, below Citadel Hill; over time during war and peace the well-defended town would come to be known as 'the Warden of the Honour of the North.' Almost three centuries later the military continues to be an integral part of the daily life of Halifax and adjacent communities.

The development of the extensive Halifax defence complex on both sides of the harbour that started during the Cornwallis era to protect settlers and port facilities from land and sea attack carried on through to the 20th century. A number of the former defence installations are designated National Historic Sites, including The Citadel (dating to 1749), Georges Island (Fort Charlotte), Prince of Wales Tower in Point Pleasant Park, York Redoubt and McNabs Island (Fort Ives, Fort McNab and Fort Hugonin).



Martello Tower, Point Pleasant Park Reference no Notman Studio Nova Scotia Archives accession no. 1983-310 number A-120

The naval influence over the years (starting with the Royal Navy and later the Royal Canadian Navy) is much in evidence in Canada's famous wartime "East Coast port." The naval sites include the Royal Naval Dockyard (1759) that continues as HMC Dockyard; Admiralty House (1819), now the Naval Museum of Halifax; the early Naval Burial Ground (1783) at *Stadacona* and the iconic HMCS *Sackville*, the last of the Allies 269 corvettes that played a pivotal role in winning the Battle of the Atlantic (1939-1945).



Lord Gillford with Lord and Lady Clanwilliam at Admiralty House, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada in 1885.

Members of the Halifax Military Heritage Preservation Society, a volunteer educational society that researches, documents and promotes Halifax's extensive military heritage, feel the military aspect of Halifax's heritage offers an opportunity for greater recognition and support by the public and private sectors, including the tourism industry. As part of its activities, members have prepared several research papers that are available on its website: www.hmhps.ca, including "Historical Paper No 1: Edward Cornwallis" and "Early Settlements and Settler Experiences in Nova Scotia, 1605-1763" (including Halifax, Dartmouth and Lunenburg).



Eastern Battery, Fort Clarence under construction on promontory in Dartmouth overlooking George's Island, 1749

At the same time, recent events in Canada, the US and elsewhere have thrown a controversial (if not sometimes violent) light on how communities commemorate military and other historical figures whose legacy, in the minds of some, is not in keeping with current values. Halifax and its founder Edward Cornwallis have not escaped the controversy.

The situation in Halifax centres on Cornwallis issuing a proclamation placing a bounty on Mi'kmaq warriors (in October 1749) to protect the newly arrived settlers after the Mi'kmaq had declared war on the British (over the settlement at Halifax) and carried out several raids on the mainland in August and September. During a raid at Dartmouth four woodcutters were killed and a fifth taken prisoner. Some Mi'kmaq leaders label the bounty as genocide. However, there is little verifiable documentation to show the number of Mi'kmaq scalps turned in at Halifax during Cornwallis's three years as Governor (he rescinded the bounty in 1752); some researchers feel the number could be as few as one. The Mi'kmaq want the Cornwallis Statue in Cornwallis Park in downtown Halifax removed and Cornwallis Street renamed. After several protests at the statue this past summer Halifax Council voted October 3 to establish a "special advisory committee to advise Council on proposed changes in the commemoration of Edward Cornwallis on municipal assets, including Cornwallis Park and Cornwallis Street, and recognizing and commemorating the indigenous history... in HRM." Four of the eight member committee and the co-chair will be appointed from a slate of nominations put forward by the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs; Council will appoint the other four members.

In 1974 Edward Cornwallis was recognized as a "national historic person" under the Historic Sites and Monuments Act; a Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada plaque on the statue's podium recognizes Cornwallis as the "Founder of Halifax."

As Canadians progress reconciliation and seek meaningful/factual accounts of our shared and sometimes turbulent history, one question we need to weigh carefully when deciding which historical figures to commemorate -who stays, who goes-- is whether today's values and standards trump those of the past.

Commander (ret'd) Heather J. Armstrong Honoured by Alma Mater



Commander (ret'd) Heather J. Armstrong, Hammonds Plains, NS, a Life Member of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust (CNMT) has been awarded a Doctor of Civil Law, Honoris Causa by Saint Mary's University, Halifax in recognition of "dedicating her life to serving Canadians."

The awarding of the honorary degree by her alma mater (BComm '83) at the Fall convocation follows earlier awards and recognition during her career as a Canadian Armed Forces officer

Looking to the Future

Life Member Master Warrant Officer Gordon Rhys Watson, Corps Sergeant Major 2685 The Yukon Regiment Royal Canadian Army Cadet Corps, Whitehorse, Yukon



Seventeen year-old Rhys Watson has achieved a great deal since he joined Navy League cadets in Halifax at age nine, became a community volunteer and saved up \$1,000 to become the youngest Life Member of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust/HMCS *Sackville* in 2010. He is one of six members of his family to hold life membership in the CNMT.

Three years ago Rhys and his family moved to Whitehorse, Yukon where he has actively continued his self-professed "passion for citizenship, volunteering and music."

and active community volunteer. In 2012 she was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal and in 2014 Prince Charles presented her with the Spirit of Military Families Coin Award for her "significant contribution to the well being of military families."

Dr. Armstrong, a graduate of the CF Command and Staff College, Toronto and the NATO Defense College, Rome commenced her career in 1978 serving in both the regular and reserve components of the personnel administration and logistics branches in Halifax, Shearwater, Cold Lake and Ottawa. This was followed by senior civilian leadership positions with DND, including director of quality of life and director of military personnel structures and co-ordination for the Chief of Military Personnel.

In addition to actively supporting the CNMT, she is a governor of Commissionaires Nova Scotia, a member of the Veterans Ombudsman Advisory Council, Naval Association of Canada and a Dame of the Order of St George.

Pictured with Dr. Armstrong is Dr Robert Summerby-Murray, President of Saint Mary's University (L) and Dr .Paul Sobey, Chancellor (R).

Before leaving Nova Scotia he had graduated to sea cadets and later joined air cadets while increasing his volunteer activities with the Navy League, HMCS *Sackville*, Canadian Hemophilia Society and other community organizations. In 2014 he was recognized with the Provincial Volunteer Award and a Halifax Regional Municipality Volunteer Award (youth category). In Whitehorse he joined the 2685 Yukon Regiment Royal Canadian Army Cadet Corps (his third cadet organization) and is now serving as the corps sergeant major while continuing his school and community involvement. And 2017 has been an exciting and rewarding year for the very engaged teenager.

