

# ACTION STATIONS!

CANADA'S NAVAL MEMORIAL MAGAZINE

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## Our Cover

A salute to our WWII Veterans and the concept artist on the occasion of the Royal Canadian Mint's unveiling of the Battle of the Atlantic coin onboard HMCS Sackville.

L-R, Norman Crewe, Merchant Navy, Captain Earle Wagner, MN, Lunenburg artist Yves Berube, Vern Toole, RCN and Captain Angus McDonald, MN.

**Photo:** Sandy McClearn



We had a full house attending the unveiling of the Battle of the Atlantic coin hosted by the Royal Canadian Mint. In attendance were our WWII guests of honour and Veterans of the war at sea. Among those attending were: Norm and Millie Crew with Steinar Engeset (above) and Peggy and Vern Toole pictured below.



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# Features

- 9 Interrupted Voyage
- 13 Canada Saved the Day
- 16 Remembering, Supporting HMCS Sackville
- 18 The Prairie Seaport
- 20 Namesake Ships
- 22 Merchant mariners crucial to winning WWII
- 26 Aftershock:  
The Halifax Explosion and the Persecution of  
Pilot Francis Mackey

## Departments

- 04 Executive Report
- 08 Crossed the Bar
- 17 Membership
- 26 Book Review

## The Battle of the Atlantic Coin

A watchful sailor presses his eye to the viewfinder of his anti-aircraft gun, scanning the skies for threats while unforgiving seas roll by below.

In dramatic detail, the \$2 commemorative circulation coin pays tribute to the men and women who served and supported the Allied war effort in the North Atlantic.

The central image of the coin design—a sailor aboard a Canadian war-ship—is accompanied by the depiction of two other Canadian vessels in the distance while a Bristol Beaufighter flies overhead.

Concept artist: Yves Berube



# From the Chair

by Captain (Navy) ret'd Bryan Elson

By the time this article appears the ship will have returned to her dockyard berth for the winter, after a very successful summer downtown. Halifax saw a major boost in tourism, and the ship has captured more than its share of the increase in visitors to the city. Anecdotal accounts go to show that the on-board visitor experience as been greatly enhanced by the presence of Trustee hosts. They have personalized the tours in a meaningful way, and I suspect that there will be a future payoff in terms of free word of mouth publicity to attract future visitors going forward. (I have heard that the number of cruise ship calls here could actually increase by up to 50 next year.) A great deal of credit goes to Bert Walker and his dedicated team of hosts, as well as to this year's excellent student guides. Backing them up as always was the ship's staff, under the inspired leadership of Jim Reddy. All who contributed deserve the congratulations and thanks of all trustees; they most certainly have mine.

Over the summer the ship hosted a number of outside authorities who chose Sackville as the site for important announcements and events. For example, officers from the so-called "five-eyes" countries-the US, UK, Australia, New Zealand and of course Canada - lunched on board as a highlight of their discussions at the Maritime Warfare Centre. Perhaps more significantly, the Royal Canadian Mint chose *Sackville* for the formal un-veiling of its new "Toonie", which celebrates Canada's contribution to the WWII Battle of the Atlantic. In so doing, the Mint recognized the importance of the last corvette as a symbol of that epic struggle, in which this country played such an important role.

At the policy level, the Board of Directors is addressing such matters as the possibility of staging a Chase the Ace fundraiser, a request from the Battle of the Atlantic Society for financial support, the need to re-vitalize our web-site, and the ever-present issue of preservation of the ship in a time of constrained resources. The Trust continues to pursue the realization of Battle of the At-

lantic Place through its Project Working Group, under the leadership of chairperson Ted Kelly.

It was in October 1983 that the newly established Trust acquired ownership of HMCS *Sackville*. A visionary group of Battle of the Atlantic veterans recognized the importance of the preservation and restoration of *Sackville* as a permanent symbol, and was able to acquire the re-fitted hull at no cost. Often against great odds they and their successors have worked to produce and operate the ship we are so proud of today. It was the founders who chose the evocative title "Trustee" for members of the society. As current Trustees, it falls to us to ensure that the founding vision will endure and flourish on our watch.



When Trustee Peter Stoffer left his job on Parliament Hill he decided to part ways with the collection of over 9000 ball caps he had acquired during his tenure as an MP. The collection had adorned his West Block office since 1997 covering every spare inch of available wall space. After giving away 2500 as he packed his Ottawa office he undertook to sell off the remainder to raise money for local charities. Peter selected not-for profit charities, including our good ship, HMCS *Sackville* as beneficiaries. I had the pleasure of accepting a generous cheque from Peter's sale that has been applied to the operation and maintenance of the ship. *Thank you Peter.*

# Captain's Cabin

by Lieutenant Commander ret'd Jim Reddy



*Battle of the Atlantic Veterans Norm Crew, Angus McDonald, Vern Toole and Earle Wagner with their new "toonies."*

It is late October and *Sackville* has just shifted back into the Dockyard for her winter maintenance period. As the weather cools, the welcome flow of Dockyard steam into the old corvette's heating system delivers comfort. Also, the regular and professional tug service of the Canadian Forces Auxiliary moved us capably as usual, highlighting the practical support we receive directly from the Royal Canadian Navy.

