



# News

CANADIAN NAVAL TECHNICAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

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## Editorial

**T**his issue of the *CNTHA News* finds our activities, committee and collection all expanding.

On the activity front, some of us gathered one day this summer for a small workshop to see how we might progress the development our data bank. The objective was to design a work project that could: map out a specific area of our history (as opposed to considering the entire length and breadth of it); determine the void spaces in our collection of material; and, develop lines of enquiry to obtain the missing material. Jim Dean was instrumental in proposing a "strawman" approach, which we hope to have fleshed out by the New Year so that we can send it out to a select group of people we think might be able to help us. If this methodology proves to be successful, we will apply it to other areas of our domain.

On the people side, we are pleased to welcome three new committee members. On the West Coast, Capt(N) (Ret'd) Hank Schaumburg has agreed to act as our coastal coordinator. Here in Ottawa, Capt(N) (Ret'd) John Nash has offered to represent the "pusser" side of the activity on our committee. Also we are pleased to welcome LCdr Richard Gimblett who has been seconded to DHH by the Chief of Maritime Staff to work on the early post-war history of the RCN. Richard



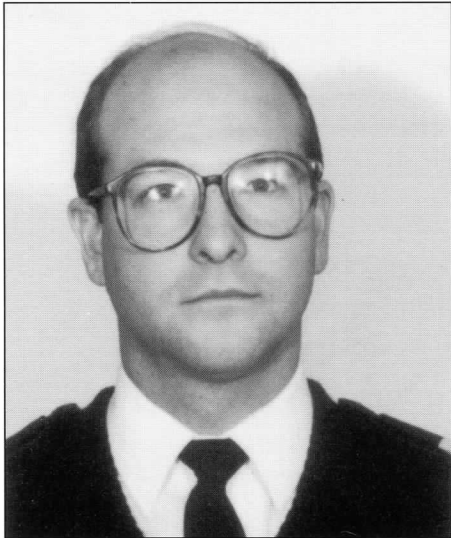
*RAdm (Ret'd) M.T. Saker*

describes his project in our feature article of this newsletter.

Finally, in addition to Phil Munro's regular column with updates on the Collection, this issue of *CNTHA News* offers a sample item in the form of a letter from Bob Grosskurth, concerning a technical innovation associated with the Korean War. Hopefully, this example may inspire other readers to relate similar stories of their experiences.

*Mike Saker*

## Capturing the Navy's "Lost" History, 1945-1950



LCdr Richard Gimblett

In many ways, the early postwar years 1945-1950 represent five "lost" years of RCN history. For various reasons, the Navy has been particularly reticent about this dark and unsettled period of its history. From the end of the Second World War to the outbreak of the Korean conflict – the time of the so-called "Interim Navy" – the RCN was in major transition. Budget cutbacks had reduced the fleet to a rump of its glorious wartime establishment (by mid-1947 there were barely a dozen warships in commission), the remaining ships were falling into disrepair, and a breakdown in relations between officers and men was serious enough to culminate in mutinies in three ships in the late winter of 1949. The resulting Mainguy Commission finally gave the Navy the impetus to reorganize just in time for operations off Korea, marking the beginning of its golden age through the 1950s and 1960s.

The story of the Interim Navy is complex and, with its many similarities to our present-day period of cutbacks and search for a post-Cold War role, study of it can be illuminating. Under the sponsorship of the Chief of the Maritime Staff, I have been attached to the Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH) to progress work on the history of the postwar RCN, concentrating on the early years, 1945-1950. To give my research focus, I have chosen to examine the record of HMCS *Crescent*, the only ship in continuous commission throughout this period.

*Crescent* and her sister *Crusader* had been acquired on loan from the Royal Navy as the lead ships of a planned flotilla of eight C-class destroyers for action against the Japanese. The transfer of the remainder of the class was cancelled at the end of the war, and while *Crusader*

was paid off into reserve almost immediately, *Crescent* was sent to the West Coast for training duties. With the maintenance budget continuously restricted, her pristine condition slowly deteriorated and the minimal creature comforts inherent in hasty wartime construction were exacerbated. When the Minister of External Affairs, Lester Pearson, directed that the RCN despatch a ship to oversee the evacuation of Canadians from civil war-torn China in early 1949, *Crescent* was the most readily available. It was on March 15, 1949, while *Crescent* was standing by in Nanking, that she experienced one of the mutinous "incidents" which Rear-Admiral Mainguy would later investigate.