Earlier this year Rhys was selected (representing the Yukon) to attend and present at the



Encounter 150 Canada and World Conference for youth in Montreal. His presentation centered around “what role Canada has to play in the world, our responsibilities to others and diversity.” Rhys’s essay can

be read on his LinkedIn site at: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/my-opinion-essay-diversity-canadas-national-identity-watson/>

This was followed in June during the cadet corps annual ceremonial review when RCMP Chief Superintendent Scott Sheppard, CO of ‘M’ Division presented Master Warrant Cadet Watson with the Major General W.A. Howard medal which is awarded annually to 13 outstanding army cadets across the country.

Rhys through his commitment to the well being of others truly demonstrates his motto *facta non verba* (action not words) by serving others before self.



This is the second article in what we feel is an important contribution to our magazine. As Senator Art

Eggleton, Former Minister of National Defence remarked: “Many people think of Cadets as preparation for a career in the military, but it is really about preparing for life; about developing skills, the qualities and the confidence that will allow these young people to prosper and contribute to the Canada of tomorrow”.

The Army Cadet League of Canada was officially formed in 1971 to work with the Department of National Defence in support of Army cadets and has a branch office in each of the provinces and the territories.

The League is the supervisory sponsor for more than 400 cadet corps across Canada. With the aid of each branch office, the League ensures financial, accommodations and transportation support for programs and services not provided by the Department of National Defence to more than 18,000 Army cadets.

MAIL BAG

Your summer issue of *Action Stations* (page 36) was particularly interesting to me as it mentions my brother. He passed a few years ago but was a veteran of Dieppe and every major invasion after that including D-Day and southern France. He shot down a Ju 88 (Junkers: Luftwaffe twin-engined multirole combat aircraft) at Dieppe and was Mentioned in Dispatches. I am the youngest of 4 brothers all of whom served in the navy during the Second World War. My wife Helen was also a Wren serving in Vancouver and several other posts before ending up in Dartmouth. Her sister was also a Wren.

You have our station cards on display aboard Sackville or at least they were at one time. Check page 36 and the quote from the Naval Service of Canada 1910 to 2010 the centennial story for mention of my brother Norm. Helen and I are 92 and then some and I have trouble typing this so I will say good bye and good luck.,

Jack and Helen Mitchinson

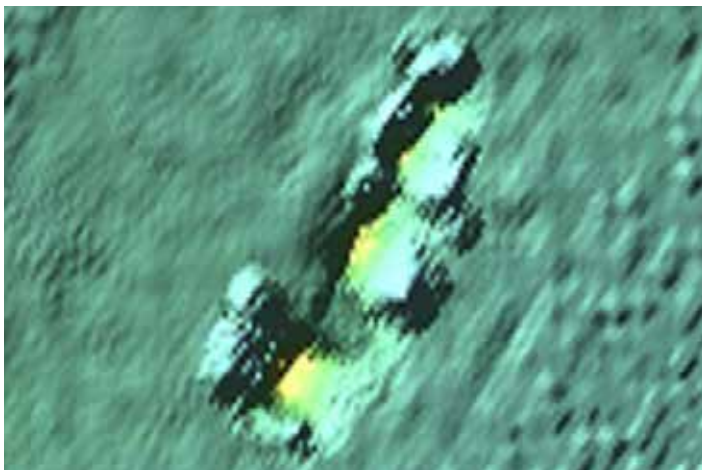
Commemorative Bottling HMCS Sackville

Glenora Distillers International Limited (Glenora) has joined together with the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust (the Trust) to offer a commemorative bottling of an eighteen year old single malt whisky in a tribute to the HMCS Sackville. The bottling is cask specific, with the casks hand-selected by Glenora owners. The bottling will be initially available to Trustees and the general public from Glenora Distillery. The price will be \$125.00 (tax included) for a 750 ml bottle. For each bottle sold, Glenora will donate \$25 to the Trust. Anyone wishing to order can do so by calling Glenora at 902-468-6516. Major credit cards accepted. Shipping charges if applicable) will be extra.



WRECK DISCOVERED ON ROCKALL BANK LIKELY TO BE STEAMSHIP SS *ATHENIA* by Carl Anderson

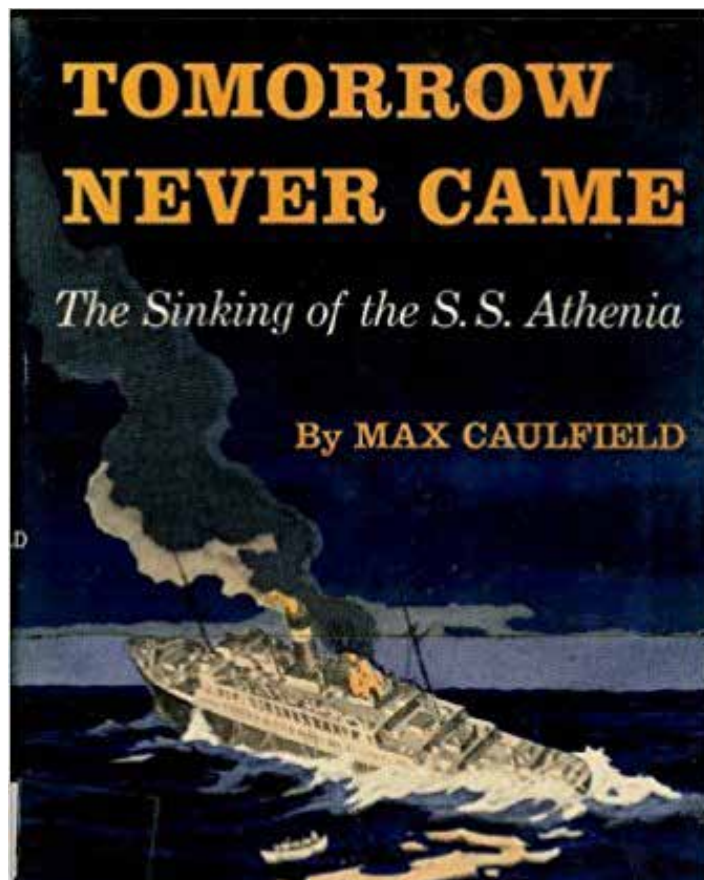
On 5 October 2017 BBC News reported that a U.K.-based professional shipwreck-hunter, David Mearns, had obtained sonar imagery of what appeared to be a wreck lying on Rockall Bank WNW of Ireland. The location of the sonar target and its shape and dimensions strongly suggest to Mearns that he has discovered the hulk of the passenger liner S.S. *Athenia*.