Our summer season was most successful from a visitor point of view. While final numbers are yet to be counted, we saw almost 10,000 paid visitors, the most we've seen since the Centennial year. This relative boom in Nova Scotia is much attributed to the currently weak Canadian dollar which attracted our US neighbours and kept Canadians at home.

Of note this past summer, Bert Walker took charge of the volunteer "Duty Trustee" watchlist which almost every day, put a Trustee at the gangway to welcome visitors. The aim here was to consistently augment the young RCN personnel and summer student tour guides with an experienced Trustee. Imagine the surprise of a serious visitor onboard when in conversation with the Duty Trustee, they discover that she is the recently retired diocesan bishop or that he is an active marine safety consultant or a retired bank investment expert. We'll develop this very successful approach for the future.

Elsewhere, you will read about the Royal Canadian Mint onboard unveiling of the Battle of the Atlantic coin. For everyone there, the highlight certainly was the participation of the four veterans, all of whom are well known in the Trust.

On a very sad note, you will see a report on the sudden passing of Jack Kelly who, over the last ten years, established himself as a force in our onboard visitor and hospitality activities. Jack brought with him a "hands on" style and the backing of his company PMA Canada. Both supported the Trust in so many ways.

As we settle into our winter maintenance, we will continue to host Friday lunches onboard. The Navy, through the Base Operations organization which controls Dockyard traffic movement and parking, allows us some latitude in our Trustee comings and goings, especially at Friday midday. The Friday lunch remains a cornerstone of our "outreach" operation where guests are hosted, Trustee updates are delivered, presentations are made and even some fun is had in a traditional sense.

But most importantly, this winter we expect to carry out the docking which has eluded us for two years. As has been reported for some time, our six-yearly docking, which should have occurred in 2014 has been delayed because of the Dockyard syncrolift unservicability. The lift has recently been returned to operation and is catching up with work. Through the winter, we expect to be lifted, surveyed, and repaired in the underwater hull where needed. The floating security and safety of the ship is paramount.



*Sackville docked on the syncrolift in 2008.*

# Executive Director's Report

*Do You Hear There?*

**Duty Trustee:** It has been a good summer for visitors to the Halifax waterfront, and numbers were up considerably to see "The Last Corvette." The Duty Trustee initiative was a big success in enhancing the experience of visitors, and the feedback from volunteers standing this duty was that they enjoyed welcoming and meeting visitors and showing them our ship. Additionally, I believe that they enjoyed being down on the waterfront during the summer: we will definitely do this again next year. If you are living outside Halifax and visiting here next summer, consider standing a "duty watch" onboard – that was the case with several visiting Trustees this year and one of them said it was a highlight of his trip.

One of the reasons the summer interpretation of the ship went so well, was that Bert Walker, ably supported by Tim Friese, organized the Duty Trustee roster and ensured that we were well-represented. This will continue to be important during the autumn, with many of our visitors coming from cruise ships. It is a rare day in September and October when there is not a cruise ship in the harbour, and there will be as many as five here on a number of occasions – potentially up to 10,000 people visiting the boardwalk and HMCS Sackville.



*Bert Walker, Senior Education Officer, HMCS Sackville and Duty Trustee, Bishop ret'd Sue Moxley at the Battle of the Atlantic Coin unveiling in the After-Mess onboard.*

**Interpretive Guides:** This summer's guides, Ryan Bullerwell and Ben Uhrich, mostly funded through the Canada Summer Jobs Program, did a terrific job for us. They were very enthusiastic, impressively knowledgeable about the ship and the Battle of the Atlantic, and were a real credit to the Trust.



*Even Mike Savage, Mayor of Halifax (left), has taken a turn at the brow greeting visitors as part of the Duty Trustee roster program. Pictured with His Worship are Ryan Bullerwell, Summer Tour Guide, Leading Seaman Andrew Beares (hidden), Duty Trustee Robert Stoddard and Jim Reddy, Captain, HMCS Sackville.*

**Battle of the Atlantic Concert:** We have met with the new Commanding Officer of the Stadacona Band, Lt (N) Patrice Arsenaault. He performed previously with the STAD Band prior to leaving the Halifax area in 2004, and is delighted to be back leading the best military band in the country and also to continue the tradition of supporting the CNMT's Battle of the Atlantic Musical Gala - in its 19th year! We are looking at a new venue, and other new ideas for next year's concert and will keep you advised. Please consider attending with family and friends - this truly is a tremendous musical event of wartime and contemporary music - with something for everyone.

