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**Volume 2, Number 3**

**July 2021**

**A periodic publication of the UNTD Association of Canada designed to provide news and short stories in a lighthearted fashion. Back issues can be found on the web site here: [Gunroom Shots - UNTD Association of Canada](#)**

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Welcome Ken!

- ⚓ UNTDA Facebook Group
- ⚓ CSVG Project Update
- ⚓ Did you Know - Prep for 2023
- ⚓ Canada's Navy in WWII

**In This Issue**

- ⚓ Tidbits
- ⚓ Letters to the Editor
- ⚓ Membership Renewal



Wishing all  
who sail in the  
Good Ship  
Canada...Fair Winds  
and Following Seas  
for the voyage  
ahead this  
Canada Day!



photo: navy-marine.forces.gc.ca

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**UNTDA Facebook Group Page**

“Do you hear there!” Forget Morse code and flag sigs; the UNTDA has arrived in the 21st Century and is pleased to announce that we have joined Facebook for your added communications opportunities. Initiated by Daniel Haché (Donnacona 1978) the Facebook Group Page was created on June 6th to attract like-minded individuals who have trained as Naval Reserve Cadets and Officers of all time periods and all entry schemes. If you are present on Facebook, we encourage you to become members of this dedicated UNTDA Group Page. To date, we have 87 members. The address of the Group Page is [www.facebook.com/groups/506247957190250/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/506247957190250/)

Oyé ! Oyé ! Oyé ! Oubliez le code morse et le sémaphore ! L'Association UNTD est entrée dans le 21e siècle et est heureuse d'annoncer notre page Facebook de groupe pour que vous puissiez utiliser ce média pour communiquer avec vos amis. Cette page de groupe a été créée par Daniel Haché le 6 juin pour attirer des gens qui se sont entraînés en tant que cadets et officiers de la Réserve navale de toutes les époques et de toutes les méthodes Si vous êtes présent sur Facebook, nous vous encourageons à devenir membre de cette page de groupe. À date, 87 membres se sont joints à ce groupe. L'adresse de la page de groupe est la suivante : [www.facebook.com/groups/506247957190250/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/506247957190250/)

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## Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph

### Project Update

by Kim Kubeck, CSVC Project Manager

This project of the UNTDA is well underway, but much work lies ahead...

#### What is it?

Of the 1769 Canadian Naval Reservists who died in WW II, very little is known about them at the Naval Reserve Division where they joined. They enlisted "for hostilities only" and served in the RCNVR, RCNR and WRCNS.

The UNTDA Board has approved a project with a goal to flesh out the stories of these sailors, to tell their story of sacrifice, and to “repatriate” them to their home division.

#### How does this get started?

Project Manager Kim Kubeck has assembled the data available from the War Graves Commission to facilitate further research . Worksheets are being sent to volunteers, who under online guidance will delve more deeply using a variety of other sources of information.

The researchers return their completed worksheets, along with a story in prose from the assembled data. A reviewer will then programmatically update the database.

#### Where are we now?

The database is in place. We have identified a number of pilot researchers who have been sent worksheets on several sailors. They will provide feedback on the design of the worksheets and the on-line guidance, and then the process will be refined.

An email address for the project has been established: [CitizenSailorsVirtualCenotaph@UNTDA.org](mailto:CitizenSailorsVirtualCenotaph@UNTDA.org)

The UNTDA is seeking suggestions for the appearance of a project home page and theme. To start with, this is being hosted on the UNTDA web site, but we expect to establish a separate site in due course.

We are also completing a virtual brochure in two versions, focused on recruiting researchers, and possible fund-raising.

The UNTDA web site home page has been revised to focus on the CSVC project, with links to explanatory docs in English and French. We expect these docs will change both in appearance and content as the project evolves, and as our graphics experts provide improved visuals. The docs can be downloaded from the web site but where possible, interested readers should always refer back to the web site for the latest versions.

Translation of documentation and content has been identified as one of the primary funding needs for this project moving forward.

We are working on some graphical elements to punch up the presentation material and with ideas for a logo. We expect to incorporate these in the brochure, the web site and a special issue of Gunroom Shots.

## **Outside Support**

NavRes has expressed interest in the project and we are hoping for active assistance in recruiting researchers and participants from NRDs. At the core of the project, the “Cenotaph”, is the readily accessible database with its detail and the sailors’ stories. Beyond this, we will need the support, participation and enthusiasm of both individual NRDs as well as NavRes to consider such things as permanent plaques, books of remembrance, commemorative ceremonies, etc. Execution will undoubtedly vary from NRD to NRD, and will most likely stretch beyond 2023.

We are exploring support and funding from the Navy League.

Our President has informed several organizations, NAC, CNMT, etc. of our plans, and whether we seek endorsement or support remains to be discussed.

