



SOUNDINGS



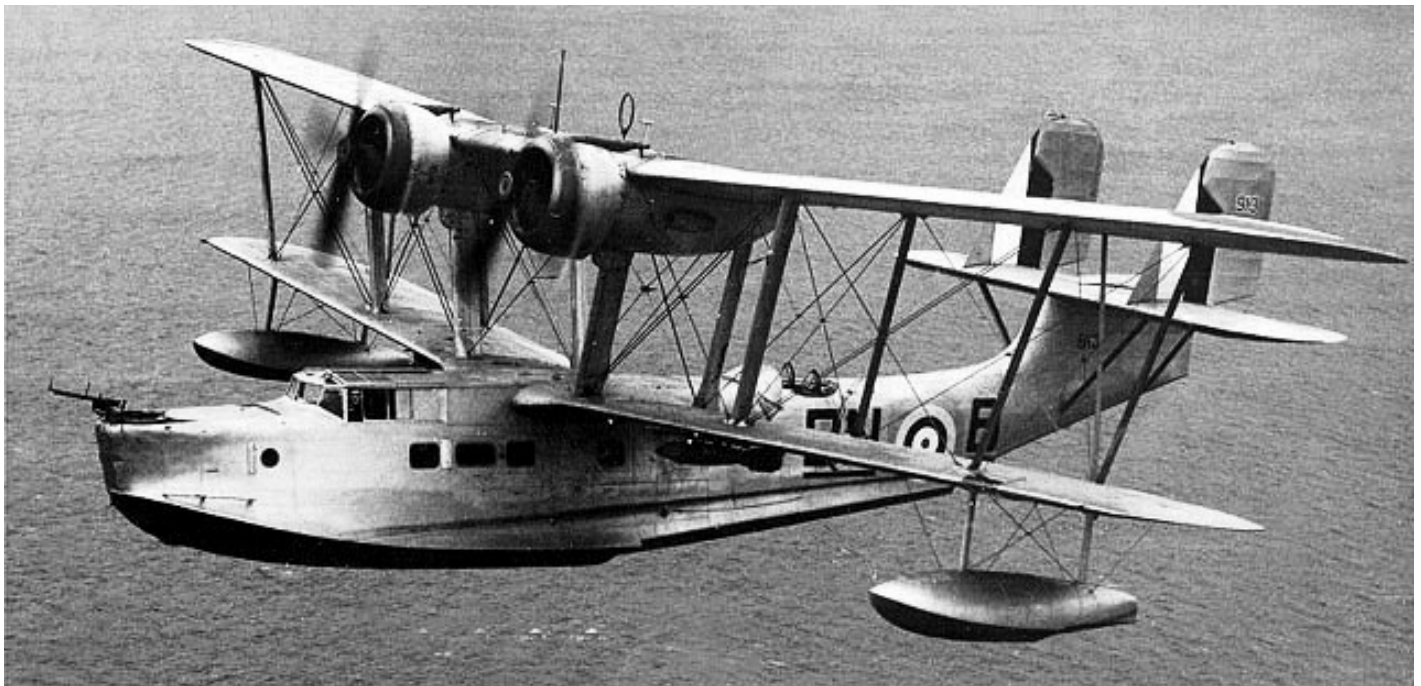
THE NAVAL ASSOCIATION OF CANADA – OTTAWA
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<http://nac-o.wildapricot.org/soundings>

First Objective in Ottawa Branch Bylaws:

“Make all levels of Government and the general public clearly aware of the vital need for, and value of adequate and effective maritime defence forces to protect and further the interests of Canada.”

58.02

“Trying the depth of the water and the quality of the bottom line...” November 2022



Circa 1940, the Stranraer 913 maritime patrol aircraft from RCAF 5 Bomber Reconnaissance Squadron flies on patrol in World War II. Depth charges are carried under the wings, and Lewis machine guns are mounted in the nose and dorsal turrets. A third turret could be fitted on the tail between the two vertical fins. See the cover story on these remarkable aircraft and their courageous aviators starting on page 8.





From the President

By Tim Addison

Greetings NAC Ottawa Branch Members...

It appears Fall has arrived, although I am quite enjoying the last few days of warm weather, it will soon be time to put away the golf clubs and gas up the snow blower.

Passing of Admiral Chuck Thomas

As many of you may already know, Vice-Admiral (Ret'd) Charles (Chuck) Thomas passed away on Friday 30 September. Like many, I had known the Admiral for many years, going back to 1976 and my MARS IV training in YUKON, when "Charlie Mike" was Commander of Four Squadron/Training Group Pacific, and I have always been in awe of his commitment and devoted service to our country and the Navy. In fact, I knew of him even earlier, as he was a shipmate of my father's in HMCS *Jonquiere*. They both shared a passion for golf. In the early 1980s the Admiral was kind enough to pass on his first mess kit to me, when a doeskin mess kit was *de rigeur*. On behalf of the NAC, I offer our sincere condolences to his family.

In Branch Ottawa there has been some return to a semblance of normalcy. We hosted our first in-person social event on 21 September and despite the modest turnout, I think everyone enjoyed the chance to catch up with old friends and look to the future. We had several non-member guests attend the luncheon, including two members of HMCS *Donnacona*, a young naval cadet from Germany and an assistant to Member of Parliament Randall MacGregor. All were very engaging, and it was a pleasure to make their acquaintances. I am aware that they intend to join the NAC and I look forward to their presence at future events.

In this Edition...

From the President	p 2
Branch Membership	p 3
Guest Speaker	p 5
Donation to NNRMA	p 6
Donation to RCSEF	p 7
Stranraer Epic	p 8
Not the Result Wanted	p 14
Library Moved	p 16
RCNBF Revitalization	p 17
Admirals' Medal Coincidence	P 18
Parade?	P 20
Book Review	p 22
Remember	p 24
Meeting in Belgium	p 25
Officers and Directors	p 27
Branch Information	p 28

The project to refurbish the naval monument associated with HMCS *Carleton* near Dow's Lake, is moving along. On 22 September I had the pleasure of handing over a \$5000 NAC Endowment Fund Cheque to support the restoration work, which has a target completion date in time for Naval Reserve celebrations in 2023. See the write-up on page

Our Speakers' Evenings over the summer were curtailed, but we are now working on a Fall programme which will be of interest. By the time you read this you will have likely heard that Commander **Corey Gleason** spoke to us on his experiences as CO of HMCS *Harry Dewolf*. What a lucky guy to have had the opportunity to be CO of the first of class of such a transformational ship.





BRANCH MEMBERSHIP REPORT

By Gerry Powell

General

COVID-19 concerns continued to challenge our return to a new 'normal' through 2022. However, progress continues. This Fall saw an in-person luncheon for members and friends, and the intention for a spring gala and more in-person events remains. In conjunction with other initiatives under consideration, membership can be expected to grow.

Our Branch membership total remains strong. The Branch has 366 members on the books at the moment – a small increase from the start of the year. It reflects a gain from the recent changes to Introductory Memberships (now available to everyone) to attract new members. Another positive increase came from NAC efforts develop corporate sponsorships and maintain interest in them despite the latest postponement of the BOA gala. A large measure of thanks for the success in that effort goes to our own Branch President, **Tim Addison**, for his development of the Corporate Sponsorship program and dedicated outreach to potential supporters! In addition to new members, sponsorships contribute significantly to NAC revenues for programs.

Our membership renewal campaign ended in March. At present, 85% of our members have completed their renewals for 2022. However, that still leaves about 40 members that we have not yet heard from. Invoices for the outstanding accounts have been posted. Nonetheless, outreach efforts over the summer to settle them have not yet been pursued as actively as intended. That will continue over November to avoid those memberships from lapsing this year.

The Naval Cadets had become a significant element of our complement. However, the numbers dropped over the last two years as we could not progress outreach to new students arriving while they studied remotely instead during the pandemic. They



Above, Branch President **Tim Addison** (on the left) welcoming guests to the 21 September Branch Luncheon. **Jonas Lindemann**, Aid to the German Attaché, is flanked by Sailor First Class (Leading Seaman) **Mikey Colangelo** and Acting Sub-Lieutenant **Karl-Antoine Usakowski**, both of HMCS Donnacona. Parliamentary staffer **Danielle Leclair** was behind the camera.

