

# It Happened Down Home

Collected Short Stories

War on the Homefront

Guysborough County - Canada's East Coast

Gerry Madigan

10 April 2018

## Author's Note:

This book is a compilation of stories first written for the readers of the Guysborough Journal. These stories were written between 2015 and 2017. They have been compiled here in one place as an example of war on the Homefront from 1939 to 1945.

The Second World War affected all Canadian Communities both large and small, yet there is often an impression that its impact was felt only in the larger Canadian centres. The truth is, the war's impact was prolific, and even affected the very small and rural areas of Canada. The impact of the Second World War in Guysborough County is such an example.

## Biographical

Gerry (GD) Madigan, CD1, MA is a retired logistician, Canadian Armed Forces. Major (Retired) Madigan's career spans 28 Years as a finance officer. His notable postings included time served at National Defence Headquarters, CFB Europe, Maritime Canada and The First Gulf War as comptroller in Qatar. He is a graduate of Saint Francis Xavier University (BSc), McGill University (MSc) and the Royal Military College of Canada (Master of Arts War Studies).

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## Acknowledgements It Happened Down Home

I had been going through a professional rough patch in 2015 having several articles in the mill for a few years, promised for publication, but going nowhere fast. For one reason and or another, these articles never were published. It happens that way, article accepted, placed in the mill, article falls off the table over time.

I had the misfortune of a change of editor during this time who unlike my first editor, probably had no interest in my work. Perhaps that work may have been too plebeian for the journal and where it was going. I don't know but that's the way the cookie crumbles. Sometimes you win, other times you lose. I now consider this low point to have been a very luck break. It brought with it a change of fortunes and professional direction.

I had recently joined the Facebook group Glenelg, Aspen, Melrose, Smithfield at the time where I came across the photograph of the Girl on the Wing. It peaked my interest that began my research with googling the St Mary's River for a little information on Salmon Pools that in turn brought me to Bill Carpan's River Magic website. Bill is an avid fisherman living at Stillwater, Nova Scotia whose local knowledge was sought to assist me in my quest.

Bill and I exchanged many emails on the subject. He found my topic very interesting and as a former writer for the Guysborough Journal, he finally suggested that I submit the finalized article for publication. I did and Helen Murphy, editor of the Journal welcomed my submission that was inserted in the Guysborough Journal as a Canada Day special in a July 2015 run that year.

It was really that by this chance encounter, my writing flourished because of the encouragement of Bill and Helen. It opened the doors to many serialized accounts of local history published in the Guysborough Journal since. I am truly grateful to them for the opportunity that has led me to reach out to so many other people in the community with similar interests.

The stories led to this book and a new path that brought to life a whole new perspective of Guysborough County during the Second World War. It came through the sharing of stories and history found in the nuances of personal

stories, recollections, family papers or books, or from the reminiscences of those who lived through those events. Notable assistance was lent by Robert and Gina Walsh, of Cross Roads Country Harbour, Norma Cooke, Isaacs Harbour, Jane Dort, Cross Roads Country Harbour, Beulah (Fenton) Myers Country Harbour Mines, Wilmer Hodgson Country Harbour Mines, Mrs. Mickey (Fenton) Harpell –Halifax NS, Mary and Brian Richard, Larry’s River, Leslie Ryter Halfway Cove, and finally Claire McKeen and Graham Kirk of Glenelg NS.

I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of George Freer and members of the Port Hasting Museum for their help, encouragement, and hospitality in researching the history of the Strait of Canso Defence Area, and Peggy Feltmate, historian for permission to use background material from her work “White Head Harbour – Guysborough County, Nova Scotia”.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the help and patience of my editor and most ardent fan, my wife Melodie. This work would not have been completed without her time, dedication, and guidance for which I am truly grateful.

There are a great many people to thank for their kind assistance. I may have missed a few people for which I am truly sorry, and for which humbly apologize for my neglect. So please accept this as a token of my gratitude, especially the people of Guysborough County for sharing and encouraging me along the way. That’s been the greatest reward for me.

## Introduction It Happened Down Home

Some events in our lives are indelible. We remember them as if they happened yesterday. My first introduction to Guysborough County was a case in point. I was courting a local beauty while attending “X” in Antigonish back in 1971.

We hitched hiked out to meet her parents one Sunday morning that Fall and made our way down highway 7 to Aspen. It was to be the first of many such trips. We eventually became engaged and married in the United Church 12 May 1973 just after my graduation. And so, began a life long adventure with my lovely bride, Melodie (nee Mackeen).

Opportunities following graduation were few and far between back then. Not much has changed since and like many, we had to leave Nova Scotia for better opportunities with some regret.

We were part of that generation “going down the road” heading for greener pastures. It was a hard slog, but we finally got on our feet, I in a military career, and Melodie, nursing. We raised our family in varied parts of Canada and Europe but always found ourselves heading down home on vacation.

I was travelling with Scott, Melodie’s father on a quick road trip that brought us over the bridge at Silver’s Pool on the St Mary’s River through Glenleg, thence to Melrose and back to Aspen. It was on one of our many road trips down home, that Scott pointed out a local cornfield and said, “An airplane crashed there during the war.”

This crash site is the stuff of legend. It was rumoured that the military buried the remnants of the aircraft somewhere near the field where this crash occurred. Contrary to popular myth, the aircraft was not buried by the military. It remained the property of the Crown and was removed and disposed off back in the Fall of 1945.

I never thought much about it after that until I retired from the military and moved back from Ottawa, Ontario to Nova Scotia in 2008. We stayed for a time in Aspen but eventually found our dream home in Shubenacadie East a year later that was way closer to what became our second home, Stanfield International Airport.

One good thing about retirement was it gave me the time to indulge in my favourite past time, fishing. But that only occupied my time so far during a year and one must find ways to occupy one's time in the winter. That turned out to be for me researching and writing on defence issues and military history. I was quite successful and was published in several military journals.

I also became very active on social media, especially Facebook. Some would say too active, but that led me to a Facebook group; "Glenelg, Aspen, Melrose, Smithfield & East River. Memories in Pictures". It was a closed group and somehow my request to join was approved ostensibly because this "from away" had married a local lass.

It wasn't very long after I joined that Timmy Macdonald, a member of the group posted a picture of a young girl on the wing of a plane at Glenelg, NS back during the war. That picture brought back to me what Scott had said on one summer road trip oh so many years ago.

I looked at the picture closely trying to identify the young girl on the wing. My attention was drawn to her and I asked Melodie if she had an inkling of who she was. It amazes me that over the years she, her mother, father and family easily remembered times, places, people and things, something that this city boy could never do.

"Do you recognize the girl on the Wing, Mel?"

'Of course, I do, you know her too!'

"What do you mean I know her too, never seen her before."

'Of course, you have. You know her well. That's Claire MacKeen, silly!'

"How do you know?"

'That's her name on the picture on the caption at the bottom of the frame!'

My gosh, she was right! I must have had a senior moment or was completely transfixed by the photograph and had failed to recognize the name on the bottom of the frame...silly me.

But what a lucky break! I reunited with Claire and was able to interview her for an article that was subsequently submitted and published as a special in the Guysborough Journal that was well received.

What began as a “one of” article, led to several stories that were subsequently written for and published by the Guysborough Journal in what has been most prolific and very rewarding research and writing post retirement. More importantly, it was the people that I met, and places travelled in Guysborough since then that I treasure most.

The experience was insightful. It opened a whole to vista to Guysborough’s history, its time and place during the years of the Second World War. The net result is this compilation of my collected stories for your enjoyment, “It happened down home.”

Gerry Madigan

2018

# 1. *Girl on the Wing*

G.D. Madigan

9 May 2015



**Photograph from the Files of Timmy MacDonald**  
Glenelg, Aspen, Melrose, Smithfield & East River. Memories in Pictures  
With permission 24 April 2015

*Based on telephone interviews between: Gerry Madigan and  
Claire McKeen, Dated: 23 April 2015, Time: 1400-1425 hrs; and  
Graham Kirk, Date: 26 April 2015, Time: 1305-1325hrs*

## Introduction

Some events in our lives are indelible. We remember them as if they happened yesterday. But truly, they are few and far between. This is the story of such an event, the air crash in the field at Glenelg NS at the end of the Second World War. Claire McKeen and Graham Kirk, both lifelong residents of Glenelg, remember it well. They were 15 and nine years old respectively at the time.

It seems appropriate to record their recollection this year, which is an important anniversary for Canada. The eighth of May is a significant milestone, marking the 70th anniversary of VE Day, the end of the war in Europe.

The 8<sup>th</sup> of May is **the** anniversary, which for many Canadians seems to mark the end of the Second World War. In fact, the war was not yet over on that date. There was still a war in the Pacific to contend with. The final push on Japan was to be the final act. Peace was delayed until Japan's unconditional surrender that occurred much later.

The government of the day desired that Canada would be represented in that final act. But there was to be no big Canadian role. Canada planned to send elements of all three of its armed services to the Pacific fray as a token to its commitment to its allies.

With that in mind, a Tiger Force was being assembled by the Royal Canadian Air Force which was to be the RCAF's contribution in that effort. No. 6 Air Group was being reformed and re-assembled from air units returning from England. The units of No. 6 Group would train at many bases in Nova Scotia for the upcoming mission.

## Claire's Story – Girl on the Wing

At the core of this story then, was a Saturday, 11 August 1945, which was a typical summer day at Glenelg Nova Scotia. One unit from No. 6 Group would visit Glenelg in an unseemly manner. An air crash would occur that was witnessed by Claire McKeen (nee Cruikshank), Graham Kirk and many

others. Claire was only 15 years old at the time. She remembers this unique event clearly.<sup>1</sup>

The Second World War was just about ended. Japan would finally surrender on 14 August with a formal surrender on 2 September 1945.<sup>2</sup> But on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August, the war or the remnants of war, were still very real to the people of Glenelg.

Claire recollects Glenelg as a typical rural Nova Scotia community. There were no more than 100 inhabitants at most. But it was a large, vibrant and active centre for its day. It had its own character and foibles too, typical of rural Canada.

Claire and the children of Glenelg were taught at one of two schools in the area. The Glenelg-Melrose school was for those resident in that area, while the Aspen School served those living in that community.

There were three churches serving the spiritual needs of those communities, two of which still exist today attesting to the vibrancy of that spiritual community.

Children's entertainments may be judged as few and far between by today's standards.

But Glenelg's children lead active and playful lives, running free in the woods, playing games in the fields and fishing in the streams in summer. In

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<sup>1</sup> Interview Claire McKeen, Glenelg NS, **Claire's recollection of an air crash at Glenelg, NS WWII**, conducted by telephone 23 April 2015, 1400-1425 hrs, author's archives

Unless otherwise cited or noted, this is Claire's recollection, account and story on the day.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Krock, **Japan Surrenders, End of War!**, The New York Times, 14 August 1945

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0814.html#article>

Accessed: 26 April 2015

the winter they coasted on the hills, skated on pond rivers and lakes and played hockey until dark. They had fun and made do with what they had.

The community was typical by its labours as well. The people of Aspen, Melrose and Glenelg survived on farming and lumbering.

It all seemed idyllic, but there were tensions and divides in those communities that were typical of politics and religion of the day. Claire remembers there two stores in existence, one serving those of a liberal bent and the other for the conservatives. And typical for the time, the post office, staff, and contract seemed to change every time the government changed.

Tensions extended to the religious life as well. There was a schism in the United Church. This schism led to the creation of a separate United Baptist Church built over in Aspen whose remains exist today. By and large though, Glenelg was just another staid Nova Scotian village, where nothing ever happened, yet things were about to change and get very exciting.

On 11 August 1945, the ladies of the community had gathered for the local monthly Women`s Institute meeting at the home of Herbie McLaughlin. This would also be a social occasion for the children. It was an excuse, for what young people do on those occasions, to get together to laugh, play and socialize while their elders attended to the more important matters of the community.

In the distance the children heard the roar of piston engines and saw a low flying aircraft circling the hills around the St Mary`s River and Lead Mines. Claire remembers she was with three friends in the mid-afternoon somewhere, between two and three PM.

The temperature was about 27 centigrade that day.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to piece together but both Claire and Graham Kirk remember it to be a pleasant and

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<sup>3</sup> Weather Underground, **Weather History for CXTD (Antigonish), Nearest airport to Antigonish, Nova Scotia**, Saturday 11 August 1945

Source:

[http://www.wunserground.com/history/airport/CXTD/1945/8/25/MonthlyCalendar.html?req\\_city=Antigonish&req\\_state=&req\\_statename=Nova Scotia&reqdb.zip=00000&reqdb.magic=2&reqdb.wmo=71308](http://www.wunserground.com/history/airport/CXTD/1945/8/25/MonthlyCalendar.html?req_city=Antigonish&req_state=&req_statename=Nova%20Scotia&reqdb.zip=00000&reqdb.magic=2&reqdb.wmo=71308)

Accessed: 28 April 2015

clear in Glenelg. It was probably humid, good drying weather for making hay.

Avro Anson Mk. V Serial #12578, was flying out of No. 6 (RCAF) Group Communications Flight at Debert, NS. It was on a training mission in a broad area between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia that would end in a hay field at Glenelg, NS.<sup>4</sup>

Claire recalls the crew saying after the crash that they got caught in a thunderstorm over the hospital at Antigonish and became disoriented. They diverted their aircraft south in the direction of Glenelg to avoid a nasty system.

By the time they reached Glenelg though, their aircraft was flying at an extremely low altitude. It was observed to be getting lower and lower to the ground still. Claire and friends watched the plane circle about with great interest. It seemed that it was about to either land or crash!

Figure 1<sup>5</sup>



Claire and others observed that the plane appeared to be flying under control. It was proceeding away from them in the direction of Silver's Pool. It then turned and backtracked on the up river on

approach to the cornfield at Glenelg bounded by the river and the crossroads road at Glenelg. The plane was observed to touch down shortly thereafter.

<sup>4</sup> Email Major Chris Larsen, Wing Historian CFB Greenwood, 30 April 2015

<sup>5</sup> Google Maps, Satellite view of Glenelg:

Source: <http://www.latlong.net/>

Latitude: 45.259712 Longitude: -62.076313

Accessed: 24 April 2015

Their landing was both a surprise and eventful. As the Anson touched down, the wheels soon collapsed, the engines churned the dirt, and the aircraft skidded to a halt. Official records indicate that “The landing gear collapsed during harsh application of the brakes”.<sup>6</sup>

#### Graham’s Story - Haystacks in the Field

Graham Kirk, another witness, was 9 or 10 years old at the time. He too remembered the plane landing in Glenelg. He saw a plane coming up through the yard at Herbie McLaughlin’s home who lived on Lead Mine Road. It was heading down river in the direction of Silver’s Pool when it turned back toward the field at Glenelg.<sup>7</sup>

Graham remembered the plane touching down in the field intact. The Avro Anson landed on the right-hand side of the field (observer to target) in the heading towards the crossroads, Lead Mines and Glenelg. Graham saw aircraft swerve as it landed towards the crossroads. It promptly hit an embankment on the road where the force of the impact collapsed the landing gear. The aircraft then went onto belly skid across the field before coming to a halt.