Her story, therefore, embraces many of the themes characteristic of the postwar RCN. But to ensure that I "get it right," the work of the CNTHA is of vital importance in capturing the true spirit of those times. Too often "official" history has had a purely operational focus, without sufficient regard for the engineering and logistics factors, which can have as much operational impact. For instance, one of the immediate causes of postwar discontent was the declining state of messdeck habitability. As well, there was a concern, especially felt amongst the technical trades, that postwar pay was not keeping pace with the boom in the civilian workplace. This gave rise to a recurring manning crisis, as many tradesmen took their discharges and the remaining hands were drafted from hull to hull in the drive to get ships to sea.

But how exactly did manning concerns and budget factors affect the state of engineering readiness of the fleet? Were pay and benefits the true concerns of the junior ratings, or

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# The Collection

Our Collection has increased to 318 items, the latest additions being a contribution from the estate of Arthur J. C. Pomeroy. Arthur, a retired RNVR officer, was a member of the Department of Defence Production (DDP, later to become the Department of Supply and Services, known today as Public Works and Government Services Canada). He was the prime mover in the acquisition of warships by fixed price/incentive/ceiling contracts, rather than by the cost plus arrangement commonly used. His papers, which cover the period from 1955-1963, give a graphic account of the problems in overcoming bureaucratic inertia, particularly through many instructional letters which he wrote to all and sundry. The fruit from his labour was implemented in the contracts to build the *Mackenzie/Annapolis*-class destroyers in the early '60s.

It is this sort of material which provides tangible insight into the personal attitudes and efforts behind the technical advances made by the navy over the years. There are other examples in our collection, some of which will be illustrated in upcoming issues of the *Maritime Engineering Journal* and the *CNTHA News*.

As stated in my last column in June, we are in need of material relating to the older ships: e.g. Tribal-class destroyers; *Crusader* as an experimental ship; *Ontario* and *Quebec*. Also, our submarine docket is practically empty. Does anyone know if we made alterations to *Grilse* after acquisition? Can anyone offer information concerning the *Manitoba*-class cruiser or the *Vancouver* frigate?

Any contributions, from a single paragraph to a book, can be sent to DHH, at the address noted in this newsletter, or to me directly:

**By mail:** 673 Farmington Ave., Ottawa, Ont., K1V 7H4  
**By fax:** (613) 738 3894, or  
**By E-mail:** as436@freenet.carleton.ca

*Phil Munro*

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merely a cover for deeper ills? Why did the divisional system fail to ensure officer-man harmony? Did the introduction of new ship types provide a solution, or simply promise a different set of recruiting and training problems?

These questions are as valid today as they were 50 years ago. If you can shed any light on these issues, or if you care to comment on the RCN's "lost years," please feel free to contact me directly at DHH at (613) 998-7061. I would certainly welcome any input you might have.

*LCdr Richard Gimblett*

**Editor's Note:** LCdr Richard Gimblett was Combat Officer of HMCS *Protecteur* for operations in the Persian Gulf, and is co-author (with Major Jean Morin) of the official account, *Operation Friction: The Canadian Forces in the Persian Gulf\** (Dundurn, 1997) [reviewed in the October 1997 issue of the *Maritime Engineering Journal*].

\*Titre français: *Opération Friction: Golfe Persique (1990-1991). Le rôle joué par les Forces canadiennes.*

## How to Access the Collection

A prime purpose of the Collection is to make its information available to researchers and casual readers alike. So how can you get to read some of it? Good question!

For the moment, there is only one copy of the Collection, situated at the Directorate of History and Heritage located at 2429 Holly Lane (near the intersection of Heron and Walkley Roads) in Ottawa. DHH is open to the public every Tuesday and Wednesday from 0830 till 1630. Staff is on hand to retrieve the information you request and to help in any way. Xerox facilities are available on a self-service basis. Access to the building requires a visitor's pass, easily obtained from the commissionaire at the front door.