On 11 October I had the pleasure of meeting with Commander RCN, Vice-Admiral **Angus Topshee**, at his office in Carling Campus. He has well settled into his new surroundings, and we had a pleasant and constructive dialogue. He has transferred his NAC membership to Ottawa and is very keen to attend our "in-person" events, which I hope we can deliver on over the fall/winter.

Once again, *Soundings* Editor Richard Archer has put together another interesting edition chock full of stories and opinions, with the cover story providing some insight into the early adventures of Canadian Maritime Air in World War II, all of which I am sure you will enjoy. Read on! **S**





NAC-OTTAWA MEMBERSHIP DATA (end of year)										CURRENT		Yet to renew
Membership Level	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	as of 22 Oct 2022	Ratio	
Regular (local)	173	197	208	228	226	216	193	188	176	175	48.1%	25
Regular (Out of Town)	51	58	60	68	69	61	56	54	50	53	13.7%	7
Regular (Serving)	22	20	28	38	34	28	29	30	26	24	7.1%	7
Regular (Spouse)	7	7	6	5	5	4	2	2	2	2	0.5%	1
Honourary/Life Paid Members	80	73	67	60	50	45	40	35	32	29	8.7%	
Introductory Members	22	6	5	13	0	3	10	3	4	12	1.1%	
Naval Cadets (at RMC)		19	37	54	49	49	83	83	67	61	18.3%	
Corporate (new)									3	10	0.8%	
TOTALS	355	380	411	466	433	406	413	395	360	366		

The membership state is a dynamic value and reflects a balance stemming from ongoing renewal and recruiting efforts to offset departures – all affecting membership strength in the longer term.

have fully returned to RMC and connectivity is being restored. We can expect their membership numbers as a group to increase.

Regular members combined continue to form 69% of our membership. A detailed breakdown of the membership as it has evolved over the last several years is provided in the table above.

Sadly, nine members passed away in 2021, and another six have left us to date this year. The list of those that have crossed the bar can be found on our Branch membership site. Additionally, many of our members lost close family members, friends, and colleagues over the year as well.

Membership Management

As noted in previous reports, NAC now uses a centralized membership registry. It was built on the system started by the Ottawa Branch in 2017 and adjusted to accommodate all NAC members and other branches across the country. Several branches now utilize this system to manage their memberships directly, covering more than 2/3 of the national membership. The

remainder are cared for by a coordinator with the National Office with updates provided from the Branches. While most members have direct access to their national NAC account, many will need to work through their branch for information on local initiatives, events, and activities.

The Ottawa Branch remains by far the largest NAC Branch in the country and continues to enjoy a strong and stable membership. However, that is not the case for most other Branches, and NAC membership overall has been declining over the last few years. There are some membership initiatives underway or under consideration to better attract new members and retain them. In addition to the online access to their personal membership profile and account, event notification and coordination, and support for news and discussion already offered, there is now:

- A new Introductory Trial for the first year of membership is now offered to all new members. This is already on the Ottawa on-line JOIN page and will soon be available on others as well. Spread the word to your friends who might be interested!
- The ability to register and renew online. This is an attractive feature for many new and current members.





In the online world now shared, there is a need to make membership options common for all. Work on a simpler common membership package is underway, and hopefully will be approved for implementation for the next membership year.

2023 Membership Renewal Campaign

A reminder that our memberships are for a calendar year and that they end on 31 December annually. While members can renew online anytime, the Ottawa Branch

formal Membership Renewal Campaign for next year will start on 15 November 2022 and run until the end of February 2023. Again, the target is for all members to complete their annual membership renewal within that period.

For any concerns, questions, or ideas, please contact myself as the membership director at **naco.membership@gmail.com**.

One last thought: your renewal is an excellent opportunity to consider making a donation to one of the fine charities supported by our members.... **S**

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**Guest Speaker**

**Assistant-Commissioner  
Derek Moss, CCG**



On June 6th, 2022, the guest speaker at NAC-Ottawa’s virtual monthly meeting was Assistant-Commissioner **Derek Moss**, Canadian Coast Guard (CCG). His current position is at the helm of the CCG's Western Region.

He entitled his presentation, “A Flock of Black Swans: The Changing Nature of Maritime Incidents,” where the black swans are symbolic of rare and impactful events.

Generally speaking, the CCG is adapting to the 21st century by building versatility and resilience, but recent otherwise rare events on the west coast have prompted AC Moss to propose a new way of predicting, controlling and administering the CCG’s approach to minimizing the impact of ever more frequent “black swans”. One such event in 2021 was the fire on board and loss of more than 100 containers by the *Zim Kingston* cargo liner in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. This highly impactful event seriously challenged the way the CCG did business, particularly the way various authorities and operational control centres were siloed, and had great difficulty in communicating and sharing information.

Thus, a primary proposal is to move the CCG to cloud-computing, where all stakeholders can share information and report their actions, with the ultimate aims being widespread maritime domain awareness and the development of standard ways and “tools” to conduct operations and control any incident. The main idea is to implement “awareness, assessment and action”. *(Continued on page 21...)*





## NAC Endowment Fund Presentation to National Naval Reserve Monument Association



On September 22, 2022, the President of the Ottawa Branch of the Naval Association of Canada (NAC) was pleased to present to the National Naval Reserve Monument Association (NNRMA) a NAC Endowment Fund cheque in the amount of \$5,000 in support of the revitalization of this important national monument.

Shown in the photo taken at Dow's Lake by the entrance to HMCS Carleton, with the monument in the backdrop, are from the

left: **Howie Smith**, NAC Project Officer, **Tim Addison**, Ottawa Branch President, Cdr **Sheyla Dussault**, Chair of the NNRMA, and Cdr **Christopher Knowlton**, Commanding Officer of HMCS *Carleton*.

In 1973, to mark the 50th anniversary of Canada's Naval Reserve a monument honouring the men and women of the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR), Royal Canadian Navy Reserve (RCNR), and the Naval Reserve was designed and built in Ottawa. It was dedicated by the Governor







General of Canada. Over the past almost 50 years, the monument and surrounding grounds have deteriorated with time and exposure to the elements, such that the monument no longer provides a fitting commemoration of the contributions of Canada's Naval Reserve. In the image, see in particular the poor state of the monument's plaques.

The opportunity exists to remedy this by revitalizing the monument and surrounding grounds, in time for the celebration of the centenary of the Naval Reserve in 2023.

The project is currently in the fundraising phase and more information including how people may donate may be found at the NNRMA website: <https://nnrma-anmrn.ca/>. **S**

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## **NAC Endowment Fund Presentation RCSC Education Foundation**

On September 8th, 2022, **Josh Barber** (right) on behalf of NAC Endowment Fund and NAC-Ottawa, presented **Harry Harsch**, representing the Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Education Foundation, with cheques to support this Foundation.

The NAC Endowment Fund provided \$5,000, while NAC-Ottawa added another \$1,000 to this worthy cause.

The RCSEF provides bursaries to Sea Cadets to assist them with their post-secondary education. While recipients for this academic year have not yet been named, in 2021/22 RCSEF shared \$100,000 among 79 deserving young people. The annual NAC award continues to be a significant contribution to this fund. Well done to all donors! **S**







## Supermarine Stranraer: The RCAF's Obsolescent Flying Boat That Could

By Col (Ret'd) Ernest Cable, RCAF  
Shearwater Aviation Museum Historian

### The Threat Develops

With war clouds looming on the horizon in early 1933, the Canadian Parliament recognised that the RCAF needed to be properly equipped with modern aircraft capable of defending the country. Although vast oceans geographically isolated Canada from the deteriorating political situations in Europe and Japan, Parliament was concerned about protection of the Pacific gateways to Canada and the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, the seaway to the strategic trading ports at Quebec City and Montreal. Since Canada was more likely to be attacked from the sea than from the air or land, the government believed aircraft capable of protecting its coasts should take priority over fighters or bombers.

In the early 1930s, the British Vickers Supermarine aircraft company developed the Stranraer (named after a town in Scotland) twin-engine, biplane flying boat to meet the RAF's coastal reconnaissance requirements. After consulting with the British Air Ministry, the Canadian government deemed the Stranraers' 1,000-mile (1,600 km) range and 250-mile (420 km) operating radius suitable for Canada's coastal reconnaissance needs. In 1936, as a concession to Quebec MPs, the Canadian government arranged for Stranraers to be built under license by Vickers Canada in Montreal, and placed an order for five Stranraers at a cost of \$28,000 per aircraft. No. 5 (GR) (General Reconnaissance) squadron at RCAF Station Dartmouth, NS took delivery of the first two Stranraers in December 1938, followed by the remaining three in June 1939. The RCAF eventually took delivery of 40 Canadian-built Stranraers which served on both coasts.