**DEFSEC 2016** – we were at the Cunard Centre at Pier 23 6-8 September as in past years, and it was very successful: both for the exposure received by our ship and the opportunity to engage exhibitors and visitors to DEFSEC through our

booth, which was provided through the generosity of Colin Stephenson, CEO of DEFSEC and a supporter of our organization. Thank you to those who supported these efforts and helped “pass the word.”

**Naval Heritage Calendar:** Our 2017 calendar is available from our gift shop and has been sent to CANEX outlets in Halifax, Ottawa, St. Jean, Esquimalt and CFB Borden. This calendar is “a keeper” for all Trustees as it highlights the wartime experiences of L.B. “Yogi” Jenson with some of his superb drawings from “Tin Hats, Oilskins & Seaboats.” We need more of you to buy our calendars – for yourself and as a gift to friends and relatives. Thanks to the support of Peter Mielzynski Agencies (PMA) we are able to offer this calendar for \$9.99, tax included – consider buying more than one! If you would like to order a box (40 Calendars) to sell through a Legion or Naval Association Branch, we can cover the cost of shipping – let me know.



**Volunteers needed:** If you are interested in helping with AS in any way, please contact us at [pr@canadasnavalmemorial.ca](mailto:pr@canadasnavalmemorial.ca). We also need help with the positions of Webmaster ([www.canadasnavalmemorial.ca](http://www.canadasnavalmemorial.ca)) and Gift Shop Manager.

**Support of RCN activities:** As most of you know, we have a close relationship with the Navy who continue to support us in many ways. In an effort to give back, we make the ship available for special occasions, such as for Fleet Commanding Officers’ Mess Dinners. Another example took place 26 October when we supported the annual Maritime Warfare Centre Forum. This is a



Volunteers Steve Rowland and Tim Friese manning our booth at DEFSEC 2016.

week-long conference exchanging information on tactical issues among representatives from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and USA. It is hosted in rotation by a different nation each year, and this year 70 naval and maritime air officers had lunch in “The Last Corvette.” We also provide a venue for a social event during a North and South America Naval War Game when it is held in Halifax. Everyone enjoys the unique ambiance of our ship and the opportunity to step-back some seven decades into a 1940’s time capsule.

**The Last word:** David Harrison, a CNMT life member and military re-enactor, works at Dalhousie University through the academic year and has each summer off. We are very fortunate to have him helping out with interpretation of the ship during his free time. He wears a WW II sailor’s uniform which evokes his grandfather who served in the Bangor-class minesweeper HMCS *Georgian*, and he adds a special flair to the look and feel of the ship. We get many positive comments via social media about how helpful he is and how visitors appreciate his enthusiasm. Bravo Zulu David!

*Yours aye,*

Doug Thomas  
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902-721-1206 (weekday mornings)

# Crossed the Bar

## JOHN FRANCIS (JACK) KELLY

For supporters of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust, business associates and friends the passing of Jack Kelly (74) in Halifax in October brought back memories of a well-travelled individual "... with a great attitude and smile...and a can do approach to any task he undertook."

Lieutenant Commander Jim Reddy (ret'd), CO of HMCS *Sackville* said "Jack was an important part of our ship's team. He was a hands-on character...literally a 'jack of all trades' when it came to our onboard operation. His fine-tuned sense of people and hospitality backed up by the Peter Mielzynski Agencies Ltd (PMA) team resulted in extraordinary social events onboard including those in support of veterans causes."

Jack had a varied career as a tow truck driver, road manager for a singer, bartender and bar manager before becoming part of PMA, a leading national distributor of wines and spirits.

Peter Mielzynski, president of PMA recalls Jack's lengthy association with the firm, including carrying out marketing, sales, tastings and licence work in several provinces.

"When he moved to Halifax, Jack introduced us to the Navy, HMCS *Sackville* and the Royal Canadian Legion. He was an important part of the PMA team...(and) could be counted on to do whatever task was asked of him across Canada... and he did it in a professional way," he explained.

Jack is survived by brother Frank, sisters Jane and Eileen, and fondly remembered by Lori and Peter.

It is no surprise that Jack had many friends. He was well known throughout the Fleet and especially onboard HMCS *Iroquois*. Included in his Navy family was Leading Seaman Richard Courchesne, his neighbour and unofficial chauffeur,



**Jack Kelly "... an important part of the HMCS *Sackville* team"**

Richard organized a commemorative piece made from a 76mm round from HMCS *Iroquois* in his honour.