We have reached out to a professor at MUN in St John’s to see if it might be possible to involve university students as researchers (for course credit).

## **Next steps**

With the help of the pilot users, Board members and others, additional researchers will be recruited, instructed and sent worksheets. Experience with the pilot researchers will give us some idea of the demands on them, how many more we will need, and whether we will have to pay for their work.

We continue to explore associated funding sources and what fund-raising will be required.

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## **Did You Know - Preparing for 2023**

(Historical reflections submitted by Stephen Rybak)

"The early 1920's were grim years for the RCN. It required a great deal of courage and fortitude to continue to serve Canada in the navy in the face of apparent government indifference and public apathy. The only

encouraging sign was the response to the RCNVR and the eagerness displayed by those who joined it. The RCN had shrunk to 67 Officers and 385 Ratings by 31 March 1924"

**(pp 66-67, Pullen in RCN In Retrospect)**

In comparison, the RCNVR's complement in 1924 was 50 Officers and 746 Ratings in 12 Half Companies. It was not until 1936 that the RCN's authorized strength surpassed that of the RCNVR.

"The qualifications required for appointment as commanding officer for a reserve division are revealing: patriotism, a keen interest in naval affairs, a position in the town that enabled the candidate to command the support of the men of his company and 'stir up interest" in the formation of the company, and sufficient spare time to devote to the organizing of the company. Officers worked for free on drill nights. They received pay only for their two-week annual training periods. They bought their own uniforms. And much of their work was not compensated."

**(p 45, Winters in Citizen Sailors)**

"By the time the depression hit hardest, most of the wealthy commanding officers had gone. Those reservists who remained continued on, in part because of the camaraderie offered, and in part because of civic pride. They were dedicated and loyal. Sadly, they were also desperate for the paltry pay if offered. Across the country, units were vandalized by people seeking meagre supplies. Under the guise of deterring theft, some members began sleeping at their reserve units."

**(pp 46-47, Winters in Citizen Sailors)**

"Despite the setbacks, the professionalism of the RCNVR continued as its role was expanded and refined. In 1930, the Department of National Defence had published a revised set of regulations.

The RCNVR was clearly a young man's organization: mandatory retirement was required for all sub-lieutenants at age 35, for lieutenants at 45, and for lieutenant-commanders at 50. There were only four officer occupations: naval, medical, accounting and engineering. Ratings were divided into three classifications: seamen, technical and logistics- each with its own ranking system, ...Slowly the RCNVR began to evolve as a separate organization. Perhaps most readily distinctive were the wavy stripes that officers in the RCNVR wore on their sleeves to distinguish them from their regular RCN regular force brothers.

**(p 49, Winters in Citizen Sailors)**





"The legacy of the Naval Reserve in the interwar period is an ambiguous one. The reserves had clearly saved the naval service from its complete breakup in the early 1920's. But had they created a national sense of pride in naval matters? By participating in fairs and exhibitions, by marching in parades and Armistice Day ceremonies, each reserve unit reminded Canadians that a naval service did, in fact, exist in Canada, no matter how battered and bedraggled. ...By failing to make the navy and its reserve truly Canadian rather than a pale imitation of the British Admiralty, naval leaders failed to capture the public's attention."

**(pp50-51 Winters in Citizen Sailors)**

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## Canada's Navy during WW2: An Appreciation

By T.B.H (Tom) Kuiper -Donnacona 1962

Continued from the last issue of Gunroom Shots.....

*Storm Below*, by Hugh Garner, gives a fictional account of a Canadian corvette escorting a west-bound convoy in 1943. *HMCS Sackville* by Marc Millner is a history from 1941 to 1985 of Canada's last and now the only corvette.

My reason for reading multiple personal accounts is that they provided a context which enabled me to appreciate better the scholarly works, because events became my vicarious experiences instead of mere facts. Not, however, the experience of actually living in a corvette. The more stable frigates of our experience embodied the relative comforts which were found in USN and later Canadian ships.

Monsarrat's accounts do not capture the true misery of the lower deck. *Very Ordinary Seaman*, a personal account by J.P.W. Mallalieu, does that very well for the RN, revealing the extreme discomfort and absurdities, and I suppose it wasn't very different in the RCN.

Canada's Naval Control Service made a unique contribution to the management of convoys, reflecting the mutual respect of all ranks in the largely civilian Canadian navy. Frederick Watt described how he transitioned from a free-lance writer with an RCNVR commission to a member of the NCSO's staff and how NCS evolved and became a model for Britain and the US.

Some sense of what life was like in a whale catcher can be found in *Antarctic Raider*, a novel by ex-whaler W.R.D. McLaughlin. A German passenger ship converted to a surface raider is sent to capture the year's whale oil catch in the southern ocean and a British auxiliary cruiser is sent to prevent that. A commandeered old whale-catcher, converted by adding three torpedo tubes, like a corvette similarly configured, finds and destroys the raider.