The sonar imagery corresponds to the overall dimensions of the *Athenia*. BBC

The Donaldson Line trans-Atlantic steamship departed Liverpool for Montreal on 2 September 1939 filled to capacity with 1,103 passengers, including about 500 Jewish refugees, 469 Canadians, 311 US citizens and 72 UK subjects, and 315 crew. Earlier the same day the German Luftwaffe had carried out its first air raids on Poland, and shortly before noon the next day, September 3rd, *Athenia's* passengers were informed that Britain had declared war on Germany. Some passengers were comforted by their belief that British-flagged merchant ships such as *Athenia*, already at sea before the declaration of war, would be permitted to proceed unmolested to its destination. That was not to be the case, however.

In the evening of 3 September, her second day out of Liverpool, the liner was steaming WNW across Rockall Bank approximately 210 nautical miles NW of Ireland. At 7:40 p.m., without warning, S.S. *Athenia* was torpedoed by the German U-boat U-30 and began to sink. She managed transmit a distress message which by the next morning brought six vessels to her aid- three Royal Navy warships, two merchant ships, and a large steam yacht. In all, 1,306 souls were rescued- 1,009



passengers and 297 crew. The German torpedo attack on the *Athenia* was the opening of what would become the longest battle of the war just beginning- the Battle of the Atlantic.

Two of the survivors of the *Athenia* sinking were fourteen-year-old Don Wilcox and his mother Dorothy, homeward bound for Canada. After their rescue by the Norwegian freighter *Knute Nelson*, Don and Dorothy returned to Wales where they had spent the summer visiting relatives. Dorothy was reluctant to set out again for Canada by sea, so she and Don settled down temporarily in Cardiff. By the spring of 1940 Britain faced a solid wall of German-occupied territory across the English Channel and North Sea. It became clear to Dorothy Wilcox that if she and Don did not soon take passage to Canada, they might be stranded in Wales until the end of the war.

The Wilcoxes set out again by sea for Montreal on 30 May 1940 aboard the Cunard-White Star liner S.S. *Antonia*. In an anonymous three-ship convoy escorted by the Royal Navy battleship HMS *Revenge*, *Antonia* and the fast troopship

Duchess of Richmond made an uneventful trans-Atlantic passage. Passengers were mystified by an unscheduled stop in Halifax during which passengers were confined to their cabins without explanation. Don Wilcox only unravelled the mystery of the ships' stop at Halifax nearly fifty years later.

Don Wilcox was a member of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust and an active volunteer in HMCS *Sackville*. He died in 2013. Read the whole story of the Wilcox's ordeal aboard the *Athenia* and their subsequent return to Canada in *Interrupted Voyage*, published in two parts in *Action Stations!* for Fall 2016 (pgs 9-12) and Spring 2017. See them at <https://hmcssackville.ca/resources/action-stations-magazine/archive>.



Survivors from the British liner SS *Athenia* are brought ashore from the Norwegian cargo ship MS *Knute Nelson* at Galway, Ireland. Credit: Hulton Archive



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Visit to HMCS *Sackville* by Bev Lundahl



CTB000839
Len Edward Lundahl

In 2004 my dad and I, in his Care Home, spent an afternoon leafing through his war memorabilia and reminiscing. My curiosity was piqued when I noticed a picture of the thunderbird mascot of HMCS *Quesnel*, the ship where he had served as an Engine Room Artificer. Where did they get this thunderbird totem that had perched up in the

mast of the ship for the duration of the war? That moment was the beginning of a fifteen year quest to ferret out the story behind the thunderbird. I didn't know it then, but this search would eventually culminate in a book to be published in 2018. The search has taken me across Canada – to Vancouver Island and Alert Bay, to the war museum in Ontario and to Halifax to visit the *Sackville*. Along the way I was able to meet with some veterans of the *Quesnel* and the people of the Kwakwaka'wakw First Nation on Vancouver Island to whom the thunderbird had originally belonged.



Dad also explained to me that day that the last remaining corvette was HMCS *Sackville* in Halifax harbour. It wasn't until 2017 that my sister and I finally made the journey from Regina, Saskatchewan to Halifax to experience firsthand the conditions under which Dad had worked during World War II; and to see the second home of the thunderbird. That week in Halifax, we boarded

Sackville three times and climbed up and down throughout the interior. Especially interesting for us was the engine room where Dad had worked, and the tiller flats. The tiller flats were where the sailors back in 1942 had hidden the thunderbird when they first scrambled aboard the *Quesnel* with it at Alert Bay B.C.



Bev Lundahl (R) and her sister Carol Turcanik on their recent visit which included a tour of the Engine Room.

We were privileged to have lunch aboard the *Sackville* with Captain Jim Reddy and others in the Trustees' Mess and to attend the Convoy Cup event the next day. This visit to Halifax and the *Sackville* has become part of my upcoming book, *Thunderbird, the Quesnel and the Sea*.

That day back in 2004 Dad also showed me the program he had saved from the December 1945 reception held in Macoun, SK for the 70 veterans who had returned home from the war. My grade 12 graduating class of 1964 was planning a 40 year class reunion in Macoun that same summer of 2004, where I shared this program with my fellow classmates and others in the community. One of them, Mary Rose Boyer, a history buff was so intrigued with this program that she initiated a class project to have all the Macoun veterans' names engraved on a memorial cairn. It was installed in Macoun and the dedication took place in 2008.

Every Remembrance Day now I am with my late father (1921-2010) on the *Quesnel*, a memory that my visit to the *Sackville* has reinforced. And I remember Mary Rose Boyer (1946-2012), whose enthusiasm for honouring our veterans spurred me on to further explore my dad's story, a small slice of WW II history that has grown to be a broader Canadian story.

HMCS QUESNEL



Quesnel alongside in Sorel after being paid off. Of note is that the thunderbird is already missing from her mast.

