



News

CANADIAN NAVAL TECHNICAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

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War Museum seeks CNTHA Assistance

Readers with a sharp eye will likely have noticed that Dr. Roger Sarty is no longer your point of contact with the Directorate of History and Heritage. Roger, who was recently recruited by historian Jack Granatstein to head up historical research and exhibit development at the Canadian War Museum (CWM), is ably replaced by Michael Whitby (who worked with Roger and Dr. Alec Douglas to establish the naval history program at DHH). Roger, meanwhile, continues to actively participate in the CNTHA, and is now asking our readers for assistance.

The war museum is seeking to strengthen its holdings of post-Second World War naval artifacts, especially those from the Cold War era. This is an important development as the foundation of the CWM's collection consists mainly of Canadian army artifacts from the two world wars. According to Roger, the retirement of the last of Canada's steam-driven destroyers presents an unparalleled opportunity to fill in some of the gaps in the naval collection, but the museum needs advice on what equipment to look for.

The *St. Laurent*- and follow-on classes were built at the height of the Cold War in the 1950s and 60s, and remained the backbone of our naval fleet right up until the early 1990s. As such, they embody some 30 to 40 years of Canadian naval history. They were the first major warships to be designed in Canada, and their repeated upgrades over the years often featured equipment and concepts that were in themselves Canadian innovations. Home to several generations of Canadian naval personnel, these ships harbour the essence of the Canadian naval experience from a long and important period.

Roger is asking for assistance in identifying specific pieces of equipment, perhaps even parts of structure, that should be acquired by the museum to meet its mandate of preserving key artifacts that will serve both as a memorial and as an educational resource. One suggestion already passed on to the museum is that they should especially try to gather equipment, consoles and displays from the operations room and bridge (which the museum says can be worked up into a nice display), but what they need to know is, Which specific items? Also, are there reasonably compact pieces of equipment and structure from other parts of the ship (say an engine-room display), that would meet the dual objectives of preserving what was familiar and important to service people, and providing a good resource for education and research?

Roger Sarty promises to keep us posted on developments. In the meanwhile, if you can help him out in any way with the new naval display for the Canadian War Museum, please contact him directly at: Director Historical Research and Exhibit Development, Canadian War Museum, General Motors Court, 330 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, K1A 0M8. (Roger.Sarty@warmuseum.ca); Tel. (819) 776-8664; Fax (819) 776-8657.

Mike Saker



Helping Official History: The Value of the CNTHA

Article by Michael Whitby

Official History due in 2010

In January the Directorate of History and Heritage received renewed priority from the DND Heritage Board to complete a three-volume official history of the RCN in time for the centennial of the Canadian navy in 2010. This is great news. When completed, the project will enhance public understanding of the vital role the Canadian navy has played, and continues to play, in both peace and war.

The project will be a massive undertaking, but DHH is in good shape to see it through with our traditional high quality. We are in the final stages of completing Volume II, which covers the Second World War. A draft should be ready for the publisher at the end of this year, with publication about 18-24 months after that.

Some preliminary work has been done for Volume I (1867-1938), but we are much farther along with Volume III, which will cover the post-war years to 1968. The great progress with Volume III is thanks in no small part to the dedication of the naval technical community which has gathered a vast array of material on specific subjects such as naval aviation, sonar development and the hydrofoil project, as well as more general technical matters.

Over the past decade the naval history team at DHH has received tremendous support from the entire naval community. We are grateful for that and it gives us a great level of comfort to know that we will be able to continue to count upon that same enthusiasm as we see the naval history project through to completion.

M.W.



Given the fact that there has been a change in leadership of the naval history team at the Directorate of History and Heritage, it might be beneficial to re-emphasize the important contribution that the members of the CNTHA make to the writing of official history. In doing so, I will rely heavily upon Dr. Roger Sarty's discourse on the subject that appeared in the March 1997 edition of this newsletter, for he captured succinctly the reasons why official historians need your assistance.

First, let's clarify the term "official history." It can be misleading, but James Butler, editor of the massive British official history series on the Second World War, described official history as that commissioned and sponsored by a government which then opened its records for that purpose and took responsibility for the competence of the authors. That well sums up the position and role of Canada's official historians at the Directorate of History and Heritage. We are given a task, we receive unfettered access to departmental records and we complete a comprehensive historic volume to the best of our ability. Our job is to get it right, warts and all.