### Armaments

Regarding armaments (see the cover photo), the Stranraer had three open turrets: one in the nose forward of the cockpit, a dorsal turret midships just aft of the trailing edge of the lower wing, and a tail turret mounted between the two large vertical fins. Each turret had mountings for a single Lewis machine gun. For ASW the RAF and RCAF initially used naval weapons to attack submarines, but these proved to be unsuccessful and the air forces struggled to find an effective ASW weapon. The Stranraer was fitted with two bomb racks under each lower wing. At first, each rack carried a 250-pound bomb charged with Amatol explosives (a mixture of TNT and ammonium nitrate). The bombs were hydrostatically-fused to detonate at depths between 100 and 150 feet, but this was too deep for aircraft-delivered bombs, as aircraft could only effectively attack a surfaced submarine or no later than 15-20 seconds after diving. Trials in the RAF demonstrated the ideal detonation depth to be 24 feet. In mid-1941, the RCAF arranged for production of the new Mark VIII 250-pound Amatol-filled aerial depth charges, and ordered fittings from the UK to convert naval 450-pound Mark VII depth charges for use by the aircraft. But they had a detonation depth of 34 feet, still too deep. By the end of 1941, the Mark VII depth charges had replaced the undependable anti-submarine bomb in most squadrons. Since the Amatol-filled depth charge lacked killing power, in May 1942 the RCAF ordered Torpex-filled depth charges from the UK, along with a supply of Mark VIII Star detonation pistols that provided the essential shallow water setting.

### War Declared

The Second World War began in the early dawn of 1 September 1939, when German armies swept across the border into Poland. Great Britain and France declared war on Germany on 3 September, the same day the German submarine U-30 sank the S.S. *Athenia* northwest of Ireland, the first





British liner to be sunk, with a loss of 117 lives. This prompted the British Admiralty to implement pre-war plans to sail north Atlantic shipping in defended convoys. Also on 3 September, the RCAF's Eastern Air Command began to mobilize by promulgating Operational Order No.4, containing 41 pages of maps and detailed information with secret pre-war orders. A week later, on 10 September, Canada supported Britain and France by declaring war against Germany. This prepared the way for the Royal Navy to station major warships at Halifax, the convoys' western terminus, to defend against German surface raiders. At the same time, the Royal Canadian Navy implemented convoy escorts with its tiny fleet of obsolescent remnants from the First World War.

The very day that Canada declared war, the RCAF's 5 (GR) Squadron launched Canada's first operation of the Second World War. Flying Officer L.J. Birchall (later a hero in the war in the Indian Ocean (Churchill called him 'The Saviour of Ceylon'), and in the mid-sixties an Air Commodore and Commandant of RMC) had only recently arrived at RCAF Station Dartmouth as a pilot on No. 5 (GR) Squadron and remembers the first day of the war:

*"I was captain of Stranraer No. 907 and had been out on patrol on 9 September 1939. We returned [to the Dartmouth seaplane station at Eastern Passage], refueled and turned over to another crew who did some night flying. Early morning 10 September, we were out again to our aircraft. All seemed well so we started up, did our taxi and engine tests, came back to our mooring [in Eastern Passage], topped our tanks and signaled we were on standby. We had food on board and so prepared a meal. A dingy came out with the appropriate cards for our coding machine [for encrypting radio messages] and sealed Top Secret orders, which we locked up in our dispatch case. Everything seemed to be back to normal.*

*Suddenly all hell broke loose! People started running to the dock and the masthead*

*light on the pier was blinking like crazy. All aircraft acknowledged by aldis [signal] lamp and then came the message, "War Declared". We started engines, cast off from the mooring and taxied to warm the engines. A message detailed us to go to a specific lighthouse up the northeast coast [a parallel track search south of Nova Scotia between Halifax and Canso], open our sealed orders and carry them out."*

Flight Lieutenant (F/L) Price and his crew of five in Stranraer No. 908 was the first aircraft to take off from Eastern Passage. Thus, RCAF Station Dartmouth and No.5 (GR) Squadron had the distinction of launching Canada's first operational wartime mission on 10 September 1939. Because of the strategic importance of Halifax's harbour, F/L Price was tasked to conduct a parallel track search off the Halifax approaches.

Birchall and crew took off minutes later and went up the coast as directed:

*"Our orders were to do a long-range patrol out over a shipping lane into Halifax, identify all shipping, record time, position, course, and speed. We were to remain on patrol as long as fuel permitted. We mounted our Lewis [machine] guns fore and aft, checked all our depth charge circuits and set out from the lighthouse as ordered.*

*Our patrols were supposed to be flown about 2,000 to 3,000 feet [300 to 700 metres] above the water but usually we were down much lower due to fog, low cloud and in the winter because of snow squalls. The Stranraer had no de-icing equipment whatsoever and so we had to be extremely careful to avoid icing conditions at all costs. We carried out our patrol and returned to Dartmouth with a bare minimum of fuel. After we picked up a mooring, a fresh crew came aboard to refuel etc. and go on standby. We were taken ashore at once, debriefed, fed, watered and off to bed for rest. Our post flight reports were sent by secure landline to Eastern Air Command Headquarters in Halifax where they were coordinated with the*





*Navy. [F/L Price and crew reported sighting five friendly vessels but no enemy activity in their post-flight report. Similarly, Birchall's crew reported sighting three friendly vessels and no enemy.] Based on all the Navy plots etc. we would be briefed on friendly shipping prior to take-off on our next patrol.*

*So started the war for us at No. 5 (GR) Squadron, the first RCAF squadron to fly a wartime mission in the Second World War's Battle of the Atlantic."*

When the first HX convoy (the HX designation was assigned to convoys sailing from Halifax to the UK) put to sea on 16 September 1939, a pattern for the future was established. Stranraers conducted harbour exit patrols off Halifax prior to a convoy's departure to ensure the Halifax approaches were clear of lurking submarines as was experienced during the First World War. But most of the Stranraers tasking was dedicated to providing anti-submarine patrols for outbound and inbound convoys to the seaward limit of their operational radius, approximately 250 miles (415 km). The patrols were flown from dawn to dusk with the Stranraers typically taking-off from their Dartmouth moorings at 0530 hours to rendezvous with their assigned convoys, then returning to Dartmouth approximately five hours later at the limit of their endurance. To extend their search area farther seaward the Stranraers frequently landed on Wallace Lake on Sable Island, 180 miles (300 km) southeast of Dartmouth, around mid-day to refuel, then by late afternoon took-off from Sable Island to either re-join a convoy or conduct independent anti-submarine searches before landing back at RCAF Station Dartmouth as late as midnight.

By the end of September 1939, the RCAF's Home War Establishment squadrons (based in Canada to defend home territory) underwent a change in designation. The "GR" (General Reconnaissance) nomenclature borrowed from the RAF was replaced with "BR" (Bomber Reconnaissance), a broader and uniquely Canadian designation which

more accurately described the various tasks carried out by the RCAF's maritime squadrons.

### **A Wavering Beginning**

Although Eastern Air Command's Operation Order No.4 appeared sound on paper, putting the plan into practice took time, and since the RCAF had no mentors experienced in maritime operations to pass on proven techniques, No.5 (BR) crews had to learn through trial and error. Very early in the war it became apparent that No.5 (BR) was not prepared for anti-submarine patrols. With visual search as the only means to detect submarines, the Stranraers could only provide air surveillance.