A Flower-Class Corvette, she was named for the town of Quesnel, BC, built by Victoria Machinery Deport Co., Ltd, Victoria, BC and commissioned 23 May 1941 at Esquimalt. Her war was typical of many Canadian corvettes. After her "shake down" cruise to Prince Rupert in June 1941, the remainder of the year was spent performing various duties such as ASW training, towing gunnery targets and providing sea training to junior officers from Royal Roads. Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, *Quesnel* was part of the rounding-up of Japanese fishing vessels on the west coast of Vancouver Island. She also acted as a tender to the battleship *HMS Warspite*, which had been repaired at the Bremerton Navy Yard in Washington, after being heavily damaged during the Battle for Crete in the Mediterranean and conducted trials and workups in the Esquimalt area prior to returning to the Mediterranean. She also provided protection to individual ships from US ports to Alaska, such as to the transport *RMS Queen Elizabeth* while she waited off Esquimalt for ideal tidal conditions to be dry-docked in Feb 1942. Returning to Esquimalt on 20 Jun 1942, she intercepted a message requiring immediate assistance for the *Fort Camosun*, torpedoed by a Japanese submarine, about 70 miles south-west of cape Flattery. Several Canadian and US ships responded but *Quesnel* was first on the scene. On approaching *Fort Camosun*, HMCS *Quesnel* picked up a contact and delivered a depth charge attack: visible results were negative and contact was not regained. The entire crew of *Fort Camosun*, 51 men, were rescued by HMCS *Quesnel*. With the assistance of two other corvettes, *Fort Camosun* was brought to anchor in Neah Bay for pumping out before eventually making it to Esquimalt for repairs.

On 13 Sep 1942, HMCS *Quesnel*, in company with HMC Ships *Timmins*, *Dundas*, *Edmundston* and *New Westminster* departed for Halifax via the Panama Canal. *Quesnel* was initially assigned to Western Local Escort Force until June 1944. During this period she underwent a refit, including foc'sle-extension, at Pictou. In June 1944 *Quesnel* joined Quebec Force and spent five months escorting Labrador-Quebec convoys. In November 1944 she was transferred to Halifax Force, going to Sydney for refit and, on completion late in Jan 1945, to Bermuda for workups. She resumed escort duty late in Mar 1945 until the end of the war. While escorting her final convoy, HX-335, HMCS *Quesnel* rescued 17 of the crew from the damaged *Esso Pittsburg* after VE Day, on 12 May 1945, arriving at Halifax on 25 May 1945. On 07 Jun 1945, she landed her ammunition at Shelburne, NS and two days later arrived at Sydney, NS to de-store. *Quesnel* then proceeded to Sorel, Quebec where she was paid off on 03 Jul 1945, sold to the United Steel and Metal Company, Hamilton, Ont., and was broken-up there in 1946. During her time escorting convoys in the Atlantic, HMCS *Quesnel* participated in 48 convoys.

Editor's note:

Upon her return to Saskatchewan, Bev visited Trustee and Battle of the Atlantic Veteran Don Bowman, who at one time was her neighbour in Regina. "He laughed when I told him we had to go all the way to Halifax to find out he was in the Wascana." Don, the author of *My Battle of the Atlantic*, served in HMCS *Edmunston* during the war.





Niobe at Daybreak - Peter Rindisbacher

HMCS NIOBE – PROTECTED CRUISER AND UK MANNING DEPOT

This issue's namesake ship is HMCS *Niobe*, the 11,000 ton cruiser which arrived in Halifax on Trafalgar Day, 1910; and HMCS *Niobe*, the shore establishment in the UK during World War II. After a series of negotiations between Canada and the Admiralty over the composition of the newly formed Canadian Navy, the protected cruiser (armour protection over vital spaces, such as machinery) HMS *Niobe* was acquired to form the nucleus of the east coast fleet – her main attribute was size, enabling her accommodate and train many junior officers and men. The newly renamed HMCS *Niobe* was transferred to Canada on 6 September 1910, after commissioning at Devonport Dockyard. Before departing Great Britain, *Niobe* and the smaller cruiser *Rainbow* were modified in order to meet the requirement of training vessels for the embryonic Canadian navy. This required the installation of new heating systems, an up-to-date galley and the latest in Marconi wireless radio.

Niobe reached Halifax, Nova Scotia on 21 October 1910, her entry into the harbour timed to coincide with Trafalgar Day. After commissioning, the status of the new Canadian vessels and their ability to operate independently of the Royal

Navy arose and prevented the ships from leaving coastal waters until the matter was settled. This initially limited *Niobe* to training duties in Halifax and prevented her from making a tour of the Caribbean Sea.

After departing on a training cruise, *Niobe* ran aground in fog off Cape Sable, Nova Scotia, on the night of 30–31 July 1911. Damage control saved the ship. The repairs took six months, completing in January 1912 and she had a permanently reduced maximum speed as a result. The resulting court martial found that the navigating officer had not been on the bridge when he should have been, and also found the captain negligent in not ensuring his officers were performing their duties properly.

Having been laid up after repair, *Niobe's* condition gradually deteriorated. She was effectively rotting at her berth in 1913. However, with the outbreak of war, she was ordered to be brought up to an acceptable state of readiness for combat purposes. This was difficult as her crew had been sent west when she was laid up. In order to fill out its crew, the sloops *Shearwater* and *Algerine*, which had passed into Canadian control, were paid off at Esquimalt, BC and their crews sent to Halifax. In September 1914, *Niobe* travelled to the Dominion of Newfoundland to pick up a contin-



gent of 107 Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve sailors to complete her complement.

After returning to operational status, *Niobe* patrolled the Gulf of St. Lawrence, escorted the Royal Canadian Regiment to Bermuda for garrison duties, and then joined the Royal Navy's 4th Cruiser Squadron on the North Atlantic and West Indies Station. She was engaged in intercepting German ships along the American coast until July 1915. As the patrol work continued *Niobe* began to wear out. Her final patrol was 4–17 July 1915, after which the cruiser returned to Halifax. Her funnels were found to be rapidly deteriorating, her boilers were worn and her bulkheads were in poor shape. As a result, *Niobe* was paid off on 6 September 1915 to become a depot ship in Halifax Dockyard.