In January the Directorate of History and Heritage received the go-ahead to complete a three-volume official history of the RCN in time for the centennial of the Canadian navy (*see box at left*). This will be a huge undertaking, especially Volume III which will cover the years 1945 to 1968. Veteran sailors of that period know of the massive changes that took place, not just in the RCN, but in naval warfare in general, and understand the ever-increasing impact that technology had on naval warfare during that time frame.

Documents are useful only to a point to the historian who is seeking to understand and interpret the complexities of technological change. As Dr. Sarty explained so well, innumerable questions arise that must be addressed: How were ship and equipment requirements evolved? How did the teams responsible for equipment selection, design and pro-

curement evolve? Who were the key players? How did the technical branches relate to the naval staff and to each other? How did the navy relate to the Defence Research Board, to the Department of Defence Production and to industry? How did the ships and equipment perform in the fleet? What problems arose and how were they tackled?

The recollections of those who witnessed or participated in those events are of immeasurable assistance to the historians who grapple with these critical questions. That was revealed to me in my work on "*Certified Serviceable, The Technical Story of Canadian Naval Aviation*." The vast expanse of anecdotes, reminiscences, copies of working papers, accounts of experience with certain types of kit, along with the photographs collected by a small group of dedicated naval air technicians, shed an enormous amount of light on what would otherwise have been a pretty dark hangar. It's not that the technical side of naval air would have been ignored in the official history, but it is doubtful that it would have been written with the clarity and insight of "those who made it so."

So we welcome, enthusiastically and gratefully, any material that members of the CNTHA can contribute to our growing naval technical collection at DHH. We also welcome your advice when we seek to understand the complexities of the post-war naval experience. You are valuable members of the naval team and you will help us to get it right.



Michael Whitby is the chief of the Naval History Team in the Directorate of History and Heritage.

Book Review: Desert Sailor: A War of Mine

By James T. Hewitt, Canadian Peacekeeping Press, Cornwallis Park, P.O. Box 100, Clementsport, NS, B0S 1E0, 1998. ISBN 1-896551-17-3. Soft cover, 192 pp, Illus., photos, appendices and index. \$24.95 plus taxes and shipping.

Reviewed by Mike Young

To this reviewer's knowledge this is only the second book published by a Canadian naval officer on his Gulf War experience¹. A specialist mine warfare officer, LCdr Jim Hewitt kept a journal during his time in the region. He has edited and smoothed the entries into a fascinating book.

As the title implies, this is both a personal account and an account of the sea

mine warfare aspects of the 1991 Gulf War. Sent to the Gulf in late 1990, the author ultimately joined the staff of the multinational mine countermeasures (MCM) force, which was commanded by a USN officer. After the shooting stopped, LCdr Hewitt was one of the first ashore at the former Kuwait naval base. There he witnessed some of the effects of the Iraqi occupation — looting, vandalism and wanton destruction, coupled with some nasty booby traps — and collected some official “souvenirs” for use as training aids in the fleet school back in Halifax.

What makes this story fascinating is the insight the author brings as a specialist in the business of mine warfare. He was

(continued on page 4)



The amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli (LPH-10) lies in drydock in Bahrain after sustaining damage below the waterline from an Iraqi mine off Kuwait during the Gulf War in 1991. The ship was able to continue operations after damage control crews were able to stop the flooding. (USN photo by JO1 Joe Gawlowicz. Used with permission.)

The Collection (354 Items!)

Among our latest acquisitions is a VHS tape entitled, “The Tracker Years.” It is an amateur video produced and written by Alfred T. Bristow. In the credits he recognizes several retired naval officers, two of whom are known to me — Robbie Hughes and Benny Oxholm. The tape runs close to an hour in length and is most professional in presentation. Although primarily operational, it tells the story of the tracker aircraft in full and is a joy to watch. The production group is called Crystal Creations, and proceeds from the sale of tapes (at \$34.50 each) are being used to support the Shearwater Aviation Museum Foundation.