Jack was recently honoured by the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, Brigadier-General The Honourable J.J. Grant, CMM, ONS, CD (ret'd) with a certificate, so richly deserved, for volunteerism commemorating Her Majesty the Queen's 90th Birthday.

Jack's ashes will be committed to the sea in May 2017 during HMCS *Sackville*'s annual Battle of the Atlantic ceremony.

## INTERRUPTED VOYAGE *by Carl Anderson*

In September 1939 Don Wilcox, age fourteen, witnessed the tragic incident that opened the Battle of the Atlantic. In the year 2000, he wrote a memoir of that experience. This is Don's story, based on his memoir, his personal papers, and Francis M. Carroll's book *Athenia Torpedoed: the U-Boat Attack that Ignited the Battle of the Atlantic* (Naval Institute Press, 2012).

### Part 1- Setting Out

War clouds were rapidly gathering over Europe in the summer of 1939. In the six years of Adolf Hitler's dictatorship, Germany had quit the League of Nations and had begun to re-arm. Germany annexed Austria in 1937 and in early 1939 had absorbed the German-speaking Sudetenland. Poland appeared to be Hitler's next target and Britain and France pledged to come to Poland's aid if she were invaded.

Despite the threat of war 14-year-old Donald Arthur Wilcox and his mother Dorothy Wilcox sailed from Canada in June 1939 to visit Don's grandparents and other relatives in England and Wales. Don had been born in Cardiff in 1924 and came to Canada in 1931 with mother Dorothy and father George J. Wilcox. In 1939 the family was living in Baie Comeau, Québec.

At the end of August Don and his mother were in Cardiff with her parents. They were scheduled to return to Canada on September 2nd aboard a Cunard White Star liner sailing from Southampton. By then, however, the British government began requisitioning British flagged-ships for war service and Cunard transferred many of its trans-Atlantic passengers to ships of other lines. The Wilcoxes learned on August 31st that they were booked to return to Canada aboard the Donaldson Atlantic Line steamship S.S. *Athenia*, due to depart Liverpool for Montréal on September 2nd. They were directed to board on that morning. Just before 5 a.m. on Saturday September 1st Germany attacked Poland and started World War II. That evening Don and Dorothy departed Cardiff by train for Liverpool in order to board the *Athenia* the next day.



Don wrote: "On boarding the train in Cardiff, we were very surprised to find all the windows blacked out and the train packed, not only with people rushing home early from their holidays, but with troops on route to their bases. Every conceivable spot was occupied in the compartments and corridors."

The S.S. *Athenia* had departed Glasgow, Scotland, on Friday September 1st and proceeded to Belfast to take on an additional 136 passengers. The liner weighed anchor in Belfast harbour at 10:00 p.m. and steamed for Liverpool, arriving at 7:00 a.m. the next morning, barely two hours after the first German air raids on Poland.

Dorothy cabled her husband George in Canada to tell him their change of plans and just before noon she and Don boarded the *Athenia*. The ship was filled to capacity with passengers shifted from other steamship lines: there were now 1,418 souls on board - 1,102 passengers and *Athenia's* 316 officers and crew.

Two lifeboat drills were conducted in the afternoon and *Athenia* departed Liverpool at 4:30 p.m. on Saturday, September 2nd. Eleven hours later, early on Sunday, *Athenia* was just north of Inishtrahull Island, the northernmost island off the Irish coast.

Shortly before noon on September 3rd, *Athenia's* passengers were informed over the ship's public address system that Britain had declared war on Germany. Some passengers were comforted by their belief that a British-flagged merchant ship such as *Athenia* which had put to sea before the

declaration of war would be permitted to proceed unmolested to its destination. Nevertheless, many of the passengers wore their lifejackets wherever they were in the ship.



That evening, the Wilcox's went on deck half an hour before dinner for some fresh air. *Athenia* was 237 nautical miles WNW of Inishtrahull Island. Dorothy went to the promenade deck while Don went all the way forward to the ship's prow. As he peered down and watched the ship's stem cut the water the ship gave a mighty heave upward and Don was nearly thrown off his feet. The ship fell back with a heavy list to port. *Athenia* had been torpedoed.

"I had just got on the deck and we were waiting for the dinner-bell." Dorothy later told newspaper reporters in Wales. "I stood for a moment and thought, 'What a lovely evening.' Almost at that moment there was an explosion just under where I was standing. The boat lurched, and we were all thrown against the side so that I thought we were all going into the water. Then she seemed to steady herself."

Don made his way down two decks in total darkness to retrieve a lifejacket from his cabin. The companionways were filled with passengers heading up to the main deck and the lifeboats. The ship's list to port meant that only the port lifeboats could be launched. All the *Athenia*'s lifeboats were double-stacked, which meant the lower boat had to be launched before the upper one. "It was 'Women and children first.' I urged Mother to get in but she insisted on staying for the second boat and going with me. Our lifeboat station was the farthest forward on the port side, so that, due to the settling by the stern, the deck level at our lifeboat station was more than thirty feet above the water."