Historians, with the advantage of hindsight, acknowledged the crews' lack of anti-submarine training and considered these early convoy escort duties as "Scare-Crow" patrols which, at best could frighten submarines away from the convoy when an aircraft was sighted. If a submarine was sighted the Stranraers' greatest value would be alerting the surface escorts to the submarine's location for subsequent attack. Early in the war, seriously under-manned ground crews, with only 63 of an established 139 airmen on strength, placed rigorous demands on the squadron's ability to maintain their outdated but sturdy and dependable Stranraers. Pilots, with only 17 of an established strength of 23, were inexperienced in maritime flying and had to hone their skills of navigating over a featureless ocean while coping with the challenges of maritime reconnaissance in unpredictable and often abominable Atlantic weather. No.5 (BR)'s Operational Readiness Book for 17 September 1939 records some of the squadron's early failings while escorting HX-1, the first convoy sailing from Halifax to England:

- *Stranraer 908 returns to base cannot find Sable Island.*
- *Stranraer 910 returns to base cannot*







*find convoy.*

- *Stranraer 914 gets lost, 114 miles from Sable Island, 40 miles off track.*
- *Stranraer 911 gets lost, runs out of fuel, force lands on ocean, flying boat sinks during recovery attempts.*

### **The 911 Saga**

The saga of Stranraer 911 is recorded in the annals RCAF history. Squadron Leader (S/L) Mair and crew of seven was tasked to rendezvous with a convoy, then after being relieved by a second Stranraer, land on Sable Island to refuel. After refuelling, S/L Mair was to relieve the second Stranraer and continue the patrol around the convoy, with a planned return to Dartmouth around 2345 hours. In very hazy weather the convoy could not be located at the rendezvous point and after a two-hour square search with no sight of the convoy S/L Mair headed for Sable Island.

However, when Sable Island could not be located, he headed for the nearest point of Nova Scotia. Eventually, the crew recognized two points of land, Cape Ray, Newfoundland and Cape North on Nova Scotia's Cape Breton Island. Confident of his position, S/L Mair altered course to the seaplane base at Sydney on Cape Breton Island. However, because the aircraft was low on fuel it was becoming increasingly clear that the aircraft would be forced to land on the open sea before reaching the Cape Breton coast. Attempts to jettison the bomb load to lighten the aircraft failed and neither the navigator (the co-pilot performed as navigator) nor Corporal (Cpl) Calow, the wireless operator, were able to raise a response to their calls for help. Shortly thereafter the engines began to sputter because of fuel starvation and S/L Mair was forced to land on the sea at 1255 hours, 7 hours 35 minutes after taking off from Dartmouth. Drogues were streamed from the aircraft to reduce drift away from its reported position. A message requesting help and the estimated position was released with one of the aircraft's carrier pigeons. The life raft was inflated and tied to the upper

fuselage as a precaution in case of being swamped in the heavy seas; the crew took turns, in pairs, standing watch. The wireless operator continued to send out calls for help, but due to static, no reply was received until 2330 hours, when contact with Dartmouth was finally established.

At 0705 hours, a Delta floatplane from Sydney was sighted about five miles to port. Cpl Calow transmitted the sighting to Sydney while an attempt was made to attract the pilot's attention with the aldis lamp. But to no avail. At 0720 hours, heavy seas damaged the port aileron and snapped the line attached to the last drogue, which was replaced by an empty flare box tied to a rope. To further stem the drift, a bailing bucket, attached to a rope, was streamed from the bow as another makeshift drogue.

At about 1000 hours, a tanker was sighted about five miles to starboard. Attempts to attract the ship's attention by flares and aldis lamp failed. Cpl Calow reported to Sydney that they could see the tanker and gave their relative position from it. He then heard Sydney telling the tanker their location, and shortly thereafter the tanker altered course in their direction. Observing that the tanker was of Swedish registry, the crew weighted all secret documents and threw them overboard (Sweden was a neutral country not privy to allied documents). The tanker's lifeboat came as close as possible but indicated that it could not come alongside in the 25 to 35-foot (7-9 metre) seas. The crew jumped in the water and with the aid of their lifejackets swam to the lifeboat.

The crew spent the remainder of the day on the tanker while waiting for a tug to arrive to tow the Stranraer ashore. However, the sea was too rough to salvage the aircraft or transfer the crew to the tug. The tanker followed the tug to the lee of Scatari Island where calmer waters allowed the crew to transfer to the tug, which delivered them to the fishing village at Louisburg on Cape Breton Island. The crew then took a taxi to Sydney where they remained until the next day, when they learned that their Stranraer





had sunk while under tow. The crew returned to Dartmouth by train.

Cpl Calow stuck to his radio equipment and was unceasing in his efforts to contact home base and DF stations in the area. During the 22 hours adrift at sea, he suffered from seasickness, exposure and cold. For his devotion to duty Cpl Calow was awarded the British Empire Medal.

### **Success at Last**

To ensure that no convoy sailed again without RCAF air protection as occurred with convoy HX-1, the squadron Commanding Officer, S/L Ross, implemented many changes to the squadron's navigation procedures. A new navigation log was created to record the time of all navigation events including changes of course, and co-pilot navigators had to submit a "Track Chart", a plot of the aircraft's track, after each flight. By November 1939, No.5 (BR)'s navigation greatly improved, successfully escorting convoys HX-7, 8, 9, and 10, totaling 117 ships, to the outer limits of the Stranraers' endurance. The squadron also completed three special constant protection patrols where the Stranraers were tasked to rendezvous with high value British warships at sea and remain overhead until the ships docked at Halifax. These special patrols provided protection for ships that were renowned during the Second World War and included HMS *Furious* (aircraft carrier) and HMS *Repulse* (battleship) on 3 November, HMS *Alaunia* (armed merchant cruiser) on 7 November, and HMS *Warspite* (battleship) and HMS *Effingham* (heavy cruiser) on 14 November. On 10 December 1939, No.5 (BR) Stranraers were tasked to escort the first Canadian Troop Ship convoy carrying 12,543 troops of the First Canadian Infantry Division to England. The convoy consisted of the converted passenger liners, *Aquitania*, *Empress of Britain*, *Duchess of Bedford*, *Monarch of Bermuda*, and *Empress of Australia* accompanied by the aircraft carrier HMS *Furious*, four Royal Navy warships and four Royal Canadian Navy destroyers.

For the next twelve months, No.5 Squadron Stranraers often deployed to Sydney and Gaspé, Quebec to conduct anti-submarine patrols in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and to escort UK-bound convoys departing from Sydney. Following Canada's declaration of war against Italy on 10 June 1940, F/L Birchall was tasked with locating any Italian vessels still in Canadian waters. Flying from the seaplane station at Gaspé, he located the Italian merchant ship *Capo Nola*, which had recently departed from Quebec, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Having been informed of the declaration of war by radio, Birchall made a low pass over the freighter as if making an attack. This panicked the captain into running his vessel aground on a sandbank. Birchall then landed his Stranraer on the water near the *Capo Nola* and waited until Royal Canadian Navy vessels arrived on scene. The *Capo Nola's* crew were the first Italians taken prisoner by the Allies during the Second World War.

In the summer of 1940, the German U-boat campaign started moving from the western approaches of the UK into the western Atlantic. The pending threat to convoys departing from Canada added urgency the RCAF's requirement to replace its collection of pre-war aircraft cobbled together for coastal reconnaissance. The RCAF pleaded with American and British governments for a higher priority for its orders for long-range maritime patrol aircraft. However, because of competing wartime exigencies No.5 (BR) had to wait until June 1941 before Canso aircraft started to arrive to replace its Stranraers. It was very fortunate for Eastern Air Command that the Kriegsmarine's (German Navy's) U-boats and heavily armed surface raiders did not venture into the western Atlantic until September 1941, because No.5 Squadron's obsolescent Stranraers and air crews inexperienced in naval warfare would have been overwhelmed by the vastly superior German naval forces. Since German naval forces did not appear off the east coast of





Canada until September 1941, No.5 Squadron's Stranraers never encountered enemy U-boats nor surface combatants, and its crews were never tested against a hostile enemy.

Although No.5 Squadron Stranraers never came across enemy forces, they played a fundamental role in the RCAF's Eastern Air Command maturing from an air surveillance neophyte to a credible maritime reconnaissance force. Following the fleeting success of flying the RCAF's first missions of the Second World War, No.5 Squadron's air and ground crews had to persevere in coaxing their under-powered but sturdy Stranraer flying boats to exceed their normal performance limits in the worst flying conditions in the world. Mastering the skills of over-water navigation in abysmal weather, the procedures for protecting a convoy, and rendezvousing with allied warships at sea provided the crews experience in bomber reconnaissance operations and prepared them for their forthcoming wartime roles. After converting to their new Cansos the crews faced the challenges of adapting to the aircraft's inherent new capabilities and learning the subtleties of anti-submarine warfare.