Graham’s perspective of the crash provides an insight into why the landing gear collapsed and the reason for the harsh application of the brakes”.<sup>8</sup> He remembers that this field was used for making hay at the time. There were hay stacks everywhere. The field was dry, and the colour of dry hay was a golden stubble.

Once the plane touched down, the pilot may have thought that this wasn’t an open field after all but may have been a rock pile. The hay stacks in the fields were high and certainly looked solid and the aircraft was approaching

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid Larsen

<sup>7</sup> Interview Graham Kirk, Glenelg NS, **Graham’s recollection of an air crash at Glenelg, NS WWII**, conducted by telephone 26 April 2015, 1305-1325hrs

hrs, author’s archives

Unless otherwise cited or noted, this is Graham’s recollection, account and story on the day.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid Larsen

these at speed! A quick decision may have been necessary to avoid disaster.

There must have been some sense of urgency in the cockpit if the conclusion was, “the haystacks were rock piles”. The sudden application of the brakes may have been necessary resulting in a change of direction. The result was not the one desired. They pranged the aircraft, severely.

Graham remembers the plane carried three crew members.<sup>9</sup> The crew didn't seem too excited or upset by their experience. They seemed to be of good spirits nonetheless and were none the worse for the wear. But basically, they had scared themselves silly.

Graham believed the pilot could have saved the plane that day. There was a clear road going through the middle of the field. It was rarely used by vehicular traffic and was free of all obstacles. It seemed to be an obvious choice for touchdown and safe landing.

Nobody knows why the pilot elected the field landing. There may have been pressing demands in the cockpit requiring some urgency in getting down, fast. These details are revealed in official report and records later below.

#### [Other Details](#)

The crew did not divulge where they were from, their nationalities, or their mission. The aircraft from the photograph of Claire was an Avro Anson Mk.V. Some 2000 Avro Anson's of various marks were built in Canada during the war. They were widely used and flew at many training and operational units. A good number were built under license in Nova Scotia at the Canadian Car and Foundry plant, Amherst, NS.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [CHRIS.LARSEN@forces.gc.ca](mailto:CHRIS.LARSEN@forces.gc.ca), May-08-15 1:08:44 PM, enclosure

This section is based on the contents of transcript in the enclosure to the e-mail. It confirms the number of crew aboard as Graham remembered it.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Peapell, Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum, identified Avro Anson MkII, e-mail 23 April 2015

Claire noted that the aircraft was painted yellow on the exterior and green on the interior. From this colour of the aircraft's exterior we can identify this as a training aircraft.

There was flurry of activity as many rushed to the scene to lend assistance. Luckily, the crew was uninjured. The assistance required and given to them was probably minimal. The aircraft was largely intact, and the crew was indeed safe.

But it was necessary to inform the authorities! A telephone was much needed, and fortunately, there were plenty of telephones at Glenelg, but all on a party line at the time.

In the meantime, the aircraft became a source of local curiosity. Claire had her picture taken on the wing. So, did many others.

[The Crew of Anson 12578<sup>11</sup>](#)

The names of the three individuals aboard Anson 12578 in the accident were:

1. J89815 F/L Richard Joseph CALLAHAN
2. R125563 LAC Arthur Henry DREW
3. R256120 LAC Albert TUBB

F/L Callahan enlisted in the RCAF on 3 December 1942. He was a member of the University of Toronto - University Air Training Corps. F/L Callahan attended NO 23 Pre-Aircrew Education Detachment at the U of Toronto before going to No. 1 Initial Training School (February 1943).

F/L Callahan commenced pilot training at No. 12 EFTS on 10 July and on graduating continued training at No. 2 SFTS commencing 4 September 1943. F/L Callahan was deployed overseas on 23 March 1944 to a bomber

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<sup>11</sup> Major Mathias Joost, Department of National Defence / Government of Canada, Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), Operational Records Team, **Crash Record Avro Anson MkV 11 Aug 1945**, e-mail May-13-15 10:00:22 AM & 14 May 2015 13:28:49 +0000

(this entire section was written with notes from DHH noted above)

squadron. He returned to Canada in June 1945 and posted to 420 Squadron at Debert. F/L Callahan was discharged on 17 October 1945.

LAC Arthur Henry DREW enlisted in Ottawa on 27 August 1941. He was an aero engine mechanic. He commenced his service at No. 1 Manning depot, then posted to No. 4 Bombing and Gunnery School on 13 September 1941. He was subsequently posted to No. 6 Repair Depot on 25 November 1941 and served there for the next 3 ½ years.

LAC Drew was posted to Scoudouc on 27 July 1945. and was finally discharged on 20 September 1945. There is no record that LAC Drew attended the Technical Training School at St. Thomas as part of his training. He was one of the few who had previous mechanical experience upon enrolment.

LAC Albert TUBB was also an aero engine mechanic. He enlisted in Hamilton on 5 May 1943. Common in the day, LAC Tubb had to wait awhile before he started his training. His first posting was to No. 4 Wireless School where he did menial jobs while waiting for a billet to become available.

LAC Tubb commenced his basic training at No. 1 Manning Depot on 15 September 1943. Upon completion of this training, LAC Tubb was posted to No. 14 SFTS, where he then worked and was mentored in AEM job duties under supervision until 27 January 1944 when he started his level B AEM training. This training occurred at St. Thomas, Ontario.

LAC Tubb qualified in his trade on 1 July and for his Level A on 1 October. LAC Tubb was posted to Scoudouc on 27 July 1945. He was subsequently posted on 25 October 1945 to Greenwood where he was discharged on 21 December 1945.

Scoudouc, NB was just a newly formed and re-organized unit on 13 July 1945. It had previously been established as No. 4 Repair Depot. Both LAC Drew and LAC Tubb were posted to Scoudouc, NB on 27 July 1945.

F/L Callahan had 2 hours dual and 5 solo flying hours on the Anson. He was an accomplished pilot amassing overall 210 hours dual and 530 solo on various aircraft.

The ORB for Scoudouc, NB noted under ferry flights for August 1945 that they ferried 1 Menasco Moth, 3 Mosquitoes at Moncton, 3 Norseman and 1 Anson. The one Anson never made it to its destination.

[The Stuff of Legend – Buried/Hidden Treasure?](#)

This crash wreckage is the stuff of legend too. It was rumoured that the military buried the remnants of the aircraft on the field where this crash occurred. Contrary to popular myth, the aircraft was not buried by the military near the crash site. It was the property of the Crown.

Even as a write off, the scrap metal and other parts still had value. The plane was likely recovered by the Repair Depot from Scoudouc, NB for eventual disposal by Crown Assets.<sup>12</sup> In the end Avro Anson Mk. V Serial #12578 was simply hauled away by the military and written off by official accounts. But it wasn't all hauled away!

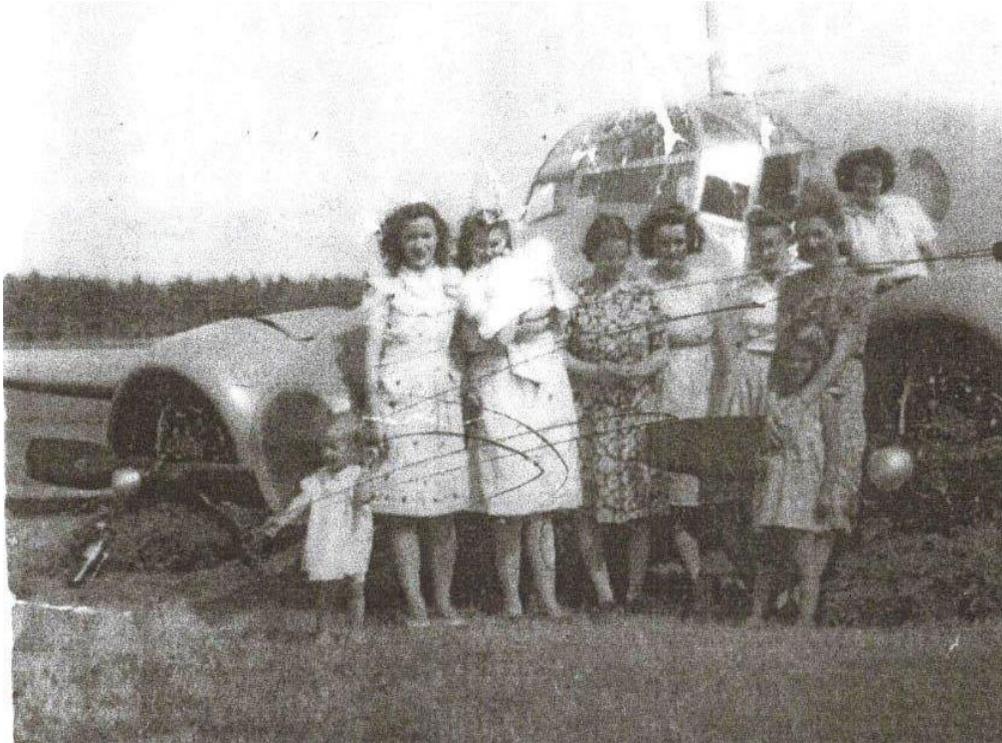
Claire remembered that the aircraft was eventually scrapped on site. The bulk of it was taken away by military authorities but not before some souvenirs were appropriated! It is alleged that some 'salvaged' materiel was appropriated from the crash site. There are reports that objects associated with Avro Anson Mk. V Serial #12578 were seen and in family possession for many years following the crash.

Photograph # 1 below gives a clue on what may have happened to some of the parts of the aircraft. It is very evident that there was a tip broken off the propeller on the left-hand side. Ernest Jordan's nephew reported seeing that item in the Jordan home as a young child. He was always excited to see it every time he visited. It was said that Ernest was making hay in the field when this happened.<sup>13</sup> There must have been debris all over his field that was retrieved after the fact by anybody seeking a piece of history as a souvenir.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid Larsen

<sup>13</sup> Jim MacLaughlin, **Personal Recollection**, Facebook, Glenelg, Aspen, Melrose, Smithfield & East River. Memories in Pictures, 3 May 2015



From the archives of Bonnie McGrath, Glenelg NS (with permission) Caption: Not sure of the names here. My Aunt Ella is on the front right (with the child in front of her). (This picture came from Elsie (Archibald) MacDonald).  
Photograph 1

Other remnants may also exist. Two young sisters remember playing on green seats in Mrs. Elwyn's field in Glenelg that were rumored to be from the airplane. The colour was lime or light green. The girls remember

that the seat was wooden and rounded at the back. They also remember a dashboard of some kind. They were told (unsure by who) that this was wreckage of the plane crash some years before. The area they remember seeing this material was in the brush at the edge of the field bordering Mrs. Elwyn Archibald's property.<sup>14</sup>

So, it is alleged that there was some material left behind in the community. There might still be some of that stuff in local barns, who knows!

[A picture is worth a thousand words!](#)

Oral histories give us a sense of the event. Photographic images provide an accurate scale and magnitude of the moments of an event. But they first must be found. There have been a number of these images that have been

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<sup>14</sup> Margie T. Goodacre and Liz (Carty) Harpell, **Personal Recollection**, Facebook, Glenelg, Aspen, Melrose, Smithfield & East River. Memories In Pictures, 3 May 2015

located and have come to light since I first wrote and posted this article. They are fascinating! Moreover, they have led to another line of investigation.

The crash did happen on the near side of the field bounded by the St Mary's River west branch at Glenelg. The landing was successful but must have been too fast in the approach. You can plainly see in photograph 2 how close the aircraft came to the property line at the crossroad of Highway 348/Waternish road.



Another view of the crash site in photograph 3 shows that the Avro Anson was heading for Ernest Jordan's house that was at the end of the field. The Jordan

From the archives of Bonnie McGrath, Glenelg NS (with permission)  
Caption: This picture was given to us from Jessie Lawson.  
Photograph 2

home has long since gone.



From the archives of Bonnie McGrath, Glenelg NS  
(with permission) Photograph 3

I suspect the pilot had to brake hard for that one reason alone. He was about to hit a dirt berm evident in the photo (#3). Odds are that he would either punch through and over the berm, sliding through, hitting a house, or impacting on the hill opposite destroying the aircraft, killing the crew. There were

few options but to hit the brakes. He was running out of room! But the real reason is found in the official crash record that will be discussed in due course.

Photograph 4 perspective appears to have been taken from under the wing of the crashed Avro Anson. The object in the foreground is a piece of metal wreckage from that aircraft.

But this photograph gives an interesting insight how close this event came



From the archives of Bonnie McGrath, Glenelg NS (with permission)  
Photograph 4

to disaster. The men in the middle ground of the photo are very near the aircraft. If you measure the distance between them and the people in the far ground, you can see that the aircraft was not very far from clearing and exiting the field.

Had the pilot not acted and braked hard, the plane could have easily continued and plowed into the

farm house killing or injuring all there in the resulting crash.

The pilot had the presence of mind and courage to take the correct steps to avoid that. He did so at great personal risk to himself, his aircraft, and his

crew. He braked hard, collapsed the gear, and skidded to a halt that prevented certain disaster that would be remembered quite differently and solemnly today had it happened!

The Glenelg air crash was a close disaster but there was also humour in its passing. That was Ernest Jordan's hay field just where the crash occurred.

Ernest Jordan was likely one of the first on the scene given the proximity of his home and that the field had just been mown. The aircrew were standing in the field.

They had their maps out and asked Ernest where they were while pointing at the maps. Ernest said, "You're in my F\*\*\*ing hay field!"<sup>15</sup> The crew.... was lost indeed!

#### [Transcript of the Official Crash Record](#)

The third and final element that completes the story comes from the official record of the crash. Avro Anson Mk. V Serial #12578 was piloted by F/L M. J. Callahan. He was carrying two passengers that day, LAC A. Tubb and LAC A. Drew.<sup>16</sup>

The official transcript stated that "The pilot got lost flying from Scoudouc to Debert. He did a square search but was unable to get a pin point.

He decided to do a precautionary landing when he had 30 minutes of safe flying left. He flew over a field once then came in for a landing near Glenelg, New Brunswick (**record is incorrect**).

The field was fairly short and **a farmer raking in the field** caused the pilot to apply brakes harshly. The undercarriage collapsed when brakes were applied."<sup>17</sup>

So, Ernst Jordan was indeed first on the scene that fateful day!

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<sup>15</sup> [Jim MacLaughlin](#) , Anecdote, family history comment, Glenelg, Aspen, Melrose, Smithfield & East River. Memories in Pictures, 3 May 2015

<sup>16</sup> Ibid Graham Kirk, this confirms Graham's recollection

<sup>17</sup> Ibid [CHRIS.LARSEN@forces.gc.ca](mailto:CHRIS.LARSEN@forces.gc.ca), May-08-15 1:08:44 PM,

This accident report and the recollections of those there, give us a general flight track of Avro Anson Mk. V Serial #12578. The Anson was part of Debert's unit establishment. It was on a flight outbound from Scoudouc, NB to Debert, NS for an unspecified reason.

F/L Callahan was on a return flight departing from Scoudouc, heading generally eastward to return to Debert, its home base. Scoudouc to Debert is in a rough line bounded by the Bay of Fundy and the Northumberland Strait, flying over the isthmus of the New Brunswick- Nova Scotia border.

There were waypoints along the way, Amherst, Parrsborough, and so on that should have assisted orientation and navigation. There was also a clear path pointing the direction ahead by following the railroad and TransCanada Highway that passed through Debert.