There was great difficulty loading and lowering the lifeboats. The *Athenia* was dead in the water and was by now lying broadside to the ten foot swell. She had a 15 to 20 degree list to port and was rolling heavily. As they were lowered to the water, lifeboats were swinging on their falls and crashing into the ship's side. Boats occupied predominantly by women and children were short on people strong enough to man the oars, and many of the women took oars in hand.

Don and Dorothy waited more than an hour to board their lifeboat. It was lowered to the water containing only ship's crew in order to control the swaying, and passengers then had to board by means of a rope ladder. The ship's list caused the ladder to hang in mid air instead of against the ship's side, making for a dangerous descent. Don described the procedure. "Two of the crew in the lifeboat were at each side at the end of the rope ladder. We were instructed to stop climbing down when we were about two feet above the lifeboat when it was on the top of a swell. When the lifeboat rose on the next swell we were told to let go of the ladder and jump backwards and that we would be caught by the two crewmen. We both landed in the lifeboat safely. Mother was directed to the bow of the lifeboat and I took a seat at the forward rowing thwart on the starboard side along with two other male passengers." Two and a half hours had now passed since the torpedoing.



IWM photo of Athenia lifeboat

Darkness soon fell. *Athenia* upper-deck emergency generator had been left running, however, and

a large floodlight near the bridge still burned. "It was, somehow, very reassuring to hear the generator and see that floodlight still shining," Don wrote. "In the early hours of the morning the generator ran out of fuel, and in the darkness and silence that followed, the only thing to be heard were the faint commands given to the oarsmen of the nearer lifeboats in the semi-circle to maintain their station, the waves slapping the sides of our lifeboat and the creaking of the oars. Nobody felt like talking."

Don recalled the arrival of the ships that would rescue the SS *Athenia* survivors. "After a couple of hours or so, we noticed some lights on the horizon approaching from the east, and we realized that we would soon be rescued. As the lights got closer, they gave the impression of a very large ship, but it turned out to be a small Norwegian freighter, the *Knute Nelson*, which was riding high in the water as she was light, i.e., no cargo in the holds. Large floodlights had been mounted on each side of the hull, to indicate to any submarines that they were a neutral ship. A private yacht, *Southern Cross*, and three Royal Navy destroyers arrived before dawn. Appearing a little later on the scene was an American freighter, the *City of Flint*."

Now those in the lifeboats had to board the rescue ships. Don explained in his memoir that it was not going to be easy. "Our lifeboat made for the first ship as it had heaved-to just outside and towards our end of the semi-circle of lifeboats. Some five or six lifeboats, including ours, made for the lee side of the vessel. The lifeboats were two and three deep at the forward and after waists of the *Knute Nelson* as it was only some fifteen to twenty feet to the top of the bulwarks at these points, so the *Knute Nelson's* crew had rigged cargo nets over the sides at these points up which everyone had to climb. These cargo nets were made of rope and woven in six inch squares. We were instructed to wait until the lifeboat rose to the top of a swell, and to avoid our legs being crushed between the lifeboat and the hull, to jump up as high as we could onto the net which was lying against the side of the hull. When we got to the top, two of the *Knute Nelson's* crew caught the arms of each climber and lifted them bodily over the bulwarks and dropped

them onto the deck. Two or more of the crew lifted them back onto their feet and, using knives, cut off our lifejackets.

"As she was carrying no cargo, the crew of the *Knute Nelson* were able to open the hatches which enabled the survivors to get under cover as there were only accommodations for the normal crew of about thirty. There were survivors in every conceivable spot. What blankets there were on board were handed out to those who were still wearing only night clothes and those left without blankets huddled together in groups of three or four to try and keep warm as the wind had now increased appreciably.

HMS *Fame* carried out anti-submarine sweeps around the rescue ships while *Athenia's* survivors were being taken aboard. In all, 1,306 of the liner's passengers, officers, and crew were rescued that morning. Of the 112 that were lost, most died in two tragic lifeboat accidents. Don and Dorothy Wilcox and the other survivors aboard the *Knute Nelson* were taken to Galway, Ireland. "As we were getting underway for Galway, Ireland," Don recalled, "we heard gunfire from one of the destroyers which was shelling the *Athenia* to sink her, as she could not be towed back and was now a hazard to navigation.