On 6 December 1917, the ammunition ship *SS Mont-Blanc* was rammed by the *SS Imo* in the Narrows of Halifax Harbour, causing *Mont-Blanc* to catch fire. Laden with huge quantities of explosives, the ship was abandoned by her crew and left to drift through the harbour. *Niobe* was laid up in harbour at the time and the alarm was raised aboard the ship once the danger was known. Warrant Officer Albert Mattison and six men sailed to *Mont-Blanc* in *Niobe's* steam pinnace and boarded the ammunition ship in an effort to scuttle her. However, while the group was boarding, *Mont-Blanc* exploded, killing the seven men instantly. The explosion caused serious damage to *Niobe's* upper works, and the deaths of several of her crew. *Niobe* remained in use as a depot ship until disposed of in 1920, and sold for scrap. She was broken up in 1922 in Philadelphia.

HMCS *Niobe* – Headquarters for Senior Canadian Naval Representative in the UK, and Canadian

manning depot in London, Plymouth and Scotland during World War II – primarily for administrative support for personnel on loan to RN or training in UK such as for Combined Operations stood up for the Landings at Normandy and locations in Italy, France, and Greece. By the end of the war, 503 Wrens (WRCNS: Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service) were serving in HMCS *Niobe*).

Vice-Admiral Nelles was in London for the last half of 1944 and until retirement in January 1945 as SCFO (O) (Senior Canadian Flag Officer (Overseas): a position with no power or influence) for a time after being relieved of his position as Chief of Naval Staff (CNS, 1934-1944) in Ottawa.

As the first large ship in the Royal Canadian Navy, *Niobe's* name has considerable symbolic importance in the Canadian navy, being used among other things as the title of a series of scholarly papers. Models and collections of artifacts of *Niobe* can be found at several Canadian museums including the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, and the Naval Museum of Halifax in *Stadacona* which devotes a room to *Niobe*. There is also a Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps located in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia that carries her name as RCSCC 62 NIOBE.

On 14 October 2014, an anchor believed to have belonged to *Niobe* was unearthed at HMC Dockyard in Halifax. The particular anchor, and the location it was discovered, is consistent with being from *Niobe*. The anchor is believed to be one of her three bow anchors used to secure her in her new position following the Halifax Explosion. On 17 October 2014, it was announced that 21 October will be recognized annually as "*Niobe Day*" to commemorate the ship's arrival in Halifax in 1910.



75th ANNIVERSARY of the CROW'S NEST *by Lieutenant Commander ret'd Margaret Morris*

It was literally a dark & stormy night when the Sea-Going Officers' Club (now known as the Crow's Nest) first opened. The Evening Telegram, the local newspaper, reported on the implementation of black-out regulations and the treacherous weather on that icy evening in January 1942.

It was Rollo Mainguy, Captain (D) at the time, who had the vision for the Crow's Nest. He had determined that, for the convoy system to work more effectively, the sea-going officers of the Allied navies and the merchant fleets had to have trust and confidence in each other. Long before MBAs and Human Relations specialists were around to tell us how to run a workplace, Mainguy understood the importance of personal relationships in getting the job done.



Captain E.R. Mainguy, (Captain D - In command of all Escort Forces operating from St. John's) in the Crow's Nest, Sept 1942. Photo: Lt Gerald M. Moses, LAC, PA-204634

Equally important, long before PTSD was recognized as a legitimate condition, he understood the value of having a safe secure environment where people who have had a difficult experience can talk it out with their peers. Again, Mainguy was ahead of his time.

Colonel Sir Leonard Outerbridge (knighted in 1946 and later Lieutenant-Governor of Newfoundland) and his good wife Dorothy also are an important part of the founding of the wartime Crow's Nest. Sir Leonard agreed with Captain (D) Mainguy on the need for the Club and donated the space. In a busy and overcrowded war-time city, space was at a premium. Making the loft of a warehouse available was very generous indeed.

The Crow's Nest was probably intended to operate for the duration of the war only. However, the Outerbridge family demonstrated their generosity a second time when they donated the space again in the establishment of a post-war, all-services officers' club. Perhaps Sir Leonard realized that mutual support amongst veterans after the fight is as important as the mutual support during the fight. If so, he too was ahead of his time.

The island of Newfoundland was of huge strategic importance during WWII. The iron ore mines of Bell Island were among the richest in the world, we had the largest sea-plane base in the world in Botwood and the largest airport in the world at Gander. International communications was largely by undersea cable and many of the trans-Atlantic cables landed in Newfoundland. If Hitler had gotten a toe-hold on Newfoundland, he would have had an incredible position to launch an attack on the rest of North America.

This fact was quickly realized by both Canada and the United States. The "friendly invasion" of military personnel from both countries soon followed. Among the many bases and military installations rapidly constructed was Fort Pepperell which was located on this very site. There was also US Naval Station Argentia, located about 90 minutes from St. John's.

On October 21 we celebrated the 75th Anniversary of the Crow's Nest with a well-attended mess dinner held in the Paddon Building, CFS St. John's.

We were especially pleased to host Sackville's Captain, Jim Reddy who brought greetings to our dinner from Canada's Naval Memorial in Halifax.

Among our guests we were honoured to include four WWII veterans. *Lou Howard* made ten port visits to St. John's in the latter part of the war as an officer on board HMCS *Sarnia*, but he never once got to the Crow's Nest! He was the youngest officer on board and he was also the only one that was married, so he was on duty every time. He visited St. John's last summer with his wife *Hyacinthe* and he finally saw the Club! During dinner Lou presented the Club with the last

remaining pennant from HMCS *Sarnia* - the sister ship of the ill fated HMCS *Esquimalt*, lost in the Halifax Approaches on 16 April 1945. *Esquimalt* was the last Canadian warship lost during the Battle of the Atlantic. Lou was Mentioned in Despatches for his efforts that day.

In addition to Lou was *Arthur Barrett*, from St. John's who flew bombers with 420 Squadron over Germany; *Sam Huntington* from Cambridge Ontario, a Bridge Watch keeper on Minesweepers and *Bob Watkins* who joined the Navy at the age of 18 and was one of those famous prairie sailors. Also attending were RMC naval cadets Monika Pinto Lee and Gavin Ormand splendid in a uniform that is not often seen in St. John's.

Coincidentally this dinner was held on Trafalgar Day, a special day for the RN, not so much for the French & Spanish navies. It was also Niobe Night for the RCN. This year is Canada 150 and we are all grateful for this great nation of ours. However, instead of these occasions, I would like to remind you all of a dark time in Newfoundland history.