There was nothing in the report that commented on the weather, other problems, time of day, or other details that may have indicated why the pilot encountered difficulty in locating Debert. The report was typical of its time, rendering the story in one simple paragraph and conclusion. Not much time was spent in analysis or details.

This should have been an easy return trip. There were clear waypoints and landmarks along the way. So how did F/L Callahan get so lost and why didn't he have a navigator on board? There were no answers in the official crash record.

The interview notes though may give some insight. It was recorded that the crew had said they got lost in a thunderstorm over Antigonish and were disoriented.<sup>18</sup> So it was quite possible that the weather also deteriorated locally en-route along the flight path that contributed to the pilot's difficulty in flying and navigating. It is mere conjecture, but it is the only obvious conclusion at this point.

It does not matter what the conclusion may be, the fact is that F/L Callahan was lost. He did a grid search along the way attempting to locate and pinpoint either his home base or a suitable field for safe landing. Time simply ran out for him. He had few options. He chose to land with what was available and at hand.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid Claire McKeen

F/L Callahan's situation was desperate and most urgent. He had only 30 minutes of fuel remaining in his tanks with no hope of making any safe landfall at any nearby base. These were too far out of range to be of any use or assistance.

He landed at Glenelg to his, Ernst Jordan's and his superiors' chagrin.

The aircraft sustained *Category B* damage and was subsequently written off.

#### [Analysis Avro Anson – Its Specifications in Relation to Crash Events](#)

Photograph 4 provides some key information to the aftermath of the landing and of the crash of Avro Anson Mk. V Serial #12578. The aircraft itself was a robust airframe and was widely used in Canada. The Avro Anson was designed for operations on short air fields. So how did it come to such an inglorious end in Jordan's Field at Glenelg?

The Avro Anson had a minimum runway requirement of 2000 yards or 6000 feet.<sup>19</sup> It was very capable of landing on grass.<sup>20</sup> The landing requirements for most aircraft are usually somewhat shorter than that required for take-off.

The field at Glenelg is estimated to be about 2700 feet (800m/875 yards) at most. But at that distance. It was likely very tight for landing the Avro Anson Mk.V. This was made more difficult given obvious obstacles at both ends of the field consisting of trees and berm. The usable run out length was probably much greatly reduced and probably below the minimum required for a safe landing.

We now have an idea why the sense of urgency for landing at Glenelg. F/L Callahan was running out of time and fuel. These photographs provide some insight into his approach to the field and how events then unfolded. The landing characteristics of an Avro Anson Mk. I too provides great insight.

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<sup>19</sup> David Ogilvy, **The Anson in later life**, General Aviation, October 2006, pg. 34-35

<sup>20</sup> Ibid Ogilvy, pg. 33

The stall speed of the Avro Anson was between 50-60 knots. On a normal landing the flaps would be lowered, and an approach made onto a runway starting at 80 knots. The aircraft would be on a glide approach and when it crossed the field threshold, when power was further reduced by 10 knots before crossing the threshold, and then the aircraft would land on the prospective airfield.<sup>21</sup>

Both engines of Avro Anson Mk. V Serial #12578 appeared to be functioning at the time. There is no indication from the witness accounts that the aircraft had engine trouble. But let us assume that there were engine problems. This could have happened at any moment given F/L Callahan's fuel situation.

The procedure on a single engine approach is instructive. It was most important for the pilot to retain directional control. He was not allowed to let the airspeed fall below 85 knots (5 knots faster than a normal approach). He was to delay lowering flaps until confirming that he could safely land before lowering them and setting down on an airfield.<sup>22</sup>

He had other things to consider in his approach. Was he too high, too low, too slow or too fast? All these judgements had to be made expeditiously because he could not afford to overshoot the runway. An overshoot was inadvisable for it was a completely unsafe endeavour.

In these circumstances, the pilot was required to accurately handle the aircraft and maintain a minimum speed of 80 knots. He was also advised not to go below 600 feet in altitude. If he elected to do so or if he had no choice, he had to be aware that he would lose an additional 400 feet in altitude in the process of cleaning up his approach, while clearing the runway in the attempt to achieve this go around.<sup>23</sup>

Failure to allow for these factors would have been catastrophic. He would have simply flown into the ground. F/L Callahan was committed to a landing because he was now less than 400 feet in altitude and there was insufficient time and height in the flight profile to safely abort the landing and seek an alternative field at that point.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid Ogilvy, pg. 35

<sup>22</sup> Ibid Ogilvy, pg. 35

<sup>23</sup> Ibid Ogilvy, pg. 35

To put “speed” into perspective, the landing speed of an Avro Anson Mk. I was 92 knots or 106 mph. This first production model did not have full flaps and was only produced with inefficient trailing-edge flaps.<sup>24</sup> This was an Mk.V. But the apparent airspeed to an observer on the ground in all variants would be around 100 mph.

We must assume that this pilot was operating by the book and was landing at speeds between 80-85 knots (100mph) on touching down. We now have the problem of the control roll out. The aircraft was under control. The problem was, did he have sufficient running room to bleed out speed for a safe landing? No! F/L Callahan’s problem was that there was indeed an obstacle in his way. It wasn’t a haystack, it wasn’t a rock. It was Ernst Jordan who was raking in his field that caused him to apply brakes harshly.

It is doubtful that F/L Callahan had time to do much else. Even if he had cut power at the point he touched down, with the flaps deployed on proper settings, the aircraft would have persisted in a forward direction for quite a while because of its momentum. Braking would not have been possible until the point his tail touched the ground and where the speed was slow enough to safely apply the brakes, coming to a stop. That did not happen, it was a hard braking.

The crash at Glenelg was a severe accident but it was not catastrophic as judged by other crashes, which too is suggestive. He simply did not have time nor space to accomplish a safe landing in that constrained field. The pilot was forced to brake before he either hit Ernst Jordan, the berm or before he careened into the Jordan house at the end of the field. He simply ran out of options, room, and time to do much else.

#### [A Beam of Light](#)

Had the war only touched Glenelg days before its conclusion? It would seem so, but this was not the case. The air war was very active over Nova Scotia. Both Claire and Graham observed many aircraft over flights in the area as youngsters. They were a common sight.

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<sup>24</sup> United States Of America, **The Avro "Anson" General Purpose Airplane (British) -A Two-Engine Low-Wing Cantilever Monoplane**, Aircraft Circulars National Advisory Committee For Aeronautics , No. 201, Washington, March 1936, pg.8

The Second World War was very real on the Canadian home front. Local communities in Nova Scotia did observe a local blackout throughout the war. That blackout was necessary for a wide variety of reasons. But it all boiled down to security.

There were very active U-boat operations, especially in the approaches to our Eastern shore. A local blackout was necessary for inland communities too. It was required.

Light aided the enemy. Any beam of light at night from a known location could have been used by the enemy as a fix. The reasoning for a blackout to communities some 30 miles inland from these operations may seem incongruent but oddly enough there is a basis in fact for its necessity.

Any beam of light from a known point could be used as a navigational fix. In the clear night skies of the Nova Scotia during the Second World War, light would be visible a long-ways away. The night skies then were clearly different than today. The lack of light pollution in the day would make easy identification of places and fix locations over long distances.

But the pinpoint of light also affected and detracted from Canadian air training. Many air force operational and training establishments existed in Nova Scotia from Debert, to Yarmouth, Sydney to Greenwood that trained both by day and by night.

Aircraft flew extensively over the province as well as those from bases in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, we can easily deduce the intensity of training. All these aircraft added to the load and number operating in skies over Nova Scotia.

The need for realism was paramount and required for navigation training. Any beam of light at night enabled the trainee to fix a location especially at known locations, was detrimental to the training. Crews wouldn't get that luxury over the skies in Europe while on active service and under fire. The training had to be as close to realistic as possible, conducted under the same conditions as would be found in a war zone, and without being hurt or shot at.

## Concluding Remarks

Air Training and operations were a vast enterprise on Canada's east coast during the Second World War. There was much hurt, pain suffering, and sacrifice in this vast enterprise. There were some 856 deaths in the training of 131553 aircrew in the BCATP throughout Canada. It seems a small number. But numbers belie the immensity of the loss.

Debert alone incurred some 110 of these 856 fatal casualties (13%), just one small rural community, near the hub of central Nova Scotia.<sup>25</sup> Casualties, loss, death and suffering did happen here and elsewhere in many Nova Scotia communities Many would come to be touched in different ways by its consequences, some humorous, most tragically.

We often lose sight of the active operational units in Nova Scotia specifically tasked with the protection of our eastern approaches from the U-boat threat. Aircraft were dispatched from various units to pursue, contact and destroy these targets if possible. They also acted as an air screen for departing and incoming convoys in Canadian approaches. Many of these were lost on operations and never returned.

The war was very real in Nova Scotia. It was in an active front of operations, it just wasn't obvious. There were some 300 air crashes alone in Nova Scotia.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Hosted by RootsWeb Ancestry.com, **No.31 Operational Training Unit June 3, 1941-July 1, 1944 - No.7 Operational Training Unit July 1, 1944-July 20, 1945 Debert, Nova Scotia, Roll of Honor**, 2010

Source:

[http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nbpennfi/penn8b1RollOfHonour\\_No31OTU\\_TrainingCasualties.htm](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nbpennfi/penn8b1RollOfHonour_No31OTU_TrainingCasualties.htm)

Accessed: 20 December 2010

<sup>26</sup> Nancy Kelly, **Military looking for memories of Valley aircrews, crashes from the past**, Kings County Register, 8 September 2008

Many stories are still yet to be discovered and told. Sometimes all it takes to do so, is one picture to prick one`s interest and will to discover our vibrant history. The Girl on the Wing led such a discovery. Does one exist for you? You never know what`s waiting for you in those old family albums.

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Source: <http://www.novanewsnow.com/World/2008-09-08/article-596939/Military-looking-for-memories-of-Valley-aircrews-crashes-from-the-past/1>

Accessed: 22 April 2015

## Biographical:

Claire McKeen is a life-long resident of Glenelg where she and husband, Doug, happily raised seven children. Claire is still active to this day. She is a member of the Kirk Memorial Church and the UCW.

Graham Kirk is a lifelong resident and still lives at Glenelg. Born to John (Isaac) Kirk and Margaret Catherine (nee Macdonald) at St Martha's Hospital 1933 who raised a family of four girls and two boys in Glenelg. Graham worked for STORA Forest Company for many years and is a lifelong member of Glenelg Presbyterian Church.

## Acknowledgements

This paper would not have been possible without the help of many people. First, I would like to thank both Claire McKeen and Graham Kirk for relating their stories. Their stories are the core of the paper, the memories of those who were there.

But the paper would not have been brought to life without the photographs! I want to thank Timmy Macdonald and Bonnie McGrath, who generously shared their photographs and gave me permission to share them with a wider audience.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Mark Peapell, Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum, and Major Chris Larsen of CFB Greenwood who helped me with the technical details, correcting the copy, and providing direction to the official records from whence I was able to reconstruct the story of Avro Anson Mk. V Serial #12578's odyssey.

It would have been impossible to build the story in any depth without the help and generosity of all.

Thank you.

Gerry Madigan

9 May 2015

## **2. Mystery on the lake**

By Gerry Madigan

29 June 2015

## Acknowledgements

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- Wilmer Hodgson, Country Harbour Mines, interview as witness to the events of 1944 and his special memories of the walk through the woods
- Mrs. Mickey (Fenton) Harpell, Halifax, interview as witness to the events of 1944 and her personal story of the events of the forced landing March 1944

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- Chis Charland, Aircraft Research, National Air Force Museum of Canada, Trenton, Ontario
- Chris Larsen Air Historian, Greenwood, Nova Scotia
- Chris Larsen (no relation), Historian Pennfield Parish Military Historical Society, Pennfield, New Brunswick
- Mark Peapell, Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Any errors or omissions herein are mine and are unintentional.

Country Harbour, once considered as a possible site for Nova Scotia's capital, is blessed with a deep-water port, one hundred miles nearer European markets, an important strategic location in the days of sail and rail. Country Harbour is a place often brushed by history.

Country Harbour's deeply interesting history would be brushed with many events, some even in the very early days of flying. On 25 June 1930, Captain Charles E. Kingsford-Smith began an epic journey from Portmarnock Beach, Ireland to Roosevelt Field, Long Island. It was amongst the first trans-Atlantic flights to be attempted. Captain Charles E. Kingsford-Smith with a crew of three in a Fokker Tri-motor called the Southern Cross set off in the hope of success of the venture.

But Kingsford-Smith's journey almost ended in disaster. He became lost in the mid-Atlantic. He was only saved from certain death by radio direction to Cape Race, Newfoundland, landing with only fumes remaining in his fuel tanks. His journey continued the 26<sup>th</sup> June and his progress was closely followed given his brush with death.

Kingsford-Smith reported "Found clear patch and am down 1000 feet. Now passing **County** Harbor, Nova Scotia, on our left."<sup>27</sup> The newspapers of the day said "It fell to the villagers of **County** Harbor, 100 miles from Halifax, on the Now Scotian coast, to be the first to see the plane. The Southern Cross was passing County Harbor, N. S., about 109 miles east of Halifax at 10 a. m. EST, today, according to a message picked up by the coast guard radio station here."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Santa Ana Register, California, untitled item; Southern Cross. Datelined TRURO, N. S., June 26, Page 1

Source: <http://www.newspapers.com/newspage/72295999/>

Accessed: 5 June 2015

<sup>28</sup> Ibid Santa Ana Register, Datelined. TRURO, N. S., June 26, Page 1

But in 1930, the skies over **County** Harbour, actually Country Harbour, were kissed by the brush of history in the coming age of air travel and air power. A war too was just on the horizon looking toward Europe! Country Harbour would be kissed in other ways some 14 years later, only deeper in its interior at Crossroads Country Harbour and Country Harbour Mines.

#### The Crash 1944<sup>29</sup>

Fourteen years after Kingsford-Smith's flight by Country Harbour, another aircraft incident would occur one Saturday afternoon, only this one on 4 March 1944 at the height of the Second World War. A plane out of RCAF Station Dartmouth was returning from an operational anti-submarine patrol and was in-bound to home base.

It came to be in certain distress when passing by Country Harbour. It was about three o'clock that afternoon when it crossed the Nova Scotian shore at some unknown point. The aircraft and crew were lost. They radioed their plight to the Aircraft Detection of Eastern Air Command's Flying Control Unit.

Flying Control immediately alerted several observers in the district of Country Harbour where they believed the aircraft to be flying. The observers subsequently filed two reports from the vicinity of Goldboro, NS very shortly after receiving that warning. They confirmed that the aircraft was indeed seen flying over. This important information was most likely conveyed to the aircrew who could fix their location, track their course and report their progress from that point on.

But knowing their location did not resolve their true problem and difficulty. They were not out of the woods, in fact, were still in deep trouble. They were wandering up the river trying to find a suitable location for a forced landing.

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<sup>29</sup> Files from Norma Cooke, 8 June 2015 "A.D.C. Aids in finding lost fliers, 1944" (newspaper and author not identified) scrap book

A landing was considered at Isaacs Harbour, but that ice appeared unsafe. So, they simply flew on looking for better options. They maintained radio contact along the way. But time was running out. They advised Eastern Air Command Flying Control that they were about to make a forced landing on the surface of a snow-covered lake, which they identified as Stewart Lake as their probable location.