Hal Lawrence gave us a different personal account in *A Bloody War*. He also wrote *Victory at Sea* (not the documentary with its memorable music by Richard Rodgers), a thrilling account of the coastal forces consisting of motor gun boats and motor torpedo boats in which Canadian flotillas, with their larger than life characters, distinguished themselves serving in Europe with the RN. They appear prominently also in *Gunboat 658*, a personal account by R.C. Reynolds who served in the RNVR.

Such boats were also used in our coastal waters. The Canadian government underplayed the naval war in the Gulf of St. Lawrence because the political situation in Quebec was already strained. Marc Milner's *Incident at North-Point*, vaguely based on a real incident, introduces us to the Fairmile motor launches and provides a context for *U-Boats against Canada*. *The Boat Who Wouldn't Float* by Farley Mowat has no connection with the RCN or WWII but provides a delightful appreciation of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the St. Lawrence River, its weather, geography and people. In *The Serpent's Coil*, Mowat captures the experience of an Atlantic hurricane. E.G. Perrault does the same for Canada's west coast in *The Twelfth Mile*.

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## Tidbits

### The future of remembrance in Canada

We want to alert our UNTDA members to this important initiative by Veterans Affairs Canada who invite us to share our thoughts about how we can best recognize all those who have served, and commemorate Canada's military, peace support, and humanitarian missions. **The consultation is open until 9 July 2021.** VAC invites all Canadians—especially Veterans, CAF members, RCMP, and other persons involved in international peace support operations, and their families—to share their views. We hope you will add your voice!

### L'avenir du souvenir au Canada

Nous voulons alerter nos membres de l'UNTDA sur cette importante initiative d'Anciens Combattants Canada, qui nous invite à partager nos réflexions sur la meilleure façon de reconnaître tous ceux qui ont servi et de commémorer les missions militaires, de soutien à la paix et humanitaires du Canada. La consultation est ouverte jusqu'au 9 juillet 2021. ACC invite tous les Canadiens, en particulier les vétérans, les membres des FAC, la GRC et d'autres personnes impliquées dans des opérations internationales de soutien de la paix, ainsi que leurs familles, à partager leurs points de vue. Nous espérons que vous ajouterez votre voix!

### Webinar for Wishful Sailors

-submitted by Roger Elmes (Star 1960)

Aubrey Millard (Star 56) and his wife Judy, world voyagers in their Ontario 32 SV, are presenting a free public webinar through McMaster University on July 27.

Aubrey joined the UNTD at McMaster, went through 3 years of training while a MAC student, including 3 full summers, and received a commission in the Canadian Navy. He put his UNTD training to good use - astro nav, seamanship, logistics, management etc. He actually did a presentation during the UNTD UK cruise on the QM2 - partially focused on sailing in and around parts of the old Soviet Union.

The July 27th Webinar is open to anyone who would like to tune in. Registration is required in order to be sent the link. You can register [here](#).

## Cadet Training aboard HMCS Antigonish, 1959

- Submitted by Mike Street (Donnacona 1963)

A letter from Lt. Cdr. Robert William James Cocks, Captain of HMCS Antigonish [1], to Captain J.A. Charles, Director Naval Plans and Operations [1], at HMCS Bytown, may be of interest to former RCN Cadets. Headlined "Antigonish / At Sea / 15 Jan 59, the letter reads:

**"Dear Sir, We're one day out of Maui and have finally reduced the roll to about 15°. The Cadets have some blood back in their cheeks but haven't put any weight back on yet. The only consolation is that Cantrain 2, on their way to Kodiak, are having an even worse time of it. Thus we enter another year of cadet training. I'm beginning to feel like CADTRNPAC or some such animal. Being promoted certainly helps and I do thank you for your kind letter. Sincerely, Bob Cocks"**

The Forces Letter was postmarked 17 January 1959 at Kahului, Hawaii. Lt. Cdr. Cocks had just been appointed as a Commander RCN (with seniority dated 01/01/1959). The only question I have is where did the cadets come from? Royal Roads and/or RMC or were there Christmas-time training cruises in 1958-59? (**Ed note:** Might any of you former Reserves been onboard?)

[1] The Nauticapedia

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## Letters to the Editor

### S.S. Nerissa, the Final Crossing

I have written and recently published a second edition of my historical non-fiction book "*S.S. Nerissa, the Final Crossing -- The Amazing True Story of the Loss of a Canadian Troopship in the North Atlantic*".