On Sept 4th, 1942, U-boats conducted a bold, daylight attack on ships at anchor off Bell Island, sinking two ore carriers. On Oct 14th, the Sydney-Port Aux Basques ferry, the *Caribou*, was torpedoed and sunk - resulting in a heavy loss of life. On Nov 2nd, two more ships were lost at Bell Island. On Dec 12th, 1942, there was a suspicious fire at the Knights of Columbus hostel. In all of these events, over 300 people lost their lives: military personnel from all services, merchant navy personnel, civilian men, women and children.

The Navy was heavily criticized, especially after the daylight attacks on Bell Island. However, what the Canadian Navy accomplished during WWII was remarkable. It went from about 3000 personnel and a dozen ships in 1939 to 100,000 men and women and 400 ships in the space of six years. That is essentially doubling in size every year! Imagine a large high school or a small college of 3000 students. Then make it 6000 one year later, then 12000, 24000, 48000 and suddenly 96000! Imagine building classrooms, hiring staff and teaching all at the same time. The war-time RCN did something much more complex: building ships, training and crewing ships - and fighting a war!



Commander Steve Archer, Commanding Office of HMCS Toronto presents memento to Margaret Morris to add to Crow's Nest collection of head dress.



Michael Hoare, London Ontario, King Wan, Vancouver, BC and past Commanding Officer, HMCS Sackville Sherry Richardson sharing a glass at the dinner.



L-R: Vancouver attendees Ron Harrison, Brian Cook and John MacLean admiring the Crow's Nest gunshield art uniquely produced by wartime artists for the collection.

TOURING SACKVILLE'S ENGINE ROOM *by Sandy McClearn, P.Eng., PMP*

Unlike today, where ships are typically powered by diesel or gas turbines, steam was the order of the day during the Second World War. Destroyers, cruisers, and battleships built during that time were fitted with steam turbines to provide better efficiency and higher speeds. Steam turbines are more expensive and are best fitted with gearboxes, so when it came time for emergency war-built convoy escorts - the Flower class corvette, for instance - the Royal Navy decided to go with simple, reliable, triple expansion reciprocating steam engines. The last of this particular powerplant in existence (of which I am aware) is the one in HMCS *Sackville*.

Since my last visit in 2005, the condition of the engine room interior deteriorated somewhat. Pat Devenish, CNMT trustee and former East Coast Fleet Chief ERA, has therefore led a clean-up effort to return the engine room to its former glory. Pat was kind enough to walk me through the engine room in October 2017 so I could get a fresh set of photos for my records.



Looking forward and to port, the engine cylinder tops reside under the grey covers. The red objects are pressure relief valves and upper valve rod guides. Piston heads can be seen on the port wall over the engine, giving an idea of the cylinder diameters. The blue plaque would not have been seen here during the war, but is currently fitted within the engine rooms of HMC Ships. Just below and to the left of the blue plaque, the grey object is the main steam chest and throttle valve. The hatchway in the background leads to a space over No. 2 boiler.

The engine room has what I will refer to as three levels, the highest being the catwalk from which the above photo was taken. Level 2 is on the

black catwalk, which brings you to the level of the cylinder heads and the original diesel generator and main switchboard. Below that, Level 1 is down beside the crank shaft and connecting rods.

Level 2



An original diesel generator, starboard side aft. The main switchboard is behind and to the right. The ladder descends from the catwalk over the aft end of the engine room. The genset's radiator is to the left of the photo, the alternator to the right.

The diesel generator provided electrical power for lights and other equipment requiring electricity, like radios and ASDIC (sonar). Diesel generators are still the method of choice for providing backup electrical power for modern facilities, with hospitals and sewage pumping stations as only two examples.

It is doubtful the electrical switchboard would meet modern safety standards, and the crew would have had to operate it in lively sea states in a type of ship that was itself known to be quite lively, and to "roll on wet grass".



Looking aft from the port side. The ladder seen in the generator photo can be seen to the left of the image. The light grey object to the bottom right of the image is the condenser. The catwalk at the rear of the photo is from where visitors view the engine room, as the rest of the space is not currently open to the general public. To the left, the curved Aiton bend in the main steam supply line from the boiler to the main engine allowed for expansion in the line and prevented stressing at the engine and steam throttle valve. Just out of view, at the bottom of the Aiton bend, is the main steam isolation valve.

Steam engines are “external combustion” engines, where the energy comes from an external source – in this case, the boilers. A triple expansion steam engine is a compound engine, in which steam is exhausted “...in to successively larger cylinders to accommodate the higher volumes at reduced pressures, giving improved efficiency.”¹ Each stage was called an expansion, hence the name. The steam is first fed to the smallest cylinder in the middle of the steam engine, and then passes to the mid-sized cylinder, followed by the two larger cylinders on the ends (losing pressure through each stage). While a triple-expansion steam engine only needs three cylinders, the final cylinder would have been too large for this installation, and therefore it was split into two cylinders and *Sackville's* engine has a total of four cylinders. Once the steam leaves the last two cylinders, it passes through the condenser which returns the steam to a liquid state, after which it returns to the boiler via some feed pumps, a feed-water heater, and a de-aerating tank.

Ever wonder why railways were once littered with water towers? Many steam railway locomotives didn't have condensers, and needed to refill their tanks.



Looking forward and to port, the condenser is in the foreground. The pipes feeding into the top of the condenser come from the two cylinders on each end of the engine. Steam driven bilge pumps are in the background. I was standing on a Level 2 catwalk for this photo, looking down into Level 1.

Level 1



Looking aft along the starboard side of the engine, the throttle handwheel is in the left foreground.



Closeup of the connection between the piston rod above, the connecting rod, and the crank shaft below.

Where steam once powered the engine to turn the propeller shaft, *Sackville's* propeller shaft is currently fitted with a hydraulic motor that when activated, turns the shaft and allows the engine to operate so that visitors can see it turn over.



Looking forward along the starboard side of the engine. There was not a lot of elbow room here.



A closeup of the reversing engine, with the throttle handwheel to the right. The throttle handwheel controls a valve at the base of the Aiton bend that regulates the supply of steam to the engine.



Adjacent to the throttle handwheel is the engine room telegraph, which relayed orders from the wheelhouse.