Eastern Air Command Flying Control reacted quickly. An aircraft was dispatched from Dartmouth and flew to the vicinity where it successfully located the four men, but not on Stewart Lake as thought! In fact, they were on a small lake according to later reports some six miles distant.

The aircraft had crashed on Archibald Big Lake just to the north and east of Crossroads Country Harbour, but its true location was not yet known. Their probable location was once again misidentified this time by the rescue plane as Tom Mann Lake.

The rescue aircraft was able to drop supplies to the stranded men. It was lucky that none of the men were injured in the forced landing for ski-equipped aircraft were unavailable as they were deployed elsewhere. The crew was to remain on the lake for several days! A speedy recovery was improbable.

[Rescue 1944 – The Local Coordination Centre](#)<sup>30</sup>

The question would now become how to rescue these stranded men? The answer was sought through local knowledge. Flying Control contacted an ADC Observer at Goldboro, a Mr. Davidson, and Constable Osborne of the RCMP at nearby Sherbrooke for their assistance.

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<sup>30</sup> Files from Norma Cooke, 8 June 2015 “Aids in rescue, March 1944” (newspaper and author not identified) scrap book – this section unless otherwise noted

Flying Control told Mr. Davidson, and Constable Osborne where the aircraft likely was. They wanted to know the ways and means of getting in to the lake by surface travel.

Their call initiated a great effort that had to be coordinated. That task fell to Miss Laurie Sears, the Chief Telephone Operator at Sherbrooke, NS. Miss Sears quickly used her own initiative.

Miss Sears called what help was at hand on the very first call from the reporting centre that a plane was in trouble over her area. She alerted several observers who she knew to be in the path of the laboring aircraft. Their contacts and reports were immediately passed through her to the reporting centre.



Miss Sears would subsequently become the clearing house and action centre for the rescue and its coordination throughout what turned out to be a two-week ordeal.<sup>31</sup> It was said that “Miss Sears practically took over and handled the alerting, the securing and passing of information herself until the men were finally rescued.”

The Aircraft Detection Corps Observers assessed her actions to have been extraordinary. Miss Sear’s contributions in the reporting and subsequent rescue of the crew of an aircraft that crash landed on the lake near Country Harbor Mines, N.S. in 1944 were highly praised. She was credited with a kudo: the successful rescue “should go to Miss Laurie Sears the Chief Telephone Operator at Sherbrooke, NS.”

[The rescue truly begins – The Community of Country Harbour Comes together](#)

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<sup>31</sup> Files Gina Walsh, Cross Roads Country Harbour, 8 June 2015, “Salvagers go on a wing and a hunch by Brian Hayes 21 August 2000”

But that was the work behind the scenes. What happened on the ground was truly extraordinary, largely unreported, and was Homeric in all its aspects.

Even though the crew of the plane was in direct contact with its operation centre reporting their position throughout its ordeal, they had little idea where they were, exactly. The problem lay in the incorrect identification of their true location. They were not on Stewart Lake but in fact on Archibald Big Lake.<sup>32</sup> Finding them took a considerable effort.

The plane`s track was well known. It was spotted in many locations particularly at Isaacs Harbour and Goldboro, but it had proceeded inland, in a westerly direction, upriver into what was then, the wilds of Nova Scotia. It was lastly spotted over the home of Obie Fenton where the plane was observed to be in trouble by time it reached a field near his home. So, there was only a general idea of where the lost crew was.

A newspaper article from 6 March 1944 summarizes events in a nutshell. It reported that a twin-engine bomber had a forced landing at Forest Lake, Guysborough County. It goes on to say that “A local rescue party left for the crash site at three PM that Saturday afternoon. The aircrew was found, and the party returned to the settlement around 10PM that night.” Frank Newman was named as the aircraft captain of the downed plane. The local RCMP were brought in from Sherbrooke to coordinate in the rescue.<sup>33</sup> It seemed simple enough on paper, but it wasn’t.

It wasn’t to be that simple for Obie Fenton and his crew of volunteers. Three different locations were given in various reports as to the location of the downed crew ranging from Forest Lake District, Stewart Lake, to Tom Mann Lake. This indicated that the crew’s location was anything but certain despite the reports from ADC. They still would have to be found by Obie Fenton and his team. This was the task that lay ahead for the people from Crossroads Country Harbour and Country Harbour Mines.

The winter of 1943-44 was bitter and cold with a deep snowpack. Snow lay heavily on the fields and woods around the area that March 1944. The ice

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<sup>32</sup> Files Norma Cooke, **A.D.C. Aids in finding Lost Fliers**, (news clipping 1944)

<sup>33</sup> Mickey (Fenton) Harpell/ Gerry Madigan Interview, 23 Jun 2015 @ 1940-2010 hrs

was thick on the lakes everywhere in the county. There were no signs anywhere of a spring melt or break up.

Country Harbour was locked in the harshness of winter's embrace.

A thick crust of ice was embedded in the snow pack. That crust would soon prove to be an obstacle and impede movement and the speed of recovery. The coming rescue of the crew stuck on Archibald Big Lake was neither swift nor expeditious. In fact, it was laborious.<sup>34</sup> But in the early afternoon Obie and Lloyd Fenton working away sawing logs had no idea of that or what was soon coming their way.

[Mickey \(Fenton\) Harpell and Beulah \(Fenton\) Myers' Big Scare.](#)<sup>35</sup>

The first signs of the pending adventure came from the observations of two young girls playing in a field. Mickey (Fenton) Harpell recounts that her older sisters Marion (Fenton) Mason and Gladys (Fenton) Harris, were out coasting as children often do on a winter's afternoon.

Here they heard strange sounds of an engine overhead. It appeared to them that an aircraft was in some distress. The engines were running rough and may have been backfiring. But the changes in engine noise may have suggested another problem, the aircraft was likely running short of fuel and had to get down quickly.

Mickey said her sisters saw that **both** wheels were down and were very concerned of an impending crash. The young girls quickly made for the shelter of the trees. The plane passed over them, going on out of sight for at least three more miles before finally coming to rest on Archibald Big Lake.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Files Gina Walsh, Sarah Mason Wilson, **Plane crash of 1944 recalled**, Guysborough Journal, Thursday 11 October 1990

<sup>35</sup> Ibid Mickey (Fenton) Harpell, 23 Jun 2015; and

Beulah (Fenton) Myers/ Gerry Madigan Interview, 23 Jun 2015 @ 1315-1335 hrs

<sup>36</sup> Ibid Files Gina Walsh, Sarah Mason Wilson, 11 October 1990

Mickey clearly recalls her father's warning to his children at the time, "You knew when the wheels were down, the plane was going to land or crash ... Dad had told us so', so the children said." The shelter of the tree appeared to be the quickest way to safety and out of the path and the danger of the descending aircraft for these young girls, but the plane flew on disappearing from sight.

Yet there was still more excitement later that day. Another aircraft flew over but much later in the afternoon. Here the two younger sisters, Mickey and Beulah, were also out playing on the field with several friends and again with their older sisters Marion and Gladys.

This time a plane circled the field where the group were coasting, and they heard a voice speak. Someone in the aircraft was talking to them over a loud speaker giving them directions to a lake. This upset Mickey, Beulah and the others greatly.

Mickey remembers climbing on the fence calling to her father and his nephew Lloyd, who were working nearby, "Daddy come and get me!" All four girls and friends ran for home but not before seeing a kit bag dropped from the aircraft before doing so!

Apart from the engine noise, the voice from the loud speaker, and the sounds emanating over the engines that probably sounded like the voice of doom, they were more upset by the fact that they just had been bombarded with kit bags from the air by their own air force!

The kit bag fell not too far from where Obie and Lloyd were sawing wood. Obie and Lloyd retrieved the package. Obie cautioned Lloyd about opening the package. There was a war on. They were very suspicious of anything strange and proceeded cautiously! They took the package to Mickey's Uncle Hadley's home where it was examined in greater detail. Inside the kit bag were directions to the crash site, rations, a first aid kit, a hatchet, and sheathed knife.

They now had firm proof that an aircraft was in distress and its probable location.<sup>37</sup> The directions given by the RCAF were in the direction of Tom Mann Lake. The first location that was given was known to be wrong and

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid Files Gina Walsh, Sarah Mason Wilson, 11 October 1990

was corrected from Stewart Lake some 10 km further distant from the forced landing site. But it was still directions to the wrong location!

The ground search for the plane and crew soon got underway that very afternoon. Obie and Lloyd Fenton organized a team. They and Wilfred Langley, Edward Kenneth, Mac Martin, Lawrence Hallett, Wilmer Hodgson and William Janes were amongst the first to pursue the rescue.

They faced a daunting task. There were no ploughed roads to the crash site, not even a beaten path where they eventually would have to go. The men had to make their way through deep snow, but they were walking to the wrong Lake!

[Wilmer's memory of the walk through the woods<sup>38</sup>](#)

Wilmer Hodgson remembers that walk well. He is now 91 years old and still lives in Country Harbour Mines. His story is enlightening. It was a very heavy winter according to Wilmer's recollection. He recalls heading out with Obie Fenton and others at around mid-afternoon with nothing but the clothes on their back. They had a horse with them.

They faced a daunting task as there were no ploughed roads to the crash site. Wilmer's recollection of the entry to the lake was from the Highway 316 approach out over the steep hill first to Tom Mann Lake thence to Archibald Big Lake. That was a very steep ascent that added greatly to their burden. The men made their way through deep snow; snow so deep that the horse got stuck and finally gave up in exhaustion. The men pressed on alone.

Wilmer recalls an aircraft constantly overhead. It assisted the team in the pursuit of finding the downed aircraft. The rescue plane maintained an orbiting station overhead, pointing/flying and guiding them in the general direction of the downed aircraft as long as possible. But the sunlight waned, and it got dark. At some point it could no longer maintain its orbiting station. The team's progress slowed, as they made their way through deep snow in the dark.

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<sup>38</sup> Wilmer Hodgson/Gerry Madigan Interview, 23 June 2015 ,Time: 1335-1410 hrs

Carrying lanterns, they made their way and continued the rescue attempt throughout the night pushing on to the other lake. Their perseverance, determination, and hope were not misplaced.

The rescuers finally arrived at the crash site around 9PM. It was pitch dark at the time. Wilmer saw the broken trees at a point on the lake where the plane contacted the wood line leading to the lake and followed it. There they saw skid marks on the lake leading to its far end.

The aircraft was finally located! One of the wings appeared to be broken off as it lay at the lower end of the lake. The aircraft otherwise appeared to be in pretty good shape! It was not a catastrophic crash. More importantly the crew was alive!

There on Archibald Big Lake, from the evidence of tree damage, the skid marks, and the scrape on the lake, Wilmer, Obie and the others found the plane and its crew in a mound of snow at the far end about 300 feet from shore. But it was a clear indication of their close encounter was almost a total disaster.

The crew were outside of the aircraft. Wilmer recalled that they appeared in good shape, well supplied and were already under canvass with a fire going. None of the crew were injured by this encounter, they were simply waiting rescue.

The rescue team soon organized their safe removal. They were soon on their way out of the woods to be housed on arrival at Country Harbour Mines in the warmth of the homes of Mrs. Eliza Haynes and Mrs. Garfield Hodgson.

Mickey (Fenton) Harpell also remembers her father's recollection of the rescue team on his return from the Archibald Big Lake rescue. The crew must have certainly been grateful for the community's efforts. Mickey recalls "I remember Dad coming home after finding where the plane had crashed. He had tins of bully beef from the guys on the plane." They were very well supplied indeed!

The crew was glad to be finally rescued, and in contact with the outside world. But they were about to embark on another great adventure— the repair, salvage, and extraction of their aircraft from the lake!

What the scene may have looked like

Coincidentally one US aircrew did encounter a similar problem in Newfoundland the prior year. Their story gives us an appreciation of the circumstances and difficulties of the day.

A Ventura Bomber operating out of NAS Argentia was on a routine anti-submarine patrol 27 February 1943. They encountered engine problems and had to make forced landing, damaging a wing and losing a wheel at Cape Bay Newfoundland.<sup>39</sup>

The crash record states that a PV-3 Ventura was returning from an operational flight. The weather suddenly closed in and the pilot was ordered to an alternate airfield. It was a brutal storm. The pilot flew on instruments for 3 hrs in a blinding snow storm. There were no navigational aids to guide him.

Captain E.H. Roberds, pilot in command, tried valiantly to find an opening in the storm. When one was finally found, a spot in some marshland, he put down with only 15 minutes of fuel remaining in his tanks. Like the Archibald Big Lake forced landing, Roberds lost a wheel towards the end of his landing run. The PV-3 Ventura broke through a crust of ice, forcing his wheels to retract into the wells.

Captain E.H. Roberds had little choice or alternatives. His forced landing was very indicative of the dangers of operations of the day. The storm had closed all airports in the area. That attests to the very real and present danger facing all aircrews who partook of what was considered "routine" patrols.

This is what Captain E.H. Roberds' crash looked like and what was most likely found at the crash on Archibald Big Lake just one year later.

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<sup>39</sup> Crash Record USN, Card# 1345, PV-3 #33932, 23 February 1943



Craig Fuller Photograph Archives, AAIR Aviation  
Archaeological Investigation & Research (with permission)

### Salvage and repair 1944

RCAF authorities must have been on site soon at some point to assess if the plane was salvageable. A decision was eventually made to repair the aircraft in the field. Those repairs on Archibald Big Lake took the better part of two weeks. Authorities brought in a replacement wing on a six-wheeled truck to effect the repairs from Halifax through to Antigonish and finally onto Country Harbor Mines.<sup>40</sup>

Patsy Fenton recalled the six-wheeled truck coming in from Antigonish with a replacement wing for the repair.<sup>41</sup> The journey from Halifax through to Antigonish to Country Harbour would have been epic in its day. The roads were unpaved, and apart from the snow and the road clearing, the journey through the 316 from Antigonish to Country Harbour would have been tortuous, bone jarring, and slow. But the journey was essential given the importance of the wing.<sup>42</sup> The six-wheeled truck finally arrived and hauled the replacement wing as far as Murray Hodgson's home.<sup>43</sup>

But getting the wing to Country Harbour Mines was the least of the difficulties. The weather was problematic and had to be contended with. You would not be able to move for three or four days after a snow fall if the weather turned for the worst. Nothing would move in or be able to get out!<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid Files Gina Walsh, Sarah Mason Wilson, 11 October 1990

<sup>41</sup> Ibid Mickey (Fenton) Harpell and Wilmer Hodgson, 23 June 2015

<sup>42</sup> Ibid Mickey (Fenton) Harpell and Wilmer Hodgson, 23 June 2015

<sup>43</sup> Ibid Files Gina Walsh, Sarah Mason Wilson, 11 October 1990

<sup>44</sup> Ibid Mickey (Fenton) Harpell and Wilmer Hodgson, 23 June 2015

Also it was March, a thaw could happen at any time. So, there was an urgency in getting a replacement wing out to Archibald Big Lake and repairing that plane.