Copies of the index to the Collection (Accession No. 93/110) may be obtained by writing to DHH.

*Drop by. Give us a look.*

# Korea: HDWS Radar in *Athabaskan*

*From a letter written by  
Bob Grosskurth,  
New Delhi, India*

My one contribution to technical improvement in the Navy came about when I was the electrical officer in *Athabaskan* during her first tour in Korea from June 1950 to May 1951. The only surface warning radar we carried was the 293 which was useless for navigation purposes because of its low definition. Bob Welland, our captain and Dick Leir, the navigator, noted that some of the USN destroyers and most of the merchant ships out there carried a commercial high-definition radar which did much to improve their capability and safety in inshore waters.

One day around the time of the Inchon landing, Welland very casually asked me whether I could install a commercial high-definition radar if he could get his hands on one. Thinking there wasn't a chance in the world that he could manage that, I just as casually told him it would be no problem. Lo and behold, when we returned to Sasebo from three weeks' R & R in Hong Kong in early December 1950, we found a pile of crates waiting for us on the jetty. The crates contained a

Marconi LN-27 that Welland had conned someone in Montreal into sending out to us, how we will never know. I never did get the story from Bob.

When asked how long it would take to install and get working, I hazarded a guess of not less than two to three weeks. I was then told we had precisely five days until our next patrol. I hustled around Sasebo trying to line up out-of-work Japanese radar technicians and also a naval architect to design an antenna platform and calculate the effect on the ship's stability of the added weight on the foremast.

To make a long story short, working around the clock with my most reliable technicians (Jim Cottrell, John Knox and C I RT Charlie Moser) and a make-up team of Japanese technicians, we managed to get the damn thing installed in five days. I shall never forget the moment on the fifth morning when we switched on power, the antenna started to revolve and, miraculously, a detailed picture of Sasebo harbour came up bright and beautiful on the display. Those Japanese I had hired were simply fantastic.

The gadget came in very handy on our next outing as we were diverted (along with *Cayuga*, *Sioux* and six USN, RN and RAN destroyers) to

Chinampo to cover the evacuation of an American infantry battalion several miles up a nasty river on a moonless night. Apart from a little dissatisfaction that the display console had to be in the chart room rather than on the bridge, the set served us well until we returned to Esquimalt the following May. I believe the commercial LN-27 afterward became standard equipment in all ships going to Korea.

## About the Author

Bob Grosskurth joined the Royal Canadian Navy as a UNTD Ordinary Seaman (Stoker Second Class) in 1943 after graduating from the University of Toronto in electrical engineering. He received his commission as a sub-lieutenant in 1945 and served aboard *Athabaskan* in 1950 when the above story took place. Later he served in *Ontario* (1955-56) and *Bonaventure* (1965-66). Commander Grosskurth retired from the RCN in 1973 and currently resides on a farm on the outskirts of New Delhi, India.

## Questions/Comments

- Does anyone know how the LN-27 radar set appeared on the jetty?
- How many ships eventually were fitted with the LN-27? All the destroyers?
- The operation to Chinampo was led by then Captain Jeff Brock in *Cayuga*, which did not have the fancy navigation radar, but did have the late Andy Collier as navigator. They too did not run aground, but several of the ships did! Andy Collier got the DSC for his efforts.





# Letters

**Rear Admiral M.T. Saker,**

May I first acknowledge receipt of the February issue of the *Maritime Engineering Journal* and the minutes of your latest committee meeting - all most welcomed. I must comment on the CNTHA newsletter - it is most impressive and should encourage everyone to contribute. It certainly has been produced to a very high standard. As you know I have long held the view that the story of the development of the Canadian industrial base from World War II to the present date is a remarkable tale. Ernie Baker's papers demonstrate how the navy steadily became more professional - particularly in the technical branches. In parallel with the improved competence within the navy was the maritime industry adapting to change and adopting high-tech principles. Progress from the relatively simple corvette of WW II to the very sophisticated CPF is a truly remarkable story. My only reason for banging on is to emphasize the importance of your project. In closing, may I wish you every success.