**Off to the West Coast**

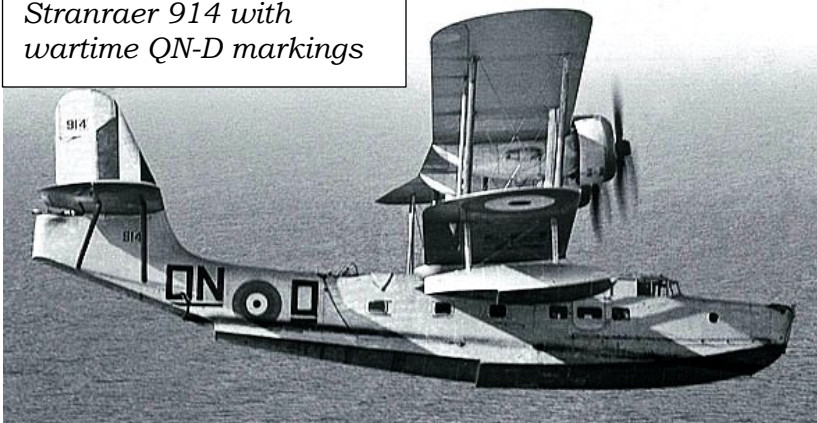
Following the delivery of Cansos in September 1941, No.5 Squadron flew its Stranraers to the Pacific coast, where they joined the Stranraers initially delivered to the west coast in September 1939. The Stranraers were assigned to Western Air

Command and formed five Bomber Reconnaissance squadrons based in British Columbia at RCAF Stations: Ucluelet, (4 BR); Alliford Bay, (6 BR); Prince Rupert, (7 BR); Bella Bella, (9 BR), and Coal Harbour, (120 BR). In April 1943, all five Bomber Reconnaissance squadrons started to replace their Stranraers with long-range Cansos which gave improved coverage of their eastern Pacific patrol areas. By 1944, after six years of reliable service, most Stranraers had been withdrawn from operations but remained on RCAF strength until 1946. After the war many Stranraers were sold to fledgling regional airlines. Most notably, Queen Charlotte Airlines continued to fly Stranraers well into the 1950s, operating from Vancouver and providing passenger and freight service along British Columbia's Pacific coast.

**Epilogue**

Only two Stranraers remain in existence: RCAF serial number 920 has been pristinely restored and is on display at the RAF Museum at Hendon in London, England. In homage to its Canadian heritage, it has been finished in the markings and silver paint scheme of the RCAF's No.5 (BR) squadron. The wreckage of RCAF Stranraer serial number 915, was shipped by rail from Pender Harbour, BC to the Shearwater Aviation Museum in 2008. When restoration is completed in the finish and markings of No.5 (BR) Squadron, it will be a rare exhibit of an early chapter in the remarkable history of RCAF Station Dartmouth and its present-day successor, 12 Wing Shearwater.

*Stranraer 914 with wartime QN-D markings*



*From the Editor: On a personal note, Cpl Calow's son, Tom Calow was my senior and my Cadet Flight Leader for Cartier Flight for my first year at Royal Roads, 1961-62; Col Cable was in Fraser Flight at the time...and A/C Birchall was the Commandant at RMC for Col Cable's and my own third and fourth years, 1963-64 and 1964-65. S*







## Not the Result Wanted

By Richard Archer

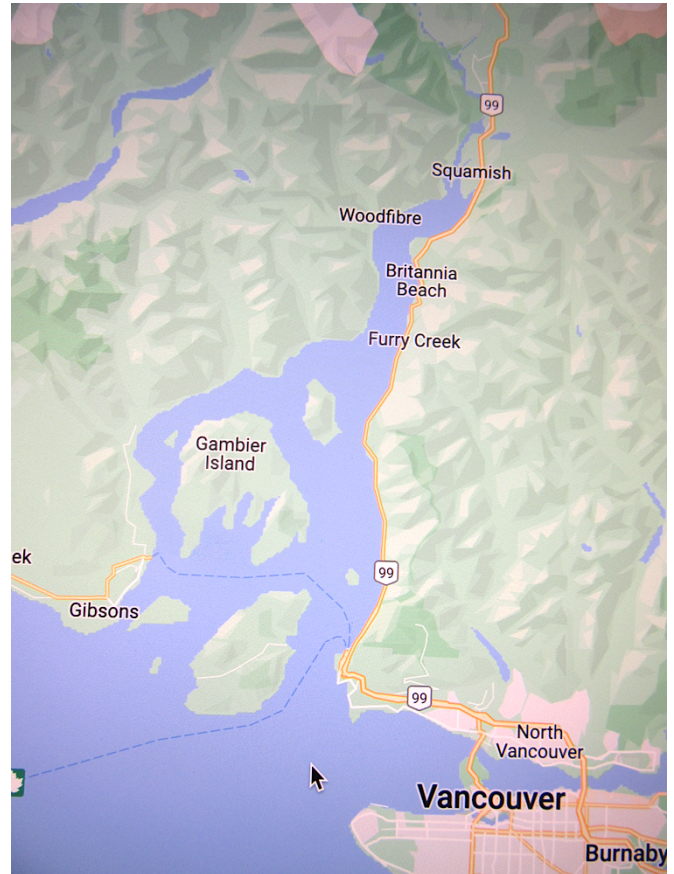
In past editions of *Soundings*, I've related my experiences as the commanding officer of three different Esquimalt-based RCN minesweepers converted, more-or-less, to junior officer training. In my 36 years in the Navy, the best jobs I had. We four 'sweepers were technically a sub-division of the west coast training squadron. The senior CO was the sub-division commander, at the time of this story this was the late Mike Duncan. The time frame was the mid-'70s. I was a lieutenant-commander.

But here's another yarn. I was driving *Fundy*, and the four of us 'sweepers were conducting independent basic navigation training for a class of sub-lieutenants in the approaches to Vancouver – in glorious weather and enjoying the magnificent scenery of gleaming sea, rocky wooded islands and snow-capped mountains. We were just completing some pilotage training in the Howe Sound area, looking forward to entering Vancouver Harbour -- my favourite port visit. See the map.

We received a call from Mike. He had received a signal from the local search and rescue centre saying that a fishing boat was on fire at the top of Howe Sound off the town of Squamish, and that he had agreed that we four 'sweepers would go to its assistance. We were to proceed independently "with all dispatch" – that is, at maximum speed, which for us was about 17 knots.

So I turned the ship north and rang on maximum revs, getting the trainees on the bridge at the time to draw up a simple passage plan to the Squamish area and to keep up the fixing, et al., to keep me safe. I looked around. One other 'sweeper was relatively nearby and heading off on about the same course as me. The other two were a couple of miles further south.

Naturally, the high revs gained the attention of my engineer officer, a C2ERA. He showed up on the quarterdeck and peered



down the engine room escape hatch, just aft of the gun deck, to speak to the stoker who was controlling the engines and throttles. He looked out towards the nearby 'sweeper and turned towards me, calling out, "Sir, is this a race?" I shrugged my shoulders and said, "Sure, why not?" The chief disappeared below decks, presumably to see if he could squeeze a few more revs out of the two diesel engines. I didn't notice any increase in speed, but at least the other 'sweeper didn't catch up.

At its northern extension, Howe Sound narrows to a steep-sided fjord, but soon I could see the village of Squamish in the distance. I didn't see much in the way of other settlements or their seaward jetties. This was a bit of a worry because *Fundy* had had its aft minesweeping gear removed, which lightened the stern and to a certain extent put the vessel down by the head. This meant that while the stern wake was less than would be expected, the bow wave was





extra-large. I surveyed the shorelines astern but couldn't see any cause for concern.

Finally in the distance I could see a slight plume of smoke. There were two or three other small fishing vessels around it. As I got closer, I could see that the vessel producing the smoke had burned to the waterline and was barely afloat. One other vessel had a towing line to the awash hull. On the security channel 16 I called to the vessels in the vicinity, identifying myself in the usual manner as "Warship *Fundy*". I came to what I considered to be a rather neat stop adjacent to the wreck. I asked about possible casualties, and offered help. The response was non-committal, a good sign.

Just then, big trouble arrived. The waves I had generated, and which had been reflected off the fjord walls, caught up with me. *Fundy* rocked from side to side...and in the waves the fire-ravaged hull settled deeper into the water and began to disappear from view. The vessel with the line to it had to sever the connection.

An irate fisherman came on the radio, yelling: "I was salvaging what I could, *Fundy*, BUT YOU SANK IT!"

What could I say – he was right – other than, "Roger, out."