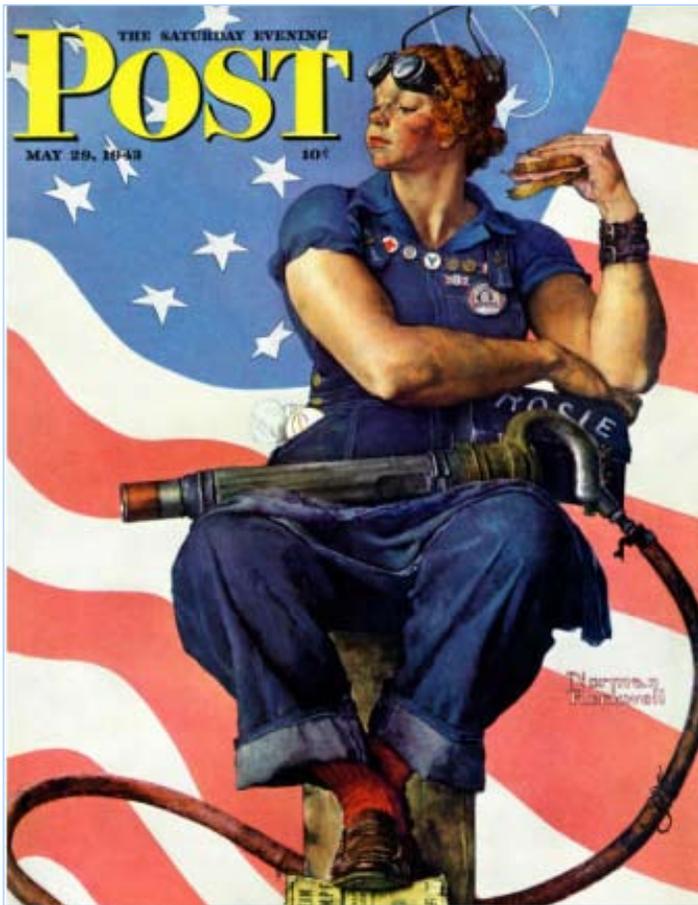
*Athenia* survivors disembark from *Knute Nelson*, assisted by an Irish soldier

"The crew of the *Knute Nelson* really did a wonderful job of looking after survivors during the return to Galway, Ireland, which was the nearest port. We were on the *Knute Nelson* for nearly thirty-six hours, during which time all five hundred of us were fed three times. Meals consisted



## CANADA SAVED THE DAY

Editorial in the *Saturday Evening Post* 1943



As this is written we seem to be well on the way toward victory in the Battle of the Atlantic. The menace of the U-boat recedes as Allied naval power grows and new techniques are developed for anti-submarine warfare. Land-based patrol planes and the rapidly growing use of converted carriers on Atlantic convoy have helped enormously. Britain, Canada and the United States are all sharing in this triumph over Hitler's strongest weapon.

What most Americans don't realize however, is that there were many desperate months when Canada stood between us and disaster.

Sea Traffic, like that on the rails, divides neatly into two categories – passengers and freight. Our passengers in the Battle of the Atlantic are troops bound for England, the Mediterranean theatre and other war fronts. They travel, heavily escorted in fast ships, and they are comparatively little trouble. They get through with but little loss. But the freight traffic is another matter. It is com-

posed of trade convoys, the rusty and battered merchantmen that deliver the goods. They carry fuel oil, gasoline, iron, ore, grain, frozen meats, tanks, planes, guns, explosives and hundreds of other products vital to the conduct of war. The size of these convoys and the frequency of their sailing are, of course, information the Germans would like to have, but it can be said here that bother much greater than you probably imagine. If the trade convoys had not been kept running, the Allies doubtless would have lost the Europeans war by this time.

### BEFORE PEARL HARBOR

There was a time before Pearl Harbor when the United States contributed substantial help in the way of escort ships for the freight convoys. But after Japan struck, much of our naval strength was needed in the Pacific, and we also had to use our fighting ships to guard the troop convoys crossing the Atlantic. The burden of protecting the freighters fell chiefly upon England and Canada. Britain, with a very limited amount of help from the Norwegian, Polish and Fighting French navies, supplied 51 per cent of the escort vessels for the trade convoys; the United States contributed two per cent, and little Canada amazingly, provided 47 per cent.

This does not mean, of course, that the United States was drowsing during those long and critical months. We supplied aircraft for freight convoy patrol and extensive ship and plane repair bases on both sides of the Atlantic. We guarded the growing stream of troops on their way to a global war. And after the fall of Singapore and Java we held the line almost alone in the Pacific. Also, it should not be forgotten that long before Pearl Harbor we had handed over to the British 50 of our over-age destroyers.

Yet the fact remains that we probably would have lost the war if the Canadian Navy hadn't come through in a spectacular and heroic way. It is not surprising that Britain, with her great sea power and resources, should have been able to shoulder 51 per cent of the job. But, it is one of the marvels of this war that Canada, an agricultural nation of less than 12,000,000 people could

have contributed 47 per cent of the vast fleet of fighting ships necessary to get the freighters across.