Corvettes didn't exactly provide direct throttle control from the bridge to the engine room. Throttle settings and helm directions were relayed to the wheelhouse via voice pipes, one for each purpose (there was a voice pipe for the helmsman, one for the telegraph operator, and one for the throttle operator). While the helmsman turned the wheel based on the directions from the bridge, another crewman listening to a separate voice pipe relayed throttle directions to the engine room via the wheelhouse telegraph, which in turn was registered on the engine room telegraph in the photo above. With no less than 3 crew members involved in this chain, everyone had to be alert to ensure that throttle commands were relayed and obeyed in good order. Presumably this made coming alongside the jetty even more exciting than it is today.

Looking through my older set of photos, I see that the last time I stood in this particular location, I was the guest of former stoker Charles Dunbar. Charlie served in corvettes during the Second World War, and later went on to work for Foundation Maritime, where he joined Foundation Josephine in 1947.

Charlie Dunbar in the engine room in 2005, standing in front of the same electrical distribution panel as the photo on the next page.



Apart from a mild rounding, rivets are supposed to be flush with the inside of the hull plating, and these rivets are somewhat proud of the plate – suggesting erosion of the plating. Eventually, the plate will thin to the point that it is no longer structurally sound, assuming some of it isn't already there. The necessary maintenance is tentatively scheduled for the winter of 2017/2018, but funding has not been finalized.

In the writing of this article, I owe much to the kindness of Pat Devenish, as well as Ian Urquhart, Neil Goodwill, and Keith Allen – the latter trio proof read and contributed to my original article on the Haze Gray and Underway website (<http://www.hazegray.org/navhist/canada/systems/propulsion/Sackville/>). All errors are my own.

Ten years later, I was present to see Charlie's ashes piped over the side of HMCS *Halifax* off Point Pleasant Park.



The ashes of Charlie Dunbar are piped over the side of HMCS Halifax.

100th Anniversary
Halifax Explosion Memorial Service
December 6, 2017

Fort Needham Memorial Park,
3340 Union Street, Halifax

8:45 am

The Halifax and Regional Municipality's 100th Anniversary of the Halifax Explosion official commemoration ceremony will be held at the recently reconstructed Fort Needham Memorial Park which overlooks the former neighbourhood of Richmond – an area virtually flattened by the explosion. The event will be on December 6, 2017 at 8:45 am.

The 100th Anniversary Memorial Service will follow the annual event program with additional guest speakers and special guests. Music will be provided by the Royal Canadian Navy Stadacona Band and the event will take place in the new Memorial Plaza in the Park.

For updates on local events see:
<https://100years100stories.ca/>

CORVETTES by Ted Letreille

Come all you boys come into the pub,
I'll tell you how, we sank the sub,
Before one line, you ever hear,
Set up four quarts of Molson's beer.

We were only a short way out of Algiers,
The sea was calm, and the sky was clear,
A better setting could ne'er been laid,
For a sub-attack or a bombing raid.

We knew they were waiting down the line,
A plane, a sub, or a floating mine;
My mate remarked as he passed his pack,
Don't be surprised, if you hear Ack-Ack.

I scarcely had time to light my smoke,
When the Action bell, its warning spoke,
Then over the pipe came the oilers yell,
"Full ahead boys; give her hell."

If you've never been down there it's hard to
know,
Of the crash and roar when the depth charges go
Over the side and off the stern
You feel her list as she makes the turn.

The deck plates bounce, the gauge glasses blow,
Asbestos lugging comes down like snow;
We would like to see what goes on up top,
Where would we be if our steam should drop?

From up on deck, we hear the shout,
"She's come to the surface" the guns let out,
Over the din the clatter and roar,
Comes the heavy thunder of the B.L.4.

Out on deck, they come on the run,
Trying to reach their forward gun,
With machine gun bullets they sprayed our side,
But again our Gunners opened wide.

"Cease fire; came the Captain's order,
"They've given up; prepare to board her."
Over the side went the boarding crew,
Each man knew what he had to do.

As they smartly went aboard her,
Not knowing what was in store,
They knew our Gunners wanted
To give her plenty more.

The wounded were lowered into a boat,
Others were placed in a Carley float,
Some dived in to swim to our side,
Many made it; others died.

They were brought to the Sick-Bay,
To be treated by our "Doc",
None were badly wounded,
But all were suffering from shock.

After a change of clothing,
And a cup of tea,
You'd never have thought,
They had been in the ice-cold sea.

Our boys were still aboard the sub,
They tried their best to keep her above.
Their efforts were futile; it was no use,
Her hull had taken too much abuse.

They waited too long to take their leave,
As the bow took a dive and the stern a heave,
She started down on her last long dive,
They were lucky they all got off alive.

You must admit she'd have been a prize,
To be brought in by a ship our size,
But after all, who are we to say,
We may get a chance some other day.

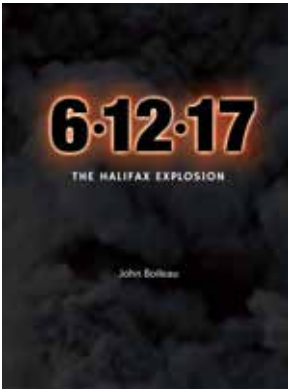
Let's drink a toast to Canada's fleet;
We know it's small, but hard to beat.
Her men, no doubt, you all have met,
The ones who man our small corvettes.



HMCS Ville de Québec Gets a Sub
Painting by: Commander Thomas H. Beament
Canadian War Museum 10043

Book Review

by Doug Thomas



6-12-17: The Halifax Explosion,

by John Boileau,

MacIntyre Purcell Publishing, Inc., Lunenburg, NS 2017. Many colour and B&W illustrations and bibliography. Hard cover 9" x 12", 106 pages, \$35.95

John Boileau, a retired Army Colonel and ardent amateur historian, has written many books – most with a Halifax connection. This book describes the Halifax Explosion of 1917: the largest man-made explosion before the atomic bombs dropped in Japan in 1945 to end the Second World War. This is a very timely book, with many commemorations planned for the coming months to mark the centennial of a seminal event in the history of Halifax, and the nation.