Getting the wing to the lake proved to be a challenge. There was no viable road into Archibald Big Lake. The initial plan was to truck it to the lake after a purpose-built road was constructed. A woods road was constructed through to the site of the crash, which took time.<sup>45</sup>

MacRitchie Hayne recalled that bulldozers cut a road through the woods. He remembered there was a lot of snow with a crust build up that often halted and impeded progress. There was more than one metre of snow on the ground. To add to the difficulties, the incline to the lake proved impossible for the six-wheeled truck to climb. It just couldn't make it up the hill!<sup>46</sup>

The plan to use the six-wheeled truck was revised. The wing would be transported to the lake – old school – by a team of horses. MacRitchie Hayne was contracted to do that job. He was paid \$5 for the use of his team of horses. It took them almost two days to reach the lake. They arrived, and the work of repair finally began.<sup>47</sup>

Some of the local men were hired to assist the air force in the repairs, Wilmer Hodgson amongst them. Mac Martin was hired as a caretaker to secure the site and safeguard the plane when the workers were finished for the day. Harry and Garfield Hodgson were also hired. They assisted the skilled technicians who were also billeted at the Hayne and Hodgson homes.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Files Gina Walsh, Brian Hayes, **Salvagers go on a wing and a hunch**, Chronicle Herald, 21 August 2000

<sup>46</sup> Ibid Files Gina Walsh, Brian Hayes, 21 August 2000

<sup>47</sup> Ibid Files Gina Walsh, Brian Hayes, 21 August 2000

<sup>48</sup> Ibid Files Gina Walsh, Brian Hayes, 21 August 2000

Wilmer Hodgson recalls that the aircraft was on the lake for two weeks or more. Wilmer remembers too being paid five dollars a day for the work. The aircraft was valued at \$250,000 in 1944.<sup>49</sup>

So, the salvage and repair began in earnest. Wilmer's account gives great insight on what measures were taken to salvage and repair this plane. He and others cut logs from the surrounding woods. Some of these logs were used to build a jack-stay that was used to lift the broken aircraft up from the surface of the lake. The aircraft was suspended while the broken wing was removed, and the replacement wing installed.<sup>50</sup>

The work progressed well despite all the difficulties. The day came when it was finally done, and work completed. Forty five-gallon cans of fuel were hauled out to the lake to refuel the plane. This gives a broad hint at the reason and the necessity of the forced landing; the plane was simply running on empty!

The fuelling of the plane marked the end of a journey of sorts. It was the last step in a flight that was supposed to be routine, daily, boring, and uneventful, which began 4 March 1944. It was long overdue reaching its final destination. If anything, this vignette was probably typical of what was a maritime patrol in Atlantic Canada during that winter of 1944.<sup>51</sup>

#### [The Big Day – Flying Off the Lake](#)

There was great fanfare on the day scheduled for take-off. Many walked out to Archibald Big Lake to see the plane take-off. A huge crowd of men, women, and children from the local community gathered on the lake. It was a once in a lifetime event. This was 1944 and rural Nova Scotia after all. You just didn't see a warplane take off from a Country Harbour lake every day.<sup>52</sup>

Wilfred Langley recalls the procedure on how that take-off was achieved. Holes were made in the lake. The men placed large poles in the resulting

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid Wilmer Hodgson, 23 June 2015

<sup>50</sup> Ibid Wilmer Hodgson, 23 June 2015

<sup>51</sup> Ibid Mickey (Fenton) Harpell and Wilmer Hodgson, 23 June 2015

<sup>52</sup> Ibid Mickey (Fenton) Harpell and Wilmer Hodgson, 23 June 2015

openings. Ropes were then tied and tethered to the aircraft. Finally, the aircraft's engines were revved as fast as possible.

The plane strained and shook violently against the ropes tethered to the poles, struggling to be released, and striving to become air borne. The ropes were cut. Away went the plane at full throttle, hurtling down the lake, and then, in a short bit, bolting up to the sky.<sup>53</sup>

This may sound far-fetched, but it was typical of the extraordinary efforts and ingenuity used toward the salvage of valuable aircraft at the time. It is an amazing insight to the skills used and problem solving of the day. It was all in a day's work of getting the job done in what was most likely the most expedient way possible!<sup>54</sup>

[The reason for the overflights - the U-boat threat](#)

You may ask why the aircraft was flying over Country Harbour in the first place? There was a great deal of Air Force activity over Nova Scotia during the Second World War. Aircraft were flying all over. Obie Fenton's admonishment to his daughters "you knew when the wheels were down, the plane was going to land or crash" was a realistic appraisal at the time for there were some 300 air crashes alone in Nova Scotia during the war.

Much of this aerial activity was for training purposes but much of it was of an operational necessity too. There was a persistent U-boat threat off Canada's East Coast. We often think of that as a purely naval show. It was not. The fact was the threat was real and had to be dealt with by Home War Establishment (HWE) through the mobilization of all its assets on the East Coast. This included the Navy, the Army, the Air Force, and Eastern Air Command and a system of Coast Watchers organized around civilian volunteers.

Billy Goobie of Hamilton, Ontario, a former resident of Country Harbour was recruited by the Air Force to be a member of the local observer corps. His home was the location of the local telephone exchange, a good fit for an observer and the requirement for speedy reportage. The Home War

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid Mickey (Fenton) Harpell and Wilmer Hodgson, 23 June 2015

<sup>54</sup> James Montagnes, **How the RCAF Prevents Waste**, Aviation – The oldest American Aeronautical Magazine, March 1944, pg. 168-169 & 324. (pg. 169)

Establishment (HWE) and the Air Force had reports that German U-boats had entered the estuary and river at Country Harbour and in the lower shore areas. This was a very real possibility. U-boats could be present in these unguarded waters.<sup>55</sup>

Evert Hudson claimed to have seen one in Country Harbour during the war. He described a surfaced U-boat coming up the Harbour, backing around, and then turning out to sea again. Such would have been a very dangerous action on the part of any U-boat Commander. It seems unlikely that any U-boat Commander would place his vessel and crew at extreme risk and very much in harm's way.<sup>56</sup>

There are no known records of inland incursions in harbours and inlets such as Country Harbour by U-boats during the Second World War. But there were actions in deeper and wide approaches in the Gulf of St. Lawrence during 1942. The German Navy did have a limited capability of a few U-boats specifically designed to enter enemy harbours and approaches to stealthily lay mines or to lay in attack with torpedoes on enemy shipping when required to do so out of an operational or a strategic necessity.<sup>57</sup> So the threat was very real indeed!

The question has always been how close did U-boats approach Canadian shores?<sup>58</sup> There are news reports and sightings of U-boats anywhere

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid Files Gina Walsh, Sarah Mason Wilson, 11 October 1990

<sup>56</sup> From the interview file: Robert Walsh Interview 8 June 2015, Time 1230-1330 hrs

<sup>57</sup> CBC News, **German U-boat found off Nova Scotia**, 14 July 2004

Source: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/german-u-boat-found-off-nova-scotia-1.471422>

Accessed: 9 Jun 2015

<sup>58</sup> Tristin Hopper, **Group on mission to prove there is truth in legends that Nazi submarines went far inland from Canadian coast**, National Post, 19 April 2013

Source: <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/group-on-mission-to-prove-there-is-truth-in-legends-that-nazi-submarines-went-far-inland-from-canadian-coast>

Accessed: 14 June 2015

between six and 20 miles off Nova Scotia's coast line. There were also reported incidents, some very intimate encounters, where surfaced U-boats allegedly approached local fishing boats for food and water. But these sightings were often disregarded either as imagined, unsubstantiated or unverifiable.<sup>59</sup>

The fact is, Eastern Air Command (EAC) of the RCAF reported 84 attacks on U-Boats between 1941 and 1945 resulting in six confirmed U-Boat kills. This was quite an achievement given the resources at hand and the relative scarcity of targets relative to operations in the European theatre of war.<sup>60</sup> But the Second World War was very close to home and had come to Country Harbour too! The proof of that fact lies in what was found many years later.

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<sup>59</sup> Some examples from "Canadian War Museum archives, 149- War European -1939- Submarine Warfare -Atlantic Coast:

1. Hamilton Spectator, **Submarine Reported Off Nova Scotia**, 21 September 1939
2. Globe and Mail, **Unidentified Sub Sighted Twenty Miles Off N.S. Coast**, 29 September 1939
3. Hamilton Spectator, **Undersea Craft Said Observed Off N.S. Coast**, 2 October 1939
4. Hamilton Spectator, **Fishermen Assert U-Boats Now Becoming Common Sight - Reports of Six Separate Meetings in Atlantic Are Reported**, 1 May 1942

<sup>60</sup> [Hugh A. Halliday, Canadian Military History in Perspective](#)

**Hunting U-boats From The Air: Air Force, Part 15** , Legion Magazine

[May 1, 2006](#),

Source: <http://www.legionmagazine.com/en/index.php/2006/05/hunting-u-boats-from-the-air/>

Accessed: 22 March 2011

It was at the far end of the lake and within 300 feet of the distant shore that our story takes us to in the year 2000. The plane just didn't fly away leaving the area cleaned of all debris back in 1944. A damaged portion of the wing was left on the lake. It eventually sank to the bottom in the spring thaw of that year. Why it was left there, is not known. It came to rest in about eight feet of water and left undisturbed until the summer of 2000.

The wing was not a lost or a long forgotten artifact of war. Its location was well known by all in the community. Robert Walsh and others fishing and trolling the lake would often pass over the wing as it was easily noticeable from the surface and thought of as a good place for fish to hide. Occasionally it would be a nuisance due to snags and loss of lures. Troublesome as it was, it was a favoured landmark for some great fishing and conversations.

Robert Walsh, a long-time resident of Crossroads Country Harbour had known about the wing since early 80's from the times he used to go fishing with an old friend, Evert Hudson. Robert said "I had thought many a times of recovering the wing, but it never seemed to happen. Roy Marryatt, one day said, 'Let's do it'". Robert says, "He was the push that got me moving". They pulled the other guys together and away we went.<sup>61</sup>

Robert and Roy Marryatt (now deceased) organized a team to recover the wing. They had a diver, Marcus Maclaren (Robert's nephew) and 4 -5 others in the crew. On a grey misty maritime summer's day Thursday 17 Aug 2000, the team proceed to Archibald Big Lake on the sole mission of salvaging and recovering that wing.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Robert Walsh- Gerry Madigan, Interview 8 June 2015, 1230-1330 hrs

<sup>62</sup> The wing recovery previously documented see:

Files Gina Walsh, Cross Roads Country Harbour, 8 June 2015, "Salvagers go on a wing and a hunch by Brian Hayes 21 August 2000" , and  
Matthew MacArthur, **WWII plane wing moved from watery grave after half a century**, Guysborough Journal, 23 August 2000

This iteration is drafted based on the notes from interview of 8 June 2015 and clarification of those files by Robert Walsh.



*Robert and Gina Walsh, Family Archives and Photographs (with permission)*

*Photograph of Marcus McLaren holding up wing 17 August 2000*



*Robert and Gina Walsh, Family Archives and Photographs (with permission)*

*Photograph of Roy Marryatt and Marcus McLaren in the water with wing*

Thursday afternoon was spent dislodging the wing from the bottom.<sup>63</sup> Marcus Maclaren, the diver, tied ropes to the wing that were subsequently tethered to two motor boats. Between pulling with the small aluminum boats, and Marcus shoving from the bottom in diving gear, the effort of the team of boats and diver, finally dislodged the wing.

It was carefully floated to shore, where the four wheelers attempted to bring it onto dry land. They failed. The weight of the wing and friction made it irretrievable on the day. This called for a new plan of attack.

The team returned on Friday 18 August 2000. This time the plan was to float the wing onto a boat trailer hauled through the woods by Robert Walsh. The work continued fast apace. The wing was finally lifted from its watery grave onto dry land two hours later, fifty-six years after it

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<sup>63</sup> Matthew MacArthur, **WWII plane wing moved from watery grave after half a century**, Guysborough Journal, 23 August 2000



*Robert and Gina Walsh, Family Archives and Photographs (with permission)*

*Marcus McLaren taking a breather*

was left abandoned on the frozen lake surface!

The team faced the same task as their forbearers did in the recovery task of the downed plane. Would the wing go through the woods? They needn't have worried. With chainsaws in hand and gingerly progressing down the woods road from Archibald Big Lake, the wing on the boat trailer was hauled 7 km through the woods and down highway 316 to Robert's home on the West Side of Crossroads Country Harbour without cutting one tree!



*Photographs (with permission)*

*Robert Walsh towing wing on trailer with ATV on the trail from the lake*

Coincidentally, it turned out to be a two-day effort getting the wing out of the woods.

The wing was successfully brought to shore after so many years of laying on the bottom of Archibald Big Lake. Surprisingly many of the fittings and valves were in a good state. The wing was still in pretty good shape all in all. The team noted that a section of the wing had been cut out in the area of the fuel tank. But that was the only visible damage.

The wing was photographed at Robert's home. He had planned to make a monument and place a plaque by the Remembrance Day that year at the Cenotaph at Cross Roads, Country Harbour. The Municipality of Guysborough would have funded the project to mark the importance of this occurrence during the Second World War.

But their story garnered much attention and media interest. David Powell then a volunteer with the Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum at the Halifax airport convinced Robert and the rest of the team to donate the wing for its collection. The Wing was brought to the Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum for a project in the eventual restoration of a Hudson Bomber within its collection of artifacts.

There are many twists and turns in this story. Throughout this tale I have alluded to "the plane". The question is what plane? The aircraft in question was at first identified as a Lancaster Bomber, a four-engine aircraft. It turned out to be a twin-engine bomber. It was misidentified again as a Hudson Bomber, a maritime patrol aircraft widely used on anti-submarine patrol at the time. The Hudson Bomber was well known and was operating both out of Debert and Greenwood.

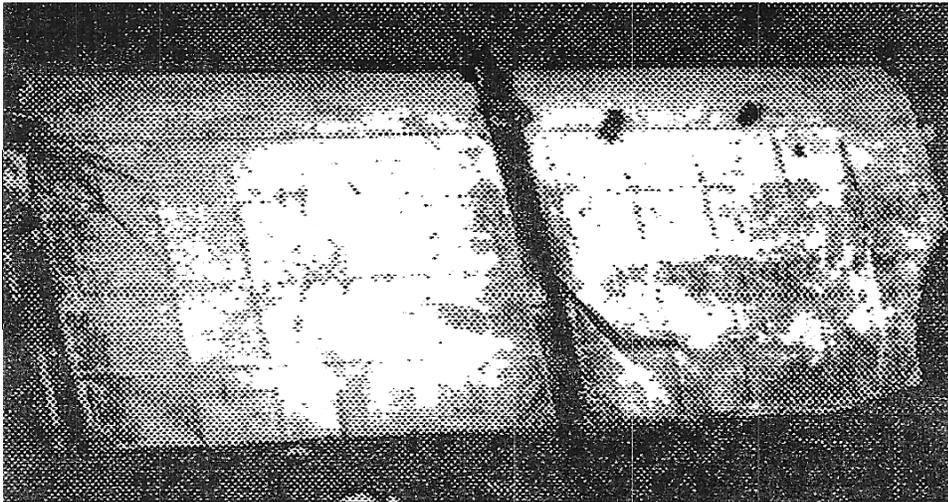
But the newspapers of the day never identified the aircraft type in the clippings ... so it was always assumed that it was a Hudson bomber. The Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum (ACAM) identified the wing to be from a Ventura Bomber, which was a different aircraft, but a model built to be a re-engineered improvement based on the Hudson bomber airframe.