## CANADIAN EPIC

How Canada accomplished such a feat is an epic that should be written in large letters. When the war began in September 1939, the Canadian Navy was composed of a handful of destroyers manned by a personnel of less than 2,000 men. Today that personnel expanded 25 fold. As for ships of war, Hitler would like to know the exact figures: Canada's performance in the North Atlantic tells the story.

Of the 50 American destroyers which were traded to the British, Canada got seven, but while these were a real help, they were only a beginning - a stop-gap. During the early months of the war, the need became apparent of a new type of war vessel - a ship designed to combat the U-boat, to be launched in the large numbers in a hurry. There was not time to be lost. The answer was an improvisation - a happy improvisation called the corvette.

The corvette is a small ship - under 1,100 tons, less than 200 feet long, but broad of beam - yet she is definitely an ocean-going craft. Her steaming radius enables her to make the trans-Atlantic run with a reserve of fuel which destroyers may envy. Her ability to survive the most frightful weather the North Atlantic can dish up is an

eternal job to those who sail her. The corvette is slow, but the old-fashioned reciprocating steam-engines which were available when the need came - are highly reliable, and reliability means much of the Atlantic convoy route. Moreover, she is amazingly manoeuvrable. Her armament is adequate for the job she has to do.

## THE CORVETTE

Once the Canadians had the design for the corvette and knew it was the answer, they set about building it in numbers that would shock the Nazi high command if they knew. Large shipyards and small ones, even tiny boatyards whose experience had been limited to fishing boats and pleasure craft, responded in a way that made history. Many husky young lads from the Prairie Provinces went down to the sea to man them. Canada made do.

Now the vast resources of the United States are being brought to bear on the U-boat problem in a larger way, and the ratio of escort craft provided by Britain, Canada and America may be changing. But Canada is still doing her part and will continue to do so, we may be sure, until the day of peace. Is it any wonder, then, that the Canadian sailor may be just a trifle offended when his cousin from south of the border inquires with polite condescension, "Tell me, does Canada have a Navy?"

**"Tell me, does  
Canada have a  
Navy?"**

*HMC Ships Moncton (K139) and La Malbaie, June 1942*



## CNMT MEMBERSHIP UPDATE - FALL 2016

Many thanks to our new members. To date, there are 17 new Life members and 31 Annual members. (\* Bold denotes new member since last edition)

### LIFE MEMBERS 2016      ANNUAL MEMBERS 2016

**Heather Armstrong, Hammonds Plains, NS**

M. Jane Biggs, Westphal, NS

**Richard Bissonnette, Burnaby, BC**

Douglas Cleough, Truro, NS

Davis C. Edwards, Courtenay, BC

Duncan Elbourne, Halifax, NS

**Brian Flemming, Q.C, Halifax, NS**

Jim Lovett, East Lawrencetown, NS

Jonathan McCann, Lunenburg, NS

Peter Mielzynski, Oakville, ON

**Bruce Moxley, Hammonds Plains, NS**

Mary Olsen, Dartmouth, NS

John Pickford, Hammonds Plains, NS

Terence Rowell, Dartmouth, NS

**Peter Stoffer, Fall River, NS**

Lawrence Weldon, Mississauga, ON

Meredith Westlake, Orleans, ON

**William Allan, Dalgety Bay, Scotland**

**James Malcolm Bishop, Abbotsford, BC**

Alix Bovair, Halifax, NS

Kenneth Brown, Dartmouth, NS

Bruce Buchanan, Woodstock, ON

Eric Bullock, Halifax, NS

Sandra Carson-Drakes, Toronto, ON

Damien Ciotti, Dartmouth, NS

Christopher Connor, Dartmouth, NS

**Janice Marie Corbett, Dartmouth, NS**

Robert Creer, Dartmouth, NS

Norm Duinker, Halifax, NS

Mike Evans, Halifax, NS

William Factor, Halifax, NS

Margaret Ferguson, Dartmouth, NS

Larry Hartman, Vancouver, BC

Lisa Haydon, Bedford, NS

Thomas Lizotte, Cow Bay, NS

L.R. Verne Lunan, Upper LaHave, NS

Bev Lundahl, Regina, SK

**Gerald Mandy, Dartmouth, NS**

**Mark Mosher, Halifax, NS**

Andrew J. Munro, Middle Sackville, NS

Ray Murray, Lower Sackville, NS

John Oake, Enfield, NS

**James P. Scott, Dunbar, Scotland**

Frederick H. Seeley, Victoria, BC

Janet A. Shirley, Halifax, NS

**Dwaine Skelhorn, East Hants, NS**

Donald Soulsby, St. John's, NL

**Galen V. Urquhart, Dartmouth, NS**



*Stand easy at sea onboard HMCS Port Arthur*

## Remembering, Supporting HMCS Sackville *by Len Canfield*



*Meredith Westlake, Ottawa and her father the late Lieutenant Commander Murray Knowles*

**T**he volunteer Canadian Naval Memorial Trust that maintains and operates the iconic WW II corvette HMCS *Sackville* is one naval support organization that ably demonstrates that family ties and remembrance run deep in the naval community.