Cheers

**Rolfe Monteith,  
5 Admiralty Cottages,  
Devils Point, Plymouth,  
Devon, England  
PL1 3RS.**

## Response:

*Thanks for the kind words and encouragement. As many of you know, Rolfe was a driving force behind recording these historical pursuits and keeps a watchful eye on our progress from England.*

**CNTHA**

**(c/o Directorate of History  
and Heritage)**

A while ago I came across a memorandum requesting historical information to be used in writing the history of the Navy. Perhaps I could help in compiling notes on the development of the AN/SQS-505 sonar systems installed in the IRE and DDH-280-class ships. I was Fred Jardine's project officer for the installation, setting-to-work and trials of those systems. Also, I could prepare notes on the development of the electrical power generation and distribution system for the CPF.

Yours truly

**Tom Stephens,  
RR #1 Ch. Baie Dupré,  
Lac Ste Marie, Québec  
JOX IZ0.**

## Response:

*We're always glad to hear from willing contributors. Tom has been put in touch with Hal Smith, our "sonar king" and research coordinator.*

*Thanks, Tom.*



## West Coast News

**H**ank Schaumburg has kindly volunteered to act as the West Coast Coordinator for the CNTHA. He will serve as our point of contact in the west, and will help organise or coordinate activities in that area. Hank can be reached at (250) 598 7956.

The **West Coast Maritime Engineering Seminar**, the annual professional development seminar for engineering personnel, will be held 19 & 20 January 1998. The naval organisers have kindly offered limited attendance by CNTHA members. Not only will it be an opportunity for you to regain contact with your naval roots, but you also will have a chance to hear our very own Hal Smith, along with co-author Dr. Shawn

Cafferky, present their paper entitled **How the DDH 280 Got Gas Turbines**. Hal says that this paper, which is partly based on some material in the CNTHA Collection, is intended as a starting point for a more complete study. No doubt more than a few of you on the West Coast possess some first hand knowledge of that era that could help the authors in their quest. Why not plan to attend? Please contact Hank Schaumburg, who has been asked to coordinate our attendance, at the above number.

## About the CNTHA

**T**he Canadian Naval Technical History Association is a voluntary organization working in support of the Directorate of History and Heritage to preserve our naval technical history. It is directed by a committee whose members are:

- RAdm (Ret'd) M.T. Saker (Chairman)
- Professor S.M. Davis (RAdm, Ret'd)
- Dr. W.A.B. Douglas, DG History (Ret'd)
- Cmdre F.W. Gibson, DG Maritime Equipment Program Management
- Capt(N) (Ret'd) R.G. Monteith
- LCdr (Ret'd) P.R. Munro (Executive Director)
- Dr. H.W. Smith, Cdr (Ret'd) (Research Director)
- Dr. R. Sarty, Senior Historian (DHH liaison)
- Mr. R. A. Spittall (DGMEPM liaison)
- Capt(N) (Ret'd) J. Nash (Supply Director)
- Cdr (Ret'd) P.D.C. Barnhouse
- Mr. Brian McCullough (*Maritime Engineering Journal* liaison)
- Ms. Gabrielle Nishiguchi, DHH (Secretary)
- Capt(N) (Ret'd) J.G. Dean (Ottawa Coordinator)
- Capt(N) (Ret'd) T. Brown (East Coast Coordinator)
- Capt(N) (Ret'd) H.W. Schaumburg (West Coast Coordinator)

Membership is open to anyone interested in Canadian naval technical history. The CNTHA newsletter and a copy of the *Maritime Engineering Journal* are sent to a CNTHA list of serving and retired military personnel and civilians. Names may be added or deleted from the mailing list by contacting DHH.

## 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:

Roger Sarty, Senior Historian,  
Directorate of History and  
Heritage, NDHQ,  
MGen George R. Pearkes Bldg.,  
Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0K2  
Tel.: (613) 998-7045  
Fax: (613) 990-8579

We look forward to hearing from you.