Request that the following be considered for including in your next communication to the membership of the UNTD Association. The embarked troops included 16 Canadian naval personnel. All regular force except Paymaster Sub Lieutenant Harold Connor Ledsham, RCNVR who was one of the six survivors. Attached is an information sheet which includes some reader reviews.

Yours Aye,

Bill

William Dziadyk, LCdr (retired)

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

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"S.S. Nerissa, the Final Crossing" (Second Edition), by retired naval officer Bill Dziadyk, tells "The Amazing



True Story of the Loss of a Canadian Troopship in the North Atlantic”. The embarked troops included 16 RCN personnel. All regular force except Paymaster Sub Lieutenant Harold Connor Ledsham, RCNVR, who was one of the survivors.

The details were highly classified for almost 50 years. The First Edition was published on Remembrance Day in 2019. The Second Edition (about 70 more pages), both paperback (<https://www.amazon.ca/dp/1777378206>) and Kindle e-book (<https://www.amazon.ca/dp/B08X3Q84BK>) were published via Amazon on the 80th anniversary of the sinking (30 April 2021). The Foreword to the second edition was provided by retired submariner Captain(N) Sherm Embree.

This second edition, is the result of feedback from readers ... and additional research related to: Nerissa’s many wartime sailings prior to and including her final crossing of the North Atlantic; the resulting public relations dilemma in both Canada and the UK; and the inclusion of additional humanizing details to a tragic story. Also addressed is the significance of the sinking in the context of: Britain’s overall war efforts; the Battle of the Atlantic; and Bletchley Park’s significant advances in decrypting German naval Enigma encoded messages (SIGINT) ... in the few weeks before and after the sinking.

The troopship S.S. Nerissa departed Halifax (Pier 21) on 21 April 1941 in company with ships of Convoy HX-122. She maintained position in the convoy for about 3 hours before sailing independently for Liverpool, England via St. John’s, Newfoundland.

Embarked were: 105 Merchant Navy crew, 16 Royal Canadian Navy, 108 Canadian Army, 5 Royal Navy, 12 Royal Air Force, 7 British Army, 14 Air Transport Auxiliary (American pilots), 4 Royal Norwegian Air Force, 4 National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) auditors, and 16 civilians.

The sinking of the Nerissa, about 12 hours from Liverpool, resulted in the third largest loss of life (207) for a ship sunk by U-boats in the approaches to the British Isles.

This book fleshes out events which led up to the sinking ... and the survivors' deadly 10 hours awaiting rescue in the cold open ocean. Of the ship's 8 lifeboats, only 1 was successfully launched, 1 was upright but flooded, 4 were capsized and 2 were pulled down by the ship.

In the early dawn, the remaining 84 survivors were rescued by HMS Veteran, while HMS Hurricane and RAF 502 Squadron aircraft provided anti-submarine protection. Included are eye witness accounts from survivors and stories of those that perished. Also addressed is the aftermath of the sinking, the official responses ... and the impacts on casualties’ families. After so many years, their stories deserve to be told.

## **Gunroom Shots -- Canada's Navy in WW2**

It’s been a long time since the summer of 1967 at HMCS Naden and the Cape Breton!

I wondered if you could pass the following on to Tom Kuiper with respect to his article on “Canada’s Navy in WW2”. The books he mentions are popular accounts with a great deal of interesting information.

However, it might also be useful to mention the three rather recent volumes of the official history of the RCN from 1910 to 1945 — “The Seabound Coast (from Colonial times to 1939)”, “No Higher Purpose (1939 to 1943)” and “A Blue Water Navy (1943-1945).” As a “professionally trained” historian, I find them very well written and researched. Much better than Tucker’s “Naval Service of Canada” which did not have access to

archives and I a rather dry read. There is also the “RCN in Retrospect” which came out in 1980’s and has some interesting pieces, including the experiences of Admiral Lear as a Mid with the RN. I was posted with his son, Michael, at the Canadian High Commission in Singapore in the mid 1980’s. I’m sure these books are known to many of the membership but just wanted to put in a “plug”.

Cheers,

Bob Shalka (Nonsuch 1963)

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## **Membership Renewals**

**If you’re receiving Gunroom Shots, you’re already a member of the UNTD Association, and participating in its central theme – Maintaining Connections. By now you will have received a membership renewal form with all the contact information we have on file for you. This is how we make sure we don’t lose the connection. Stay connected – make sure our contact information is correct.**

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Nous souhaitons  
à tous ceux qui  
naviguent  
sur le bon  
navire Canada  
des vents  
favorables et des  
mers suivantes  
pour le voyage à  
venir en cette  
fête du Canada !



photo: navy-marine.forces.gc.ca

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Send your letters, anecdotes or suggestions to Barry Frewer, Editor at:  
[Gunroom.Shots@UNTD.org](mailto:Gunroom.Shots@UNTD.org)

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