The Lockheed Ventura was operated by many allied air forces and the air force was in the process of gradually replacing the older Hudson types. It also came as a shock that the wing recovered from Archibald Big Lake had clear US naval markings and insignia.



It is very clear that the wing tip and back edge of the wing in the above photograph are missing. Mickey (Fenton) Harpell's picture below is what may be the missing artifacts, the landing flap from the wing picture above. This artifact too was widely known and used in the community after 1944.

*Robert and Gina Walsh, Family Archives and Photographs (with permission)*  
*Wing with under side up, can see where a hole was cut into it.*



**The wing of the plane that crashed on Archibald's Lake in 1944.**

*Mickey (Fenton) Harpell Archives and Photographs (with permission)*

A long piece of this wing may still be lying in some local field.

Still many questions on the aircraft's origins remain. Was it a US crew that had gone down on Archibald Big Lake during the Second World War? Where

did it originate from? What was its mission? What happened?

So, whose plane, was it? The news accounts of the day clearly state that that the aircraft was from Dartmouth. We must assume until proven otherwise that it was a Canadian crew and a RCAF aircraft.

It transpired that in the exigencies of the war, aircraft were transferred from the United States to Canada on the lend lease program. These were often

flown with US markings until they could be re-painted on a maintenance cycle.<sup>64</sup> This is what we know from news accounts written in 1944. The rest of the questions remain a mystery to be solved!

Fast Forward one more time to 2015

The wing that Robert Walsh and his team recovered in August 2000 and the fuselage of Hudson Bomber from the ACAM are now being restored as a museum piece. This restoration is currently underway at Trenton, Ontario at the National Air Force Museum in association with the Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum (ACAM) in Halifax.

The project is the restoration of the 1942 Mark VI Lockheed Hudson, Serial Number FK466. It will be the only Mark VI Hudson on display in the world. The project will take five years to complete.<sup>65</sup> You may be surprised to learn that the wings of the Ventura and Hudson Bombers were interchangeable. The Ventura wing from Archibald Big Lake is being used in a very historic restoration!

Canada owes a debt of gratitude to the citizens of Country Harbour. First and foremost, for their boundless efforts in the rescue of the aircrew and salvage of the airplane aircrew at the height of the Second World War. Their friendship, hospitality, and succor to the downed air crew must have certainly been most appreciated by those there.

Second, Canada owes a debt of gratitude to those who followed. They remembered. They have never forgotten those events as they caringly brought a historic artifact out of the woods, which is about to have a new life. This year marks the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the wings recovery from Archibald Big Lake.

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<sup>64</sup> Information provided by Chris Charland, National Air Force Museum Canada and Christian Larsen, Pennfield Parish Military Historical Society

<sup>65</sup> National Air Force Museum of Canada, **Lockheed Hudson**, Copyright 2015

Source: <http://airforcemuseum.ca/en/hudson-restoration>

Accessed: 7 Jun 2015

Robert Walsh and his team remembered the supreme sacrifices made by our predecessors during the war in this effort. Their hope was that somewhere in the community, a fitting place would be found to mark the importance of this occurrence during the Second World War.



That place has now changed and will be at the National Air Force Museum at Trenton, Ontario. The restored wing on the Hudson Bomber, a significant part of Canada's aviation history, will be displayed for all to see. A debt of gratitude is owed to them for their generous donation.

***Robert and Gina Walsh, Family Archives and Photographs (with permission) The team: Gary Harris, Marcus McLaren, Derrick Hayne, Roy Marryatt, and Robert Walsh standing for group photo by wing***

## The Treasure Trove – The value of family albums!

Many stories are yet to be discovered and told. Sometimes all it takes, is one picture to prick one's interest. Such discoveries have led to two stories from Guysborough County alone on the vibrant history of Canada at War on the home front during the Second World War. The *Girl on the Wing* and *Mystery on the lake* are two examples of these possible discoveries, those hidden treasures in family albums and scrap books.

Does one exist for you? You never know what's waiting for you in that old family photo album or just sitting waiting in that shed or barn. Just open them up and relive the memories of Mom and Dad, their parents, siblings and your community. It's all there for you to discover!

### **3.What's in a Name?**

#### **The Story of the Crew of Ventura 2159, No. 145(BR) Squadron (Bomber Reconnaissance)**

By Gerry Madigan

12 August 2015

“Keith!”

“Sir”

“Do you or do you not have an e-mail address?”

“Of course, I do, sir. I’ve always had one.”

“Well you better come over here and show me because I’ve spent the better part of an hour searching for your name!”

This was the gist of a conversation that I had with a colleague during one of my final years in the military. I was in the midst of setting up a new team and trying to organize some files to be passed around to the staff for their work. Keith Stuart was my point man for one of my key sub-sections.

Keith was flummoxed by my persistent question and frustration as much as I was confounded by his “missing name”. He pointed out “Major Madigan my last name is spelled “S-T-U-A-R-T not S-T-E-W-A-R-T!” Little did I know that appellation would come around once again to confound and foil my attempts in resolving the story of the “*Mystery on the Lake*”! But this little incident was invaluable. I learned that people make mistakes, there are barriers of miscommunication, and that records are imperfect!

For those who have not followed the serialized story “*Mystery on the Lake*”, a Ventura Bomber had a forced landing on Archibald Big Lake on 4 March 1944. Much of the story came from news accounts both before and after the event.

I was recently working on another project pertaining to the Ventura bomber in the follow up to this story. I needed some information on Operational Unit 34 at Pennnfield New Brunswick to finish it off. Major Mathias Joost, Operational Records Team, Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), Canadian Armed Forces generously assisted me. But he had another surprise in store for me. He inquired if I was interested in a crash record that he had on a “Stuart” Lake, NS.

Major Joost knew from prior correspondence that I was on the lookout for anything related to the crash on Big Archibald Lake. He had a crash record for an incident on 4 March 1944 but at Stuart Lake, NS. It was just too much of a coincidence.

It turns out that this record is the lost record for the crash on Archibald Big Lake! They are one and the same the crash. What may have caused some obfuscation was the spelling of Stuart Lake on the official crash record.<sup>66</sup>

The place of the record was spelt as Stuart Lake whereas the spelling of the name in Country Harbour Mine was “Stewart” Lake. We now know that there was also some confusion given on the crash site. Three possible locations were cited in “*Mystery on the Lake*”. The different spelling in the official record only added to the mystery.

But was it the same Stewart Lake? In fact, there are at least three Stewart or Stuart Lakes that can be found in the Nova Scotia Atlas. Surprisingly a second Stewart Lake is located near the borders of the Antigonish, Pictou, Guysborough County Lines at Cross Roads Ohio, Antigonish County. A Stuarts Lake, similar to the name on the crash card, does exist and is found near Port Mouton and Kejimikujik National Park.

There may be some doubt from the confusion in the records that this air crash record is for the one and the same event! Remember that there were over 300 air crashes in Nova Scotia alone during the Second World War. The record could have easily been related to another event!

The spelling of the name of the lake and the information contained in the air crash record was ephemeral. It did not readily lend to narrowing down the crash to Archibald Big Lake. But the additional information from the operational records provided by Major Joost and eye witness accounts on the ground do corroborate this record as the account of the events of 4 March 1944!

The air crash records identify Ventura GRV Serial 2159 from No. 145(BR) Squadron returning from an operational patrol forced landed on Stuart Lake on 4 March 1944 at 1750hrs GMT or 1:50 PM Atlantic Standard time. Ventura 2159 suffered a Category B crash that signified considerable

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<sup>66</sup> Canada, National Defence, Director of History and Heritage, Air Crash Card Record Ventura GRC 2159 4-3-44, file #1100-21-59, email DHH, Major Mathias Joost 6 Aug 2015

damage had been sustained. Category B meant that the aircraft would have been transported – not flown under its own power – to a contractor or depot facility for repair. This would have been hard to do in the case of Archibald Big Lake. The contractor had to come to them!

The purpose of the flight was an operational patrol. A court of Inquiry determined “With fuel running low, or **used entirely**, (the) aircraft attempted to land on ice and snow-covered lake and ground looped.” This is consistent with the account given in “*Mystery on the Lake*”.

The Court added “the crew was lost and no gas”. It also identified a secondary and contributing factor as “Wheels up landing” but that was subsequently stricken from the record for that wasn’t the case at all.

The Ventura 2159’s wheels were observed to be down by those on the ground well before its approach to Archibald Big Lake. The gear must have collapsed at some point after the landing either by damage in contact with the trees as observed by eye witness account or by ground looping at the far end of the lake.

The crash record identified four personnel aboard the aircraft, again consistent with the story told so far. The personnel on board were Warrant Officer (WO2) J.C. Tanner – Pilot, Warrant Officer (WO1) A.W.G. Edgley – Navigator, and two wireless air gunners Pilot Officer (P/O) W.A. Harris and Warrant Officer (WO2) A. McMichael. All were reported as uninjured. What was inconsistent was the fact that there was no Frank Newman, the assumed aircraft captain, on board!

Dartmouth was listed as the unit of origin and that is consistent as well. It seems odd then that “Frank Newman” was named in the news accounts. He was not listed on the crash record nor was he listed on the operational staff list for No. 145(BR) Squadron at Dartmouth in March 1944.

The “Newman” name again places some doubt about the veracity of the found record. But there was a Flying Officer (F/O) Nelson who also was an aircraft captain in search of Tanner and Ventura 2159. It is possible that Nelson may have been the liaison between the RCAF and the newspapers. It is also possible then that the newspapers simply got the name wrong. But other evidence from the official records serve to remove all doubt concerning the Ventura 2159 record.

What we do know now was that WO2 Tanner was an experienced pilot in command of Ventura 2159. He had some 563 total flying hours broken down as 300 solo and 263 dual, with 38 hours solo and 36 hours dual or 74 hours in total on the Ventura airframe. His training included instrument and night flying which he amounted to 28 and 50 hours respectively. His profile was the norm for the day. Tanner was both a proficient and an experienced pilot.

Tanner's Lockheed Ventura was a Mark V with Canadian Serial Number 2159. It was assigned to No. 145(BR) Squadron, Dartmouth Nova Scotia. It was taken on strength 30 April 1943 from ex-US Naval stocks whose original serial was USN 33148 again confirming Dartmouth as the unit of origin in the case of the forced landing of Ventura 2159.<sup>67</sup>

The USN relationship too is consistent with the evidence found by Robert Walsh and his team in 2000. The aircraft was most likely painted in Canadian colours. The wing was on the surface of the frozen Archibald Big Lake in March 1944, sunk in its waters that spring, and rested there for over 56 years. The lightly painted Canadian colours simply wore off over time and the more durable enameled USN markings came to show and was found instead. This explains the USN marking found so many years later by Robert Walsh and his team.

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<sup>67</sup> Canadian Wings, web page: [Home](#) > [Squadrons](#) > SquadronDetail, No. 145 Squadron, Copyright 2012  
© AEROWAREdesigns

ACCIDENT CLASSIFICATION											
UNIT 145 Sqdn		COM. E		PLACE Stuart Lake				DATE 4-3-44		TIME 1750 GMT	
A/C TYPE VENTURA GRV		No. 2159		CRASH CAT. "B"		H.O. FILE 1100-21-59		S.E. x		M.E. x	
PERSONNEL		RANK		NUMBER		DUTY		INJURIES		SIGNAL	
TANNER, J.C.		WO 2		R71261		P		Uninj.		No. DATE	
EDGLEY, A.W.G.		WO1		R55664		NAV		Uninj.		A.744 4-3-	
HARRIS, W.A.		P/O		J38953		WOAG		Uninj.		D 14 (REVISED)	
MCMICHAEL, A.		WO2		F82948		WOAG		Uninj.		No. CHECKED	
										1	
										#1	
ENGINE		ENGINE NUMBER(S)		INST.		NIGHT		HOURS FLOWN BY PILOTS		ON TYPE	
Pratt & Whitney		5538/7005						SOLO		DUAL	
Double Wasp		5537/7050						38		36	
R2800-31				28		50		300		263	
ACCIDENT CLASSIFICATION											

From Files of "Operational Records Team, Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), Canadian Armed Forces". GMT – Greenwich Mean Time is 4 hours ahead of AST – Atlantic Standard Time.

Part 2 – No. 145 (BR) Squadron and the Evidence of the Operational Records

We now know the history associated with Ventura 2159. In the winter and spring of 1944 No. 145(BR) Squadron was located at Dartmouth, NS. The crew state for No. 145(BR) Squadron states that it was staffed with 21 Pilots, 21 Navigators, and 40 Wireless Air Gunners (WAG). Also listed were one spare pilot, 2 spare navigators and 3 spare wireless air gunners. There was no Frank Newman found anywhere on the operational staff list.<sup>68</sup>

No. 145(BR) Squadron's Operations Records were available for the period 1 to 7 March 1944. There were no flying operations on 1 March 1944 due to poor weather conditions. We see the first actions commencing 2 March.

<sup>68</sup> Canada, National Defence, Director of History and Heritage, No. 145 Squadron – Crew State, email DHH, Major Mathias Joost 6 Aug 2015

Ventura 2159 was assigned to WO2 Tanner who is listed as its "Aircraft Captain".

Tanner had an early morning start that day, taking off at 1025 GMT (6:25AM AST) only to return some hours later at 1700 hrs GMT (1PM AST). His mission was a regular anti-submarine sweep lasting approximately 6-1/2 hrs duration. The unit remarks that he completed the usual patrol and that nothing was sighted.

Tanner rested on 3 March 1944. He was then assigned a convoy coverage patrol on 4 March 1944. Tanner took off around 0910 hrs GMT (5:10 AM AST) hours. His return time was listed as 1750 hrs GMT (1:50 PM AST). Ventura 2159 was 8 hours and 40 minutes in duration. This time Tanner's trip was not so uneventful. The Operations Log listed him as crashed and missing. This time places Ventura 2159 in the area of Obie Fenton's farm roughly at the right time of day recalled by Obie's daughters.

We have no clear indication if Tanner in Ventura 2159 had encountered any difficulties at any point while over his convoy coverage patrol. We know from prior sources that he was in radio communication with his headquarters. Tanner reported that he had engine problems at some point after leaving his convoy patrol.

Tanner's radio transmission probably occurred at the end of his mission, long after he departed the coverage zone, and once he was over the Nova Scotia coast line. Tanner would not have jeopardized or endangered the convoy by radioing his dispositions while in position over the convoy. He would have waited until the convoy was safely out of his way and when he was able to do so.

Dartmouth knew that Ventura 2159 was having trouble. Ventura 2171 was diverted to investigate. F/O Nelson's in Ventura 2171 was ordered and diverted from his own mission to search for Tanner and the crew of Ventura 2159. Nelson was already on station somewhere over the Atlantic and most likely closest at hand to the distressed aircraft.