Copies can be obtained from:

Alfred T. Bristow
#94-100 Burrows Hall,
Scarborough, Ontario M1B 1M7
phone (416) 299-8016

We are continually on the lookout for new material. If you have something and think we have it, send it anyway. We can sort it out. You can reach me by:

mail: 673 Farmington Ave.,
Ottawa, Ont., K1V 7H4
fax: (613) 738-3894
E-mail: phil@ncf.ca

Phil Munro



(continued from page 3)

RCN/RN Relations, 1955

In 1955 a number of Canadian officers and ratings were serving in Royal Navy submarines based in Portland, England as part of the deal that brought the (RN) Sixth Submarine Squadron to Halifax in that year. On June 16, 1955, one of the boats, HMS/M *Sidon* sank alongside the depot ship after a torpedo explosion, with fourteen lives lost. I happened to be Duty Staff Officer at NMCJS (London) that day. That evening I got a call from someone in the Admiralty asking whether the Canadian Government would have any objection to the Queen sending condolences to the relatives of the one Canadian petty officer killed in the blast. After a quick check to make sure that the next of kin had already been informed, I told the Admiralty to go ahead. On reporting this to Commodore Brock the next morning, he was appalled by the thought that anyone would even ask the question. We'd certainly succeeded (maybe too well) in sensitizing the RN to Canadian independence. — **Hal Smith**



aboard the MCM command ship USS *Tripoli* when she hit a mine in the barrier off Kuwait and he describes the chilling scene as damage control parties fought to contain the flooding, shore up weakened bulkheads, restore electrical power and prevent explosions from a variety of flammable products released by the mine damage. The damage caused by a single mine to this 20,000-ton ship was major and a reminder of just how dangerous mines can be. The missile cruiser USS *Princeton* was also severely damaged as a result of actuating a mine in the same field.

It is clear from the observations of the author that, once again, when it came to mine warfare, some key naval planners, as well as some coalition senior officers, overlooked the lessons of history. Fortunately, this time the coalition forces were able to side-step. Next time we may not be

so fortunate. This book should be mandatory reading for naval officers attending the Canadian Forces Command and Staff College.



Mike Young is an independent consultant based in Ottawa.

[Cmdre Duncan "Dusty" Miller wrote about his experiences as a task group commander in the 1995 book, "*The Persian Excursion*," written in collaboration with Sharon Hobson. RAdm Miller now commands the Canadian Maritime Forces Atlantic.]

Canadians at Harwell

Regarding an earlier query of, "Who were the Canadians, if any, who joined the team at Harwell?"

The following people undertook the 16-week course at Harwell, U.K., completing it in mid-January 1958:

- Cdr(E) (later Vadm) R. St.G. Stephens
- Constructor LCdr W.M. Ogle (left the RCN 1964)
- Lt(L) G.A. Kastner (retired as Lcdr)
- R.A. Mitchell, civilian engineer from NEDIT

They all then went to Y-ARD to work with the RN team studying nuclear propulsion.

Lt(E) (later Capt) S.E. Hopkins completed an M.Sc. degree in nuclear engineering at the University of Ottawa in September 1957. Cdr(E) (later Capt) M.W. Anketell-Jones was on the Harwell course immediately after the above four. [Source: *Crowsnest*, Feb. 1958, pp. 14-19, "Atomic

power high in naval planning: RCN officers train in nuclear engineering," (which I happened to stumble across while looking for something else!). Most of the article is quoted from a survey by RAdm G.A.M. Wilson, RN, Deputy E-in-C in the Admiralty, December 1957.]

The article also says that LCdr(L) C.R. Nixon (left the RCN as Cdr 1963; later Deputy Minister of National Defence) and LCdr(L) J.A. Stachon (later Cdr) "are studying nuclear engineering as part of the course they are taking at MIT." This is something of an exaggeration as, at the time and for some time afterward, MIT offered only one course in nuclear reactor control — or about five percent of the total courses they took. [Source: Me! I took this MIT course in 1959.]

Hal Smith



We'd love to hear from you...

If you have information, documents or questions you'd like to pass along to the Canadian Naval Technical History Association, please contact the Directorate of History and Heritage, NDHQ, MGen George R. Pearkes Bldg., Ottawa, Canada K1A 0K2 Tel.: (613) 998-7045/Fax: (613) 990-8579