After confirming that there was nothing left for me to do, I left the scene and met with the other three 'sweepers. Together we formed up and headed south for our scheduled Vancouver port visit.

The next morning, I was approached by one of the other COs, the late Ron Copley. Now, the four of us captains were a true band of brothers, but Ron was a fellow player on the Stirling-Cup-winning Navy rugby teams on both coasts, and my best friend. He looked concerned. He had heard that at the usual morning meeting of the admiral and his staff in Esquimalt, a recording of the channel 16 communications for the incident was played. Apparently, when the final exchange about the sinking was heard, the whole room burst into laughter....

Ron was worried that I might be seeing some consequences...but actually, I never heard another word about it. **S**



Four Bay Class ex-minesweepers enter Esquimalt Harbour past Fisgard Light, led by HMCS *Cowichan* and with *Chaleur* to port, *Chignecto* to starboard and *Miramichi* as the rear guard. This photo was taken the year before *Miramichi* (also a subsequent command of mine) was put into refit and replaced by *Fundy*. At the time of this photo, I was a lieutenant and in command of *Chaleur*. The occasion was the last port entry of the sub-division commander in *Cowichan*, the late John Kilner, who wished to salute the admiral. Once inside the cramped harbour we did our iconic starburst manoeuvre – dicey but still do-able. Richard Archer. **S**







## Mack Lynch Library Moved

By David Gray



On June 28th, ten members of NAC-Ottawa boxed and transported 1,100 books from HMCS *Bytown's* MacK Lynch Library to a storage room at HMCS *Carleton*. The following two pictures identify the volunteers who answered the call for assistance. With so many workers, all toppling over each other in the small room, the job got down quickly – in fact so quickly that one last beer was enjoyed at the bar at the former mess before driving to the new location. The hope is to store the books at HMCS *Carleton*, in a way that they are accessible to NAC members. **S**



See if you can identify: **Tim Addison, Josh Barber** (organizer), **Ray Coutu, Bob Dunlop, David Gray, Stephen Knowles, Nick Leak, Tony Palmer, John Millar** and **Gerry Powell**.







## Re-imagining the Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund

By Gay Hamilton, Executive Director RCNBF

Sailors, both serving and retired, will know the Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund (RCNBF), or the Fund for short, for its involvement and dedication in supporting their needs for the past 80 years, over which the Fund has distributed 21.2M dollars in support to 42,000 individuals. In 2022, the organization marks this important milestone by taking a deep dive into its mission, governance, programs, and operations. This national charitable organization promotes the wellbeing of the naval community to enrich the lives of sailors, veterans, and their families. In seeking to ensure the continued relevance of that statement and to meet the needs of today's naval veterans, RCN members and their loved ones, a fundamentally new approach to programming will be required - one that aligns with the Fund's renewed mission, is focused on achieving demonstrable community impact, and improves the Fund's visibility and presence within the naval family and beyond. In fact, this "re-imagining" is already well underway, and one need only check out the new website and most recent annual report to get a sense of the shift that is happening, towards a better future for the organization and its clients.

Through its renewal strategy developed last year, the organization is creating an increased sense of community to better inspire and engage volunteers, funders, and partners. It is building resiliency and capacity by diversifying funding sources and leveraging partnerships with like-minded organizations. It is instilling strategic leadership to advance its mission. And perhaps most importantly for its naval family, the RCNBF is focusing its efforts on developing relevant and valued programs that are appropriate for current needs and interests as well as the times we live in.

To inform its decisions around programming, the RCNBF has initiated a Programming Needs Assessment & Program Development Project that will assess current services, identify target audiences' needs including any service gaps, and recommend meaningful programming. The project involves a major reshaping of how the RCNBF provides financial support. It will include research, interviews, surveys, and focus groups with a broad range of stakeholders including clients, volunteers, staff, and partner organizations. In fact, don't be surprised if they come calling on you!

The end goal is to have a clear indication of services and programs that are better attuned to the times, to exploit strategies that mitigate barriers to program access and that provide opportunities for collaboration. We wish to find ways in which to extend the organization's reach. With this knowledge, the RCNBF will be better able to prepare its cadre of volunteers and staff to support the naval family's actual and emerging needs. Look for its new programming based on the needs assessment as early as May 2023.

The RCNBF has a long and storied past and is positioning itself for even greater relevance in the future. During its 80th anniversary-year, the organization has launched an **80-for-80 fundraising campaign** to encourage individual and corporate donations to help the RCNBF in achieving its renewed vision and mandate. Consider making a difference to this very worthwhile organization.

To learn more about the RCNBF, visit its website at <http://rcnbf.ca> and check out the latest news and activities through its social media platforms:

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/rcnbf>

Twitter: [https://twitter.com/rcnbf\\_fbmrc](https://twitter.com/rcnbf_fbmrc)

LinkedIn:

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/royal-canadian-naval-benevolent-fund>





## Surreal coincidence at Mayfair Theatre brings closure to Ottawa family's tragic wartime loss

By Ray Coutu

A Canadian Navy reservist veteran and his family recently obtained closure on a tragic wartime loss exactly 78 years later--by coincidence and to the day--at the Mayfair Theatre in Ottawa.

Retired journalist, war correspondent, 16-year Naval Reservist at HMCS *York* and NAC member **Peter Ward**, 91, was at the famous Ottawa landmark on April 28th to receive the Admirals' Medal from the Naval Association of Canada for his role in saving HMCS *Haida* from the scrap heap. The famous Second World War destroyer, now a national historic site and the ceremonial flagship of the Royal Canadian Navy, was also the subject of a recent YouTube mini-documentary narrated by Ward, entitled *The Last Tribal Class Destroyer—How and why HMCS Haida was saved*.

Ward commented that, "Following the cancellation of this year's Battle of the Atlantic gala dinner at the Canadian War Museum due to Covid-19 restrictions, organizers were left scrambling for another venue to present me with the medal."

In a chance conversation between the mini-documentary's director and the Navy, someone mentioned that the local Ottawa Naval Reserve unit HMCS *Carleton* was hosting a *Battle of the Atlantic Night at the Movies* at the Mayfair Theatre on April 28th and offered it as an alternate venue for the medal presentation.

"I received an apologetic phone call from the documentary's director and fellow NAC member, Ray Coutu, and he asked if I minded receiving the medal at the Mayfair, where we could also screen the new documentary I was involved with. I was speechless and I started to cry," recounted

Ward. "The coincidence was just simply surreal and I couldn't believe my ears. In my mind, there was no better place on earth to screen that documentary and to receive the Admirals' medal," he added.

Ward said once he regained his composure, he had to explain to the bewildered caller that April 28th was the anniversary of his father being killed in action when HMCS *Athabaskan* was sunk by enemy fire back in 1944, taking with her 128 Canadian sailors, among them his father.

He continued, "I was thirteen at the time and my mother had received a telegram saying my father had arrived safely in Londonderry, so she said let's celebrate by going to the Mayfair and watch a movie. Towards the end of the movie my mother had a seizure, which was unusual because she was healthy." He added that when she came to, she said, "Oh my God, something terrible has happened. We have to go home now!" Ward went on to explain that it was a couple of days later when they learned that Lt Leslie Ward had been aboard *Athabaskan* and it had been at that precise moment the ship had been hit when his mother had her seizure.

HMCS *Haida*, commanded by Harry DeWolf, picked up 43 survivors, and the remaining 83 were picked up by the Germans and became prisoners of war.

Hosted by HMCS *Carleton* and emceed by one of their Sub-Lieutenants dressed in a Second World War WRCNS (Wrens) uniform, the special event was attended by Peter Ward's children, grandchildren and many friends, including the DeWolf family, fellow NAC members and nearly 100 members of the *Carleton* ship's company.

Following the screening of the documentary, Peter Ward received a three-minute standing ovation. After he was called up on stage by the NAC's Ottawa Branch President **Tim Addison** and acting Deputy Commander RCN, RAdm **Casper Donovan**,





Rear-Admiral **Casper Donovan** was on hand to present the Admirals' Medal to **Peter Ward** with NAC-Ottawa Branch President **Tim Addison**.

to receive the Admirals' medal, he received a second standing ovation, lasting four minutes.