Nelson departed Dartmouth 0850hrs GMT (4:50 AM) some minutes prior to Tanner's own take off. They were most likely tasked to the same convoy coverage duty. F/O Nelson duty listed in the unit operation log 4 March 1944 was typed "carried out search for missing aircraft." The operational

report was most likely typed up after the fact to reflect the change in mission. There was very little space for detail in the log. F/O Nelson returned to Dartmouth at 1520 GMT (11:20 AM) without encountering Tanner in Ventura 2159.

But Tanner could roughly fix his position and radioed that information to Dartmouth. Dartmouth subsequently tasked two other Ventura crews to go out and find him. Flight Lieutenant (F/L) E.T. Merriot in Ventura 2165 was first dispatched at 1800 hours GMT (2 PM). His rescue flight was specifically a mission to locate Tanner and the crew of Ventura 2159. He was followed by Flying Officer (F/O) I.D. Stephens in Ventura 2171, fifty five minutes later at 1855 (2:55 PM).

Merriot in Ventura 2165 was only an hour and fifteen minutes in the air. He returned to Dartmouth at 1915 GMT (3:15 PM). Given the very short duration of this flight, Ventura 2165 was probably the first to locate the downed aircraft and probably was the initial aircraft to fly over the Fenton farm scaring the older Fenton sisters. His was also most likely the first to indicate the way to the crash site and who corrected the initial crash site location to Tom Mann Lake.

But it was most likely F/O Stephen in Ventura 2171, who put the fear of God into the younger Fenton sisters, who dropped the kit bag, and whose voice boomed on high from above, that led the way to Archibald Big Lake to the rescuers on the ground. His rescue mission began at 1855 hrs GMT (2:30 PM). Stephen's flight was long and lasted until 2330 Hrs GMT (7:30 PM). He was the one that most likely cycled over the crash site, guiding Obie Fenton, his nephew Lloyd, Wilmer Hodgson and the others there. F/O Stephen left only when that last ray of sunlight and the onset of darkness forced him to do so.

A fourth flight was carried out on 5 March 1944 by a personage no less than the Squadron Commander! Squadron Leader (S/L) J.F. Greer flew to the crash site in Ventura 2165. His mission began at 1310 GMT (9:10AM) and ended a short while later at 1450 GMT (10:50 AM).

S/L Greer's duty was listed as a "Carry Flight", which was likely two-fold; to see and assess the situation for himself and to drop supplies to the beleaguered crew. So, it was no surprise that Obie Fenton's rescue team came home with tins of bully beef for his family confirming Mickey (Fenton)

Harpell's account of what happened in March 1944. The crew was indeed grateful to be found after a very harrowing day!

These records and the eye witness accounts match and corroborate what happened both on the ground and in the air. The only logical conclusion then is that this must be the one and the same crash record relating to Archibald Big Lake!

So, what's in a name? Plenty! In this account it was the spelling of names that hid and confused the information that took us over many paths. In the end the facts were found, and doubt removed in the telling of the big picture that sets the history.

Names are important on the smaller and personal level too. It is names within the tale that bring life that defines the history. The names of the people involved beyond the events and what they did are very important too!

### Part 3 – A hellish hard day!

The story of Ventura 2159 is interesting on the human level. It is a story of distinguished service and one of great courage and determination.

WO2 Tanner on Ventura 2159, on an operational convoy coverage patrol, orbited over a convoy providing cover and protection for over eight and a half hours on 4 March 1944. He must have been on station for a considerable length of time. He stretched the mission envelope of Ventura 2159 to the limit and almost lost it. He was caught short of fuel on the return flight. We now know from the official records that "With fuel running low, or **used entirely**, (the) aircraft attempted to land on ice and snow-covered lake and ground looped" on Archibald Big Lake.

Why would WO Tanner and the crew of Ventura 2159 choose to do so? The operational records do not provide very many clues here. However, these young men were trained to conduct a mission with maximum effort, regardless of cost. Tanner would have remained on station as long as needed given the certain and present dangers of lurking U-Boats in Canadian waters. Ventura 2159's job was not only to seek and destroy the

U-Boat but also to keep them down and underwater, where U-boats lost an advantage of speed and became much slower than a passing convoy. This gave a passing convoy a fighting chance of escape. Ventura 2159's patrol ensured that time, space, and distance were placed between a passing convoy and any hunting U-Boat.

What happened to WO2 Tanner in Ventura 2159 was actually a very common occurrence. Russell McKay, a veteran of the Second World War recounts a similar tale but this one, a ditching off the coast of Nova Scotia, in 1941. Russell McKay too was on an extended antisubmarine patrol out over the Atlantic.

Mr. Mackay and his crew spent a long time on station, became lost, and were very low on fuel. Land was spotted but their plane lacked sufficient fuel to make it back. Mackay's plane was forced to ditch in St Margaret's Bay. His crew was lucky. They were quickly rescued by local fishermen.<sup>69</sup>

The plane at Country Harbour suffered similar circumstances. It was short of fuel and had to force land on Archibald Big Lake. The fact that it was first spotted over Isaacs Harbour and Goldboro gives an indication of where Tanner's patrol line may have been on the day.

At the time it passed over Isaacs Harbour, Ventura 2159 was some hundred miles away from its Base at Dartmouth. It was short on fuel looking for a safe place to put down at the end of its patrol. The usual patrol is not defined in the unit operations log. But by mental calculation and knowing the limits of the Ventura aircraft we can roughly locate the area of his patrol.

Tanner's patrol line would have been bounded in an area somewhere bounded by Halifax and Cape Breton and off shore toward the edge of the continental shelf where he shadowed a convoy at length from where he

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<sup>69</sup> Tom Spears, **Remembrance: Russell McKay's adventures in flying — and landings**, Ottawa Citizen, 8 November 2014

Source: <http://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/remembrance-russell-mckays-adventures-in-flying-and-landings>

Accessed: 8 November 2014

made landfall at Isaacs Harbour and based on his reported difficulties and fuel shortage.

On making landfall, Tanner first proceeded westward in-land as he determined that the ice at Isaacs Harbour appeared to be unsafe. The aircraft was next observed along the way and by two young Fenton girls at Country Harbour. Tanner's engines were then observed to be running rough and may have been backfiring. The plane was subsequently observed at Howlett Brook but proceeding in a northerly direction.

Tanner's way up Country Harbour was not conducted in solitary fashion. He was not alone. He had his crew to assist him. His two wireless air gunners Harris and McMichael would be observing along the way and calling out details, hazards or landmarks. Edgley his navigator, would have been responsible for charting and navigating Ventura 2159's course and path. He would have been the one responsible for plotting points for radio transmission.

The record says that they were lost. That was not necessarily the case. They may have been lost coming in from the Atlantic but Edgley most likely quickly fixed their positions at Isaacs Harbour and on up the Country Harbour River. It is clear that this was so as Stewart Lake was fixed as a landmark along the way. Its location was radio backed to Dartmouth probably as a waypoint in the first instance. So, the crew knew roughly where they were in relation to these known points.

Tom Mann and Stewart Lake are also clearly evident on any good charts or maps of the river. They would have been evident from the air on the way to the Fenton farm where Ventura 2159 turned back easterly. Edgley did not radio his position from these two known landmarks that is suggestive in the events that followed and the urgency of their situation. Navigation would not have been easy, there was no GPS in the day. It was all a matter of headwork, calculation, slide-rules, rulers, charts, plotting and paperwork. That took time, and time was running out in the heat of events. But Edgley's navigation and the report of Ventura 2159's rough location was key to their rapid rescue!

Ventura 2159 was indeed in some difficulty. It had both wheels extended when it passed over the Fenton Farm, indicating that it was landing somewhere. There were indications of fuel starvation by the backfiring of the engines. It was at this point that Tanner had no choice. He needed an immediate and a suitable area for landing as Ventura 2159 was in extreme danger of crashing. There was little time for Edgley to fix or transmit another new location.

Ventura 2159 continued in a northerly- easterly direction away from the Fenton farm on parallel course with Archibald Big Lake where it disappeared from the Fenton girls' view. But time had run out for Ventura 2159. It was going down, not on Stewart Lake but on Archibald Big Lake, more than likely because they had simply run out of fuel!

We have an indication of Tanner's intent. He was probably heading back to Stewart Lake given the reciprocal change in direction away from the Fenton Farm and then back towards it. The eye witnesses on the ground say that he was lost from view. This suggest that Ventura 2159 was very low.

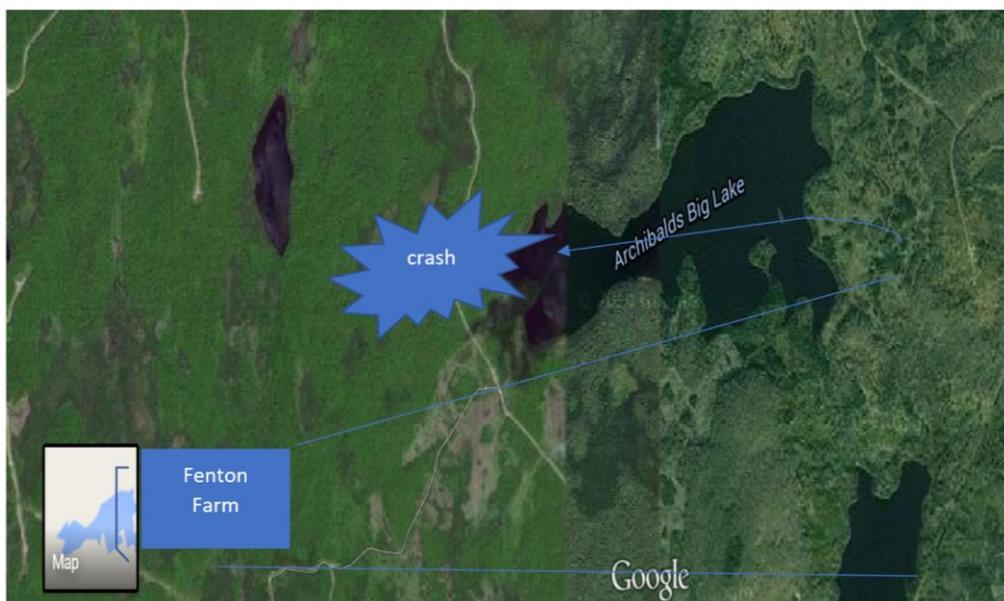
The area in and around Crossroads Country Harbour and Country Harbour mines is very hilly. The height of land is between 150 and 200 meters. Ventura 2159 was very low as it flew out of their view very quickly. Why would Ventura 2159 be so low?

The basic rule of thumb for flying is maintaining height! Height cannot be maintained without power. Once power is lost either from fuel deprivation or engine loss, height diminishes, and an airplane suddenly becomes a glider. Ventura 2159 was out of fuel, WO Tanner was out of options, and he forced landed quickly were it was safest to do so.

Tanner was about halfway down on a parallel vector when he made a turn into and toward Archibald Big Lake and where he finally forced landed Ventura 2159. He had only fumes remaining in his tanks. Archibald Big Lake is approximately 3km long on its east west access with lots of room for an emergency landing. It is an irregularly shaped lake, long, and bounded by bays and points along its shores. There was a point though, approximately midway down the lake, which from the evidence on the ground at the time, suggested that Ventura 2159 turned there and onto the final approach.

Ventura 2159 apparently contacted the tree line. The aircraft must have been too low, probably because it was losing power. A wing, presumably the starboard wing, clipped the trees and tore off the tip and may have weakened the oleo. The tree tops in location indicated such contact that was observed by Wilmer Hogdson and the others.

The aircraft proceeded on past the treeline, then landed on the lake, sliding to the far end. Ventura 2159 finally ground looped and came to rest within 300 feet of the distant shore.



Source: <https://www.google.ca/maps/@45.2937062,-61.7970012,3122m/data=!3m1!1e3>

Ventura 2159 subsequently required 45 gallons of aviation fuel that was needed for the takeoff from Archibald Big Lake some weeks later. Ventura 2159 eventually lifted off and was salvaged from Archibald Big Lake. The 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1944 was the end of a hellishly hard day for WO Tanner, WO Edgley, P/O Harris and WO McMichael, the crew of Ventura 2159. They were stranded on the frozen surface of Archibald Big Lake!

#### Part 4: The Crew - Duty Bound and Courageous too

WO Tanner, WO Edgley, P/O Harris and WO McMichael, the four crew of Ventura 2159 forced landed on Archibald Big Lake aboard Ventura 2159 on 4 March 1944. All survived. They were very lucky too, all were uninjured.

These young men often cast as Canada's own, intrepid young airmen, attracted to the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and the romance of flying, came from all parts of Canada to join in the air war in common purpose to defeat the enemy.

WO2 John Charles Tanner hailed from Winnipeg. He was born 17 February 1914. He joined the RCAF 25 September 1940. He was 26 years old. He would be a relatively old man in the air force at 30 years old at the time of the crash in March 1944.<sup>70</sup>

Tanner began training as a pilot and received his wings upon completion of initial flight training on 28 May 1941 only nine months later. He was promoted to Sergeant. He continued his flight training and proceeded along the training path was promoted along the way, Temporary WO/2 on 1 June 1942, Temporary WO/1 1 December 1942, and Pilot Officer (RCAF) 9 December 1943.

WO Tanner accumulated some 563 total flying hours and was an experienced pilot by March 1944. WO Tanner was posted to Eastern Air Command on 31 December 1943. He was subsequently re-posted to No. 145(BR) Squadron some five days later on 5 January 1944.

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<sup>70</sup> Canada, National Defence, Director of History and Heritage, **John Charles Tanner, R71261 – J43174, Personnel record**, email DHH, Major Mathias Joost 6 Aug 2015

WO1 A.W.C. Edgley – Navigator, hailed from Quebec. He was born 5 January 1921 and joined the RCAF 30 November 1940.<sup>71</sup> He was only 19 years old at the time. He initially trained as a Pilot Observer. He began that training on 4 January 1941 and successfully graduated some five months later 28 May 1941. He was promoted to Temporary Sergeant effective 7 November 1941.

WO Edgley continued his training and eventually became an Air Observer on 7 November 1941. He had several postings and was eventually posted to Eastern Air Command on 9 November 1943. He was subsequently posted to No. 145(BR) Squadron 11 January 1944 just one week after WO Tanner.

P/O W.A. Harris's personnel record does not easily identify his province or town of origin. Harris's card states that he was from N. Falls and was a Canadian Citizen.<sup>72</sup> Presumably N. Falls was short for Niagara Falls.

P/O Harris was born 5 November 1919. He joined the RCAF 13 May 1940 and was only 21 years old at the time. He trained as a Wireless Air Gunner. Harris began his initial training 21 June 1940 and qualified on 15 December that same year. He was promoted Temporary Sergeant on successful completion of that training.

Pilot Officer Harris had several postings from December 1940 to May 1943. He was posted to Eastern Air Command 12 May 1943 and was subsequently re-posted to 162 Sqn 16 May 1943. He was promoted to Pilot Officer 19 Sep 1943. He was then posted once again back to No. 145(BR) Squadron on 11 January 1944. He was promoted to Temporary Flying Officer 19 March 1944.

WO2 A. McMichael hailed from Ottawa and was born 20 Feb 1920. He was 21 years old when he joined the RCAF on 18 February 1941. He too was trained as a wireless air gunner. He qualified in his trade 6 July 1942 and was promoted to Temporary Sergeant.