The Trust's mission is to preserve Canada's Naval Memorial in perpetuity to ensure that future generations of Canadians can have a tangible link to the significant achievements of the Royal Canadian Navy. In this regard the Trust relies on new members (trustees) and donor contributions to support ship operations and numerous naval and community events. Plans call for the 75 year-old veteran of the Battle of the Atlantic to be housed in the innovative, architecturally-striking Battle of the Atlantic Place.

The current 1,000 plus membership represents a cross-section of Canadian society and includes annual and life members. It is the latter category that has generated considerable interest among annual members who wish to 'upgrade' and those considering joining the Trust. In many cases it's a family connection with HMCS *Sackville* and other naval ships and establishments that is a primary reason for becoming a 'lifer.'

Meredith Westlake of Ottawa, who comes from a naval family, is representative of annual members who have become life members. Her father,

the late Lieutenant Commander Murray Knowles served during the Battle of the Atlantic including commanding the corvette HMCS *Louisbourg* and was an early supporter of the CNMT and restoration of *Sackville*. Following her father's passing Meredith acquired his Trust membership number and joined her brother Stephen Knowles and husband Commander (ret'd) John Westlake in continuing LCdr Knowles' support of the Trust and ship.

Captain (N) John Pickford (ret'd) of Hammonds Plains, NS held a number of appointments during his career including commanding officer of HMCS *Athabaskan*, flagship of Canada's Naval Task Force contributing to the UN coalition to liberate Kuwait during the Persian Gulf War 1990-1991, and project manager of Canada's Naval Centennial. He became a life member on assuming the life membership number of his father, the late Rear Admiral RJ (Jack) Pickford of Ottawa who commanded the corvette HMCS *Rimouski* (1942-1943) as a young lieutenant and would go on to serve as Deputy Maritime Commander and Commander Maritime Forces Pacific.

"When I'm onboard *Sackville* I think of my father and all those who served in corvettes during the Battle of the Atlantic and the hardships they endured but also the success they achieved in the most trying conditions. It's an honour to assume



*Captain (N) John Pickford, left, Hammonds Plains, NS and his father the late Rear Admiral Jack Pickford.*

his life membership number,” he explains. Commander Richard Oland of Halifax, another life member, served as commanding officer of HMCS *Goose Bay* and HMCS *Scotian*. He comes from a family with a lengthy record of military service including his late great uncle Captain (N) JEW (Eric) Oland who served as naval officer in charge Saint John, NB during WWII and commissioned *Sackville* in Saint John in 1941 and his father the late Commodore Bruce Oland who served as commanding officer of HMCS *Scotian* and Senior Naval Reserve Advisor.

Not all life members are advanced in years and careers but have abiding interest in HMCS *Sackville* and Canada’s rich naval heritage. David Harrison of Halifax, whose grandfather the late William Thomas Harrison served in the minesweeper HMCS *Sackville* 1944-1945 says he grew up in a household where history was a popular topic.



David Harrison, one of HMCS *Sackville*’s guides.

David, in his 20s and active in a reenactment group and said “...after meeting with CNMT Executive Director Doug Thomas and *Sackville*’s captain Jim Reddy on New Year’s Day 2014, I decided to become a life member to preserve my grandfather’s memory and to support *Sackville* by volunteering as a guide. It’s been a great experience and helped me to improve my RCN living history background.”

Commander (ret’d) Patrick Charlton, co-chair of CNMT’s membership committee says “the Trust

has been able to operate for more than 30 years due to the generosity and financial support of trustees and others from across the country and the corporate community. For many, it is a deeply personal remembrance that motivates them to have a connection with the Trust and to maintain HMCS *Sackville* as Canada’s Naval Memorial.”

Remembrance and support can take several forms including a memorial membership to honor a relative who has passed away, including memberships for children and grandchildren in memory of a deceased family member. A Life Membership is available for a one time donation of \$1,000, while an annual membership requires a yearly contribution of \$75. An In Memoriam donation honours a life of someone special with their name placed in HMCS *Sackville*’s Book of Remembrance. In addition, there are a number of Donor categories (covering individuals, military units, civilian groups or companies) with appropriate recognition.

For more information check out:  
[membership@canadasnavalmemorial.ca](mailto:membership@canadasnavalmemorial.ca) or  
 contact: [execdir@canadasnavalmemorial.ca](mailto:execdir@canadasnavalmemorial.ca)  
 Tel: (902) 721-1206.