In his acceptance remarks, Ward told the gathering of the events on that fateful night exactly 78 years ago--to the day--while pointing to where he had been sitting in the theatre. The look of shock and disbelief was on everyone's face as they seized the significance of the moment, especially after watching the documentary which included a photo of Ward's father, as well as footage of the wreck of *Athabaskan* resting in 285 feet of water off the north-west coast of France, filmed by a dive team in 2003 that included Ward's son Mark, who was also in attendance.

The retired journalist also shared how much his Naval Reserve service had helped him in his successful civilian career, and encouraged the young sailors to "stick with it as it will pay dividends in your own careers." He added "Besides, Canada needs you young men and women in uniform—especially now." He concluded by saying,

"You make me proud to be Canadian and I thank you for your service as well as for helping my family and I get closure this evening." There was not a dry eye in the theatre after that.

Looking back on the screening and medal presentation at the Mayfair, Ward offered "it was one of the most wonderful evenings in my life. I am most grateful."



Above, Carleton's ship's company, NAC members, family and friends at the Mayfair Theatre giving a standing ovation to Admirals' Medal recipient Peter Ward. **S**







## Parade? What Parade?

By Richard Archer

Last July, Marilyn and I made a visit to one of our favourite places in the world – Victoria, BC. Besides the gorgeous scenery and positive vibe, it's the town where I officially joined the Navy, and had three years of naval and university schooling at HMCS *Venture* and then Royal Roads. After graduation from RMC and after pre-fleet training, Victoria was my first posting as a brand-new sub-lieutenant in HMCS *Mackenzie*. I had met Marilyn in North Bay, Ontario, at the wedding of her brother, a classmate. I was fortunate that her father, a senior CWO in the Air Force, was shortly thereafter due to retire, and that her parents had decided to take the final retirement posting to Victoria, taking their daughter with them. Thus, in Victoria the two of us were married and had our first abode. After sessions in Halifax, I managed to wrangle another series of postings to Victoria. At the time I thought of myself as a west-coaster.

This past July we stayed at our usual place, some rented rooms in an older house situated less than a block from Dallas Road, from the Strait of Juan de Fuca and from glorious views of the Olympic Mountains in the US. On a walk we decided to cut over from Douglas Street and enter Beacon Hill Park. Enroute, we came across a wide expanse of fine gravel, about the size of a soccer pitch. I was taken aback: I well-remembered this patch of ground....

The remembered date was Friday 16 June, 1961, the day before my 18th birthday. I was coming to the end of my academic year at *Venture*, although the routine had changed little since we junior cadets had disembarked from the navy bus onto the *Venture* parade square the previous September. By June, the senior cadets had returned from their South Seas cruise in the training frigates, and I had lost my position as a (temporary) divisional cadet captain. On

parade I was back in the middle of the rear rank, and once again, the seniors were taking their toll on the ever-diminishing number of junior cadets. From the outset, they had crowed that the naval junior cadet was the lowest form of marine life, “lower even than the amoeba” ... and had redoubled efforts to prove it.

On the day in question, out of the blue, we juniors were instructed to leave our classrooms, and to change into our number 1 uniforms. I made sure to wear my best white lanyard, the symbol of our junior-hood worn around the neck under the collar with the end tucked into a breast pocket. We were ordered to muster in our divisions on the parade square. Nobody said anything about why. This had happened before – the seniors felt it their right to call the juniors out onto the parade square at any time so as to impose punishment or for any other reason. We juniors took it all in stride.

In due course a couple large stake trucks pulled up alongside the parade square. Now, juniors were very familiar with such transportation. The trucks had a series of longitudinal benches upon which cadets could crowd. We accepted that this was the normal mode of ground transportation for those at the lower end of the marine life spectrum, often used as a means to getting to and from sports fixtures, for example. We called them cattle cars.

Without any explanation forthcoming, I took my place in one of the cattle cars, and the curtains covering the rear opening of the truck bed were closed. Off we went, with none of us sitting in the back seeing where we were going.

Eventually, we arrived somewhere and piled out. Led by an NCO, we had to walk across a grassy field and through some trees and then came upon the gravelly expanse, with bleachers on three sides. Surprisingly, at least four divisions of sailors carrying rifles were lined up in the centre of the space, with their officers with swords in front, everyone standing easy. Behind them





was the *Naden* band. I recognized the parade commander. He was the CO of *Venture*, Capt D.G. Padmore. Curiouser and curiouser.

We were led over to the rear of the bleachers, told to spread out, and I ended up behind the ones that lined the side facing the sailors. There we were each handed a fistful of pamphlets and told to escort members of the public who were coming to witness the parade to seats in the bleachers, and to hand out the pamphlets.

I looked at one of the pamphlets and it said something like, "Presentation of Sterling Silver Drums to the Royal Canadian Navy Pacific Command in Honour of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Navy." A bit late, I thought. The anniversary was last year, 1960. But sure enough, I finally noticed that sitting in the space in front of those on parade were stacked a set of silver, highly-embossed marching drums, complete with an animal skin for the bass drummer, destined to be employed by the *Naden* band in important ceremonies. Wow.

Okay, I hereby admit that recently I did some basic research into the event, and found a suitable record and a (too) grainy photo of the drum kit in the *Crowsnest*, the Navy's newsletter of the time, dated August 1961. Apparently, the Province of British Columbia, the City of Victoria, the Municipalities of Saanich and Oak Bay, and the Township of Esquimalt had all chipped in to acquire the drums, but they weren't ordered from England until 1960, thus the delay. *Crowsnest* said that a lot of preparation had led to this ceremony – I can imagine. The Lieutenant-Governor of BC, Hon Maj-Gen (Ret'd) George R. Pearkes, VC, presided.

Once I had more-or-less completed my ushering, I had a chance to view the proceedings. After the parade was brought to attention, the band played God Save the Queen in honour of the Lieutenant-Governor, followed by the Royal Salute. The troops were inspected and speeches were made. The

drums were appropriately blessed by the Command Chaplain. After O Canada the final march-off of the sailors went well with a march-pass of the dais and the Lieutenant-Governor taking the salute.

We juniors were bundled back into the cattle cars and taken back to *Venture* and back to the grind, which shortly thereafter included a rehearsal for our own graduation ceremony, to include a gymnastics demonstration and a parade with a live *feu de joie*. The highlight of the actual graduation parade for me of course was at the end. The seniors slow-marched through our junior ranks and on a signal ripped off the suitably cut lanyards from around our necks and tossed them high in the air. The one who did this for me said, "Congratulations, Senior Cadet." My own personal celebration. **S**



*(Guest Speaker Moss, continued from page 5...)*



This concept is being pitched by the Western Region to Ottawa CCG authorities, with the suggestion the region work to implement these proposals as a pilot project. If successful, it can then be shared with other regions.

In response to a question from the floor, the Assistant Commissioner made the point that the CCG in general has a strong working relationship with the RCN and continues to contribute to DND's maritime security agenda. Such cooperation with other government departments serves to advance the CCG's own aims. **S**





## Book Review

By David Gray

**Duane Schultz, *The Last Battle Station: the Saga of the USS Houston*, St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Ave, New York, NY, 10010, 1985. 249 pages, black & white photos, maps, ship's profile & deck plan. ISBN 0-312-46973-X. Available from Amazon.ca for as low as \$14.00 and up to \$150.00 used.**

USS *Houston* was an American heavy cruiser built in the early 1930s carrying nine 8-inch guns in three turrets. The peacetime U.S. Navy of the 1930s suffered from the naval limitation treaty America signed in 1921. The *Houston* was one of these treaty-class cruisers, built according to the restrictive guidelines imposed by the government's decision to abide by the rules. Some called the ship a "paper cruiser" because the armour plating was so thin [p. 4]. Initially, she was President Roosevelt's favourite ship for vacation cruises, being dubbed the "Little White House".

By the time war came for the United States, *Houston* was 12 years old, overdue for modernization, with no radar, antiquated fire-control equipment, no target practice (shells cost money), defective anti-aircraft ammunition, poor quality torpedoes, and biplane aircraft meant only for reconnaissance. Yet, she was the flagship of what the Americans had in the SW Pacific (Philippines-Australia area).

The book can be divided to three parts: the immediate pre-war (for the U.S.), the first 3 months of the war (for the U.S.), and the rest of the war. In the period just prior to the United States entry into the Second World War, *Houston* was showing the flag along the coast of China, hovering around the Philippines, and having plenty of shore leave for her crew at various ports. The book recounts some of the shenanigans that brought seamen before the captain the next morning.