Boileau sets the scene with a brief history of Halifax and what it was like to live in those times, and then describes the events leading up to the fateful morning of 06 December 1917. The British Empire, which included Canada, was at war with Germany and its Allies. By this stage of the war, the Canadian army was a seasoned, well-led force and had several recent and significant victories under its belt: Vimy Ridge and Hill 70, near Lens, France. A stalemate between the warring armies on the Western Front would soon be broken with the infusion of fresh troops coming from the United States which had declared war in April 1917.

There is a very good recounting of the events leading up to the explosion, including how an American vessel, the SS (Steam Ship) *Clara*, proceeding up the harbour enroute to the Basin on the wrong side, played a role in complicating the movements of *Imo* and *Mont-Blanc* in the Narrows. Maps, details of the vessels, statements of the participants, and discussion of the efforts to move the damaged vessels and put out the flames are described in detail, as are the horrific events ashore. About 2000 people were killed by the explosion and 8000 were injured. The explo-

sion flattened many buildings in the north end of the city, which then caught fire from their coal- and wood-stoves. To add insult to injury, a major snowstorm hit the area the next day and many homeless people sought.

HMCS *Niobe*, the elderly cruiser being employed as a depot ship in the north end of the Dockyard, received serious damage from the blast. Some of her ship's company were killed, including the 7-man crew of her steam pinnace which had been sent to help put out the fire onboard *Mont-Blanc*. Similarly, a whaler from the cruiser HMS *High-flyer* on a similar mission was lost with all but one of her crew.

6-12-17 has a great deal of information about many aspects of the Explosion: the contribution of the many soldiers and sailors who helped to alleviate suffering, searched for survivors, set up emergency housing and rendered medical assistance. Halifax was a major staging point for transportation of army units to Europe: among the 5000 soldiers in Halifax on that fateful day were 600 medical personnel along with military treatment facilities which made a huge contribution in the immediate aftermath. Sailors from the British, American and Canadian ships in harbour participated as well, although Canadian sailors ashore were rightly most concerned with the welfare of their own families, many of whom had suffered in the explosion and subsequent fire.

The book goes on to describe the relief commit-



George Arthur, wounded in the explosion, with nurse Elizabeth Choate, A.C. Ratshesky and an unnamed man. Photographer: Richard W. Sears, Boston. From the Papers of Abraham C. Ratshesky, Jewish Heritage Center at New England Historic Genealogical Society

tees, American aid, recovery of the dead and burials, and housing construction including the Hydrostone district in north Halifax – now a highly sought location for young professionals. The Inquiry into what caused the accident, and



The Relief Fund from Massachusetts contributed \$750,000 in goods, furniture and assistance. Photo: Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax NS (negative: N-7012)

the subsequent trials of three individuals: the surviving captain and pilot of the *Mont-Blanc*, and the Navy's King's Harbour-Master Commander Evan Wyatt, will be of interest to the reader.

There was definitely a concerted attempt by authorities to find scapegoats and the pilot Francis Mackey and Cdr. Evan Wyatt bore the brunt of it. The captain of *Mont-Blanc* was back at sea and in command by the summer after the conclusion of legal proceedings.

John Boileau also relates events in and around the harbour during World War II. Again thousands of ships loaded with explosives and munitions assembled in Halifax awaiting convoys to the UK. Inevitably there were problems: a ship with an explosive cargo caught fire in 1942 and another in 1943. On both occasions, RCN personnel successfully intervened and catastrophe was averted. Later, two months after the war in Europe ended, ammunition stacked on a barge at the naval magazine on the shores of Bedford Basin caught fire and started to explode. The fire quickly spread, and there were many who feared a repetition of the 1917 disaster. Evacuation of exposed areas took place, and a fire-fighting team formed under the leadership of Commander Owen Robertson, the King's Harbour Master.

Robertson had previously distinguished himself in the 1943 incident described previously. Once again, after several days of hot and dangerous work, the fire was extinguished. There was only one casualty, a sailor who first spotted the fire.

There is one vessel still afloat that survived the explosion. That is the ex-Hydrographic Service and CGS (Coast Guard Ship) *Acadia*, commissioned into the Royal Canadian Navy in both World Wars and now part of the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic. On 06 December 1917, HMCS *Acadia* was acting as the Bedford Basin Guard Ship, and she was located on the east side of the Harbour near the entrance to Bedford Basin. *Acadia* received minor damage – there were no injuries or fatalities. Every year on the 6th of December, *Acadia* hoists the same signal flags that she flew on the day of the explosion.

This is a very attractive book: it is colourful in spite of the many black and white photos, with large clear images – some in sepia tones; coloured maps and paintings, and side-bar snippets which provide details about some of the people involved in the accident and afterwards in the recovery of survivors and bodies, and the rebuilding of the area of devastation near the Narrows.

Although the Halifax Explosion and its aftermath were dark days in Halifax's history, there were many note-worthy incidents of bravery and kindness which are well-worth remembering.

Editor's Note: Following the publication of John's book he came across this passage from the Book of Revelation: 6: 12-17.

"12 I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, 13 and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. 14 The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"



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 converted luxury liner - requisitioned by the Admiralty - 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, wounded soldiers from the Front 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. The Newfoundlanders lost were from St. John's and coastal fishing communities from all parts of the Island including Conception Bay, Trinity Bay, Bonavista, Fogo Island, to the Port au Port Peninsula.

For the past 10 years the loss of HMS Laurentic has been remembered in the Republic of Ireland by The Ulster Canada Initiative in ceremonies in the villages of Fahan and Buncrana. Plans are now underway to erect a commemorative memorial at Fort Dunree in County Donegal, overlooking the site of the disaster. Included in this undertaking is a fundraising component to finance the manufacture of a fitting memorial. We hope to unveil the monument during the 2018 Laurentic Commemoration Ceremonies on May 18 - hosted in conjunction with the Battle of the Atlantic Pilgrimage to Derry/Londonderry.

Donations are most welcome at our GO FUND ME site <https://www.gofundme.com/laurentic> or by cheque or money order made payable to:

Ulster Canada Initiative
5 Pairc na Haluine
Buncrana, Co Donegal
Republic of Ireland
F93 RF67

For more information please contact: donnymcneill@gmail.com, find us on Facebook at The Laurentic Memorial (<https://www.facebook.com/LaurenticMemorial/>) or visit our website: www.laurenticmemorial.com

The Laurentic in Halifax Harbour, Nova Scotia