When war did break out, the South China Sea was too "hot" for her, so she went into hiding, then withdrew to the south leaving the U.S. Army on the islands of the Philippines to their own devices. We now know that Gen. MacArthur had to withdraw by submarine. *Houston* then did convoy escort duty, which was uneventful, in the Java Sea area well away from Japanese aircraft. She had to work with the Royal Navy ships in the area (e.g., HMS *Exeter*), Dutch naval ships (e.g., HNLMS *de Ruyter*), Australian ships (e.g., HMAS *Perth*), but found that there was no coordination, no battle plans, no common set of signals, little sharing of information, no confidence in upper command. Thus, she found that she was often acting on her own initiative. During the Battle of the Java Sea (27 Feb. 1942), she was pounded by Japanese aircraft which could attack with impunity due to the faulty American ammunition such that they knocked out the aft triple turret.

A few days later, *Houston* tried to escape through Sunda Strait before a Japanese convoy brought an invading force to the west end of the island of Java. Due to poor dissemination of information, she was too late. She, with HMAS *Perth*, met up with 7 heavy cruisers and several destroyers at around 10 p.m. The Japanese took great delight in firing at them at close range and then upon the crew in the water. The current in the strait meant that many who abandoned the ship were swept out into the Indian Ocean and never seen again. Those that did survive, maybe about 350 of the 1064 on board *Houston*, were taken prisoner over the next few days – some attempting to avoid capture by trying to get to Batavia (Jakarta) before the Japanese. They didn't make it. For the duration of the war, the Americans back home considered the *Houston* "overdue and presumed lost".

The third part of the book deals with life as a Prisoner of War in various jails, prisons, work camps, and torture cells. At some (not many), the Japanese were somewhat humane, but at most others the







conditions were deplorable. If you were too sick to report to work, then you were not worth feeding (even the paltry amount that was issued) – you were of no worth to the Japanese and might as well die. Most of the survivors were part of the work crew building the railroad from Thailand to Burma, including help building the bridge over the River Kwai.

When war ended, there were only 292 officers and seamen from the *Houston* who survived the ordeals of sinking and POW work camps. The epilogue recounts some of their reactions when meeting Japanese people in America after the war.

**S**



*USS Houston, circa 1942*

US Navy Photo





## REMEMBER

By Pat Barnhouse



### Active Members

**Cdr(Ret'd) Gregory ALEXANDER, CD\***. In Embrun, ON 28/04/22 at 57.

**Cmdre John Alfred GRUBER, OMM, CD\*, RCN(Ret'd)**. In Ottawa 19/05/22 at 90

**Cdr Gerhard Webber KAUTZ, CD\*, RCN(Ret'd)**. In Ottawa 19/08/22 at 84.

**Capt Charles Malcolm NICHOLSON, CD\*\*, RCN(Ret'd)**. In Ottawa 03/07/22 at 85.

**AB Alexander POLOWIN, RCNVR**. In Ottawa 16/08/22 at 98.

### Others Known to Members

**S/Lt David Fordyce BARR, RCN(R)(Ret'd)**. Former member, in Winchester, ON 02/04/22 at 85

**P1HT4(Ret'd) Lawrence William BUTLER, CD\*\***. In Cornwall 29/08/22 at 72.

**Capt(NR)(Ret'd) John DANIELS, CD**. In Ottawa 12/07/22 at 90.

**Lt(L) Thonas Edwin DEVEY, RCN(Ret'd)**. In Ottawa 24/02/20 at 94

**Lt(N)(Ret'd) Douglas James DINSMORE, CD\*\***. In Rockland, ON 03/08/22 at 72.

**CPO1 James William FORSYTH, CD\*\*, RCN(Ret'd)**. In Halifax 20/07/22 at 91..

**Lt(N)(Ret'd) Jane E. GALE, CD**. In Stratford, ON 01/04/22 at 58.

**Capt(N)(Ret'd) James Terrance Oliver JONES, CD**. Former member, in Ottawa 28/09/22 at 80.

**Cdr(Ret'd) Tracey Muriel LONSDALE-HARRIS, CD\*\***. In Ottawa 12/08/22 at 60.

**Cdr David Franklin McCracken, CD\*, RCN(Ret'd)**. In Ottawa 02/07/22 at 76

**Capt Gordon Dean SPERGEL, CD\*, RCN(Ret'd)**. In Ottawa 30/05/22 at 97.

**Capt Donald David MacKenzie (Mack) WHITMAN, CD\*, RCN(Ret'd)**. In Ottawa 07/06/22 at 89.





## A Meeting in Belgium

By Richard Archer

This past August 18th was the 80th anniversary of the Canadian Army's 1942 raid on the coastal town of Dieppe, France. Appropriate ceremonies and commemorations were held, especially on the Dieppe waterfront.

I was reminded of an occasion when I met one of the raid's officers, who as a captain had led his battalion ashore on that day. He and his troops had made the deepest incursion into the town, and, of the 100 officers who had landed, he was the only one to make it back to the extraction boats unwounded. His name was Captain Denis Whitaker of the First Battalion, Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (RHLI).

He retired from the army as a brigadier-general, and aided by his author daughter Shelagh Whitaker, subsequently wrote about his raid experiences, and the encompassing circumstances, in a book called, "Dieppe: Tragedy and Triumph".

But how did I get to meet him?

Starting in 1994 as a commander, I was on the International Military Staff at NATO HQ in Brussels. From time to time, I was called upon by the Canadian delegation, either the military or the embassy, to represent the Canadian Armed Forces in post-war commemorative events in Belgium and the Netherlands. Marilyn always accompanied me.

These events were marvellous experiences. The joyous gratitude of the local people to Canada, and especially to the Canadian Army that had liberated them and, in many cases had saved them from starvation, was truly moving. We always felt that the people back in Canada should be there to see what the country's greatest generation had accomplished, how much Canadians were appreciated, and even how much potential Canada still held.

One such event was to be held in the village of Kalmthout, on the northern outskirts of Antwerp. We learned that the

event was to unveil a new statue raised in the village's main square in front of the local train station, and that there was a Canadian connection. That's all.

We arrived in the village, and sure enough we found the site, surrounded by throngs of people, where tarpaulins were readied to be lifted for an unveiling. My exact memories of what happened are a touch hazy, but a raised, roofed seating area held the seated VIPs, who were soon introduced. One of the first to be introduced was none other than retired Brig. Gen. Whitaker. Shelagh was by his side.

The story is that the RHLI had been intimately involved in 1944's Battle of the Scheldt, and that Whitaker had had a leading role. He was helped by a unique alliance between the Canadian infantry and the local Belgian resistance fighters. They joined forces and together liberated the port of Antwerp. This gaining of a major port and access to north-west Europe is seen to have been one of the keys to eventual allied victory.

The other main introduction was for the leader of the Belgian resistance fighters, a gentleman by the name of Eugène Colson, someone whom more Canadians should know more about. If you are interested to learn more, Shelagh Whitaker has written a book on the subject, "Eugène Colson and the Liberation of the Port of Antwerp."

In 1994, Canada's Governor-General awarded Colson with the Meritorious Service Medal (Civil Division), a rare honour for a non-Canadian. And I seem to remember him being introduced in the House of Commons. This was in recognition for all of his daring, effective wartime support of the Canadian advance in the Antwerp area 50 years earlier. At the time of the investiture, he was said to have the rank of retired Lieutenant-Colonel.

Back in Kalmthout the time came for the unveiling, and the result is shown in the image: in life-size statues, the approaching Canadian officer is greeted by the resistance fighter as they first meet on the battlefield.

We had a chance to chat with Whitaker and Colson, and they both joked







that the statues didn't look like them... but the commemorative plaque associated with the statue mentions them by name.

The plaque also provides a title: the Flemish name translates to "The Monument of the Gratitude." Thus, this monument is not directly commemorating the liberation of

Antwerp – it was raised by the local people of Kalmthout solely to recognize, appreciate and remember the roles of the Canadians and the resistance fighters in the liberation of their own village. **S**



This logo represents the 80th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund. In 2022, the organization marks this important milestone by taking a deep dive into its mission, governance, programs, and operations.  
See the story on page 17.





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## Naval Association of Canada - Ottawa

### Soundings

This newsletter was founded in 1982. It is published twice a year, normally in May and November, reporting on NAC - Ottawa programs and activities, trends and other matters of interest to its members. This and previous editions are posted on the branch web site at:

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