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<sup>71</sup> Canada, National Defence, Director of History and Heritage, **Alexander William George Edgley, R55664, Personnel record**, email DHH, Major Mathias Joost 6 Aug 2015

<sup>72</sup> Canada, National Defence, Director of History and Heritage, **William Arthur Harris, J3B593,1130-H-238, Personnel record**, email DHH, Major Mathias Joost 6 Aug 2015

WO2 McMichael's personnel record is sparse on details but he was first posted to No. 145(BR) Squadron 7 Dec 1942. He was subsequently re-posted to No. 145(BR) Squadron once again on 26 Oct 1943. Along the way McMichael was promoted first as Temporary WO2, 1 September 1943, then as Pilot Officer, 18 Apr 1944, and finally as Temporary Flying Officer, 18 October 1944. Of the three crew members, WO2 Albert McMichael was **the** old hand at No. 145(BR) Squadron as he was on Squadron strength for the better part of two years.

The crew were typical of the men and women who joined Canada's Armed Forces in the day. Their collective training and devotion to duty came to define who they were and what made them truly extraordinary and special. WO2 J.C. Tanner – Pilot, WO1 A.W.C. Edgley – Navigator, the two wireless air gunners P/O W.A. Harris and WO2 McMichael, the four crew members aboard Ventura 2159 truly represented the finest of Canada during the Second World War.

Their patrol on Ventura 2159 is an example of extraordinary devotion to duty and courage in the face of grave danger. War is often said to be 99% boredom followed by one per cent sheer terror. The terror arises when things can and do go quickly off the rails. It was the unexpected that was terrifying!

On 4 March 1944 Tanner and his crewmates in Ventura 2159 were on a convoy patrol tasked with its protection. The mean temperature in Halifax was -11.1 degrees C. It was bitterly cold. It was also a relatively clear day with no noticeable precipitation. Tanner's odyssey started at 0520 hours (local) and ended almost seven hours later at 1320 hours (local). This patrol can be described as routine, hour upon hours of orbiting and cycling in a circuit...pure boredom.

That patrol quickly turned from pure boredom to sheer terror. Ventura 2159 forced landed and ended up on Archibald Big Lake at 1320 hours meant that Tanner ensured his Ventura was on station on convoy protection to the very limits of its range and endurance. He and the crew of Ventura 2159 provided maximum coverage to what was a very attractive target to an enemy U-Boat. They performed this duty at great risk to the aircraft and the crew, at a time when the convoy was very vulnerable.

Tanner's fuel difficulties suggested that he was on the limits of his aircraft's fuel envelope. Any shift in wind direction, which impeded his progress, would have likely reduced his ability to make safe landfall at Dartmouth. And that was the case! He was forced to land some 100 miles away at Country Harbour. He was indeed on the edge of mission profile. He and his crew could have easily have perished off the Atlantic coast had he not made landfall...sheer terror!

We do not know if Tanner encountered any difficulties over the convoy. The records suggest not. To us, Tanner was simply on the way home. It was only once he crossed the Nova Scotia coast that he encountered a problem, raised the alarm and expressed concern about his situation. This was important! Tanner and the crew of Ventura 2159 first duty was to the protection and safety of the convoy.

That is the point to be remembered. Any break in radio silence over the convoy would have exposed that convoy to detection and have brought the wrath of any U-Boat present down on it. If he had encountered any difficulty, Tanner chose not to break his radio silence until the convoy was out of his range and once he was safely over the coast, far and away putting distance from this desirable enemy target!

Tanner's actions taken in Ventura 2159 on 4 March 1944 were the ordinary actions of the day. But their actions were indeed extraordinary, and both remarkable and courageous too! Such deeds occurred daily and regularly by all who served in this role. They attest to the quality of the men and women of the day and their deference to danger and the ultimate sacrifice that was required in the performance of their duties. It is a mark of true courage and expectations that, even in the performance of the mundane, the day to day, the routine, an ultimate sacrifice was expected of them.

Given the conditions of the aircraft, its fuel state, and the need to put down in such a hurry, attests to the skill and training of its pilot, WO2 Tanner. But there was more to it than simply putting an aircraft down, a lot more to it. This was bravery and devotion to duty in the highest regard!

WO2 Tanner persevered under some extremely difficult conditions, no fuel – engines likely failing. He was able to put his aircraft down safely and the

crew was able to walk away relatively unscathed. Moreover, Tanner saved a valuable asset that was repaired and that was returned to service! Ventura 2159 was able to fly again and was struck off RCAF strength 7 December 1946. Still it was truly amazing that Ventura 2159 didn't crack up and that no one was killed!

In the greater scheme of things, the safety of the convoy was more important to them than the lives of the crew and safe return of Ventura 2159 to Dartmouth. It was just the way it was. Tanner, Edgley, Harris, and McMichael knew that well, and accepted it as the risk of service in the RCAF during the Second World War.

#### [Part 5– An incident at Goose Bay](#)

People get posted and units get transferred or detached. The ways and means for doing so vary but they are often based on needs and service requirements. No. 145(BR) Squadron not only operated out of Dartmouth, but it also had detachments at Torbay and Goose Bay Newfoundland.

Scott MacKeen of Aspen was once posted to Goose Bay during the Second World War. We have his photographic record that documents the time and conditions of service. Newfoundland then was not a part of Canada and was indeed considered as an “overseas” posting.

Goose Bay was not the lap of luxury. It was primitive by today's standards. The base was quickly built with Quonset and H-Huts. The walls looked thin and the accommodations cold in winter.



The men and women at Goose Bay were kept busy both on and off-duty. They had ball diamonds, theatres, messes and other local entertainments that assuaged the pains of being away from home.



Files: Scott MacKeen, Goose Bay during the Second World War  
H-Huts in summer – a little fall hunting

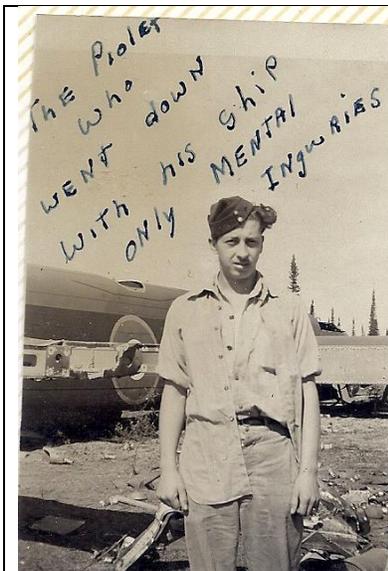


Files: Scott MacKeen, Goose Bay during the Second World War  
H-Huts in winter

Goose Bay was an active air station with a wide variety of units and aircraft. It had its fair share of accidents too. One on 6<sup>th</sup> July one incident would have very tragic consequences.

Files: Scott MacKeen, Photo 1: Air crash at Goose Bay, no loss of life on this one but Scott's comment was "The pilot who went down with his ship – only mental injuries"

Photo 2: B24 Liberator eventually used in the anti-submarine role mid-Atlantic gap



Goose Bay was far away from home for servicemen and women. It was very different from what they were used to. It was cut off from civilization, isolated, out in the middle of nowhere, and on the Labrador Shield. Notwithstanding the pleasures of the mess, local entertainments, and the diversions of hunting, fishing and sports in the off-duty hours, many would have been homesick, looking forward to a good leave, and longing for the

coveted distraction of the bright lights of a big city sometime, if they could only get there.

Many longed-for diversions from the structured military life and the isolation at Goose Bay. It was an adjustment that may have been stifling to the one-time civilians now serving under the King's Rules and Regulations!

The one good thing about Goose Bay though was that it was on a well-connected airway. There would have been opportunities to relieve the staff

Files: Scott MacKeen, Goose Bay during the Second World War  
RCAF B-17 Mail plane on stop over weekly run from Ottawa to UK

and dispatch some well-deserved personnel on leave or posting on any administrative flight that passed through "Goose".



One such flight originated from Dartmouth. Ventura 2171 was dispatched from Dartmouth to Goose Bay on a cross country training mission. Ventura 2171 tasked to pick up six passengers to fly with its crew of five on the return leg from Goose Bay to Dartmouth.

Ventura 2171 headed down the runway when it encountered engine difficulties. Its starboard engine faltered at a critical juncture in its takeoff at about 1737 GMT (roughly 2: 07 PM local). It was suspected that the engine had a spark plug failure.

What happened, happened relatively quickly, for the aircraft started to swing. Given the load on board, the engine failure and weight imbalance, Ventura 2171 swung out of control. Ventura 2171 failed to clear the runway, crashed, killing all on board.

There were 11 fatalities that day. Amongst the dead, Pilot Officer J.C. Tanner, Pilot, and Pilot Officer W.A. Harris, Crew -Wireless Air Gunner, survivors of the forced landing on Archibald Big Lake of only a few short months earlier on 4 March 1944. Pilot Officer Tanner had 752 total hours on his log book at the time of the crash, 189 hours more than he had on 4 March.

Pilot Officer Tanner was a busy pilot and fully engaged in the war about him. His flying hours between March and July 1944 attest to that fact. This flight was supposed to be a swan, a simple training and administrative run. It was anything but simple. It turned deadly, moreover, it happened quickly.

Sadly, this happy occasion turned sour and cost the lives of PO Tanner and PO Harris with those on-board Ventura 2171 who would not live to see the fruit of their labours – final victory.

What's in a name? The names of Tanner, Edgley, Harris, and McMichael revealed a lot. We now come to the point of the story where we sum up. We can place their contribution and the history of Ventura 2159 in the context of Canada's great contribution to the Second World War in the history of No. 145(BR) Squadron.

No. 145(BR) Squadron was a very distinguished unit, first formed at Torbay Newfoundland 30 May 1942. It was originally armed with Hudson and then Ventura aircraft for anti-submarine work on Canada's East Coast. No. 145(BR) Squadron flew 3085 sorties amounting to 16851 operational hours. It sunk one U-boat from 7 attacks on 9 sightings. It was busy in other ways too as it accumulated 8443 hours in non-operational flying.<sup>73</sup>

On the balance sheet No. 145(BR) Squadron earned seven distinguished Flying Crosses and 12 Mentioned-in-Despatches at a cost of 4 aircraft lost on operations with 12 crew, and 8 aircraft lost on non-operational duty. No. 145(BR) Squadron suffered 27 personnel killed or injured; 8 killed - on operations, 17 killed – non-operations (9 passengers). Two crew were injured.<sup>74</sup> PO Tanner and PO Harris from the forced landing at Archibald Big Lake on 4 March 1944 are amongst the dead listed in aircraft lost on non-operational duty status.

Looking at the balance sheet, it may not appear to have been much. No. 145(BR) Squadron flew roughly some 25000 flying hours for one U-boat sunk on 7 attacks and 9 sightings. But these 25000 hours were very important. The ultimate aim may have been to destroy the enemy, but the secondary aim was also to keep the enemy at bay! Their patrols did that. They forced the enemy to remain submerged and provided opportunity to the convoy system for escape or evasion.

Germany lost 772 U-boats during the war at a cost of 28,000 lives. Land based aircraft accounted for 48% of total U-boat losses in relation to all aerial attacks on U-Boats. Air attacks accounted for 349 of 772 or 45% losses of all U-Boat losses between 1939 and 1945 that included attacks

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid Canadian Wings, 2012

<sup>74</sup> ibid Canadian Wings, 2012

by land and carrier based aircraft or attacks in combination with naval assets. It was quite an achievement. Eastern Air Command (EAC) reported 84 attacks on U-Boats between 1941 and 1945 with confirmation of 6 U-Boat kills.<sup>75</sup>

Still many merchant men were sunk despite naval and air action. The situation might have been far worse without air cover, we will never know what those long hours actually achieved. The effect of air power was an intangible and was difficult to measure in the balance sheets of the war.

So, was it true, nothing really happened here in Canada during the war? The EAC record proves otherwise. Canada was on the front line. The air force and navy played a vital role in ensuring that the supply lines were kept open to Britain on the sea lanes. The army protected its shores. We should never forget that. What Tanner, Harris, and the other young men and women of their generation achieved was vital to the final victory. It was paid for in their blood with our treasure!

“Nothing ever happened in Canada. It was a safe-haven. The ravages of war only happened over there.” Those assertions are certainly far from the truth. Much did happen here. Lives were lost in the service of our country and sacrifices were made by all our armed services on our very shores.

Robert Wilson’s desire for the recovered Ventura 2159 wing to be used as a monument in Country Harbour was well-placed and would have been a very fitting memorial for the loss of Tanner and Harris.

We should never forget their sacrifice. We should never forget that Canada was a theatre of war too – it just wasn’t apparent and hidden from us in secrecy under the veil of wartime censorship.

So “what’s in a name?” Everything! Names are the fabric and mosaic of our collective history. Names define places, persons, events, or things. Names place everything in context and tell a great story of what happened. Names

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<sup>75</sup> Major (Ret’d) G.D. Madigan, **Canada’s Unknown Success**

**Employment Of Land Based Aircraft – The Antisubmarine Role Gulf Of St Lawrence.**, unpublished paper submitted RCAF Journal, 18 October 2011 (to have been published 2012 – deferred)

describe moments of valour. This is especially true too for the small community of Country Harbour.

This story is simply at an end. But “Mystery on the Lake” during the Second World War, tells us that there are other stories yet to be told. There is much more out there to learn and discover. There is a lot of hidden history resting in family scrapbooks and albums. It may simply be the beginning of the larger history of Guysborough County during the Second World War. Time will tell!

## **4. “For the good times”**

**Through the eyes of Mickey Stevens  
No 5 Radar Unit (RCAF)  
Cole Harbour, Guysborough County 1942-1945**

By Gerry Madigan

11 December 2015

### **Acknowledgements**

I am deeply indebted for the generous help and time of many people who allowed me to use their photographs, peruse their scrapbooks, archives, and even mailed me valuable leads and content! All these have proved invaluable to compiling and writing this article.

I truly thank the following for their most generous help and encouragement:

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- Norma Cooke, Isaacs Harbour, her many letters, comments and use of her archives and who first brought this story to my attention;
- Royal Canadian Legion, Torbay Branch #117, Charlos Cove, N.S. for permission to use Mickey Steven`s files, photographs and records in the recounting of this story; and
- The author would also like to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to the late Mickey Stevens who left the community with an excellent record

and an outstanding legacy in the record of his stories and photographs of his time at Cole Harbour.

Any errors and omissions are unintentional and are mine alone.

With files from:

Norma Cooke, Isaacs Harbour, Guysborough County, Nova Scotia.

Mary Richard, Larry's River, Guysborough County, Nova Scotia.

Royal Canadian Legion, Torbay Branch #117, Charlos Cove, N.S.  
<http://www.pinetreeline.org/rds/detail/rds5-6.html>

**W.W. McLachlan, RCAF Radar 1941-1945** (Royal Canadian Air Force Personnel on Radar in Canada during World War II)

Canadian Virtual War Memorial, **Leading Aircraftman Edward James Flower**, December 20, 1944

Steve Mayo, Webmaster, **RV2011- The Bay of Fundy Memorial**, Web Hosting, [Primehost.ca](http://Primehost.ca), Copyright © 2010 RV2011 Reunion

Canadian War Museum – democracy at War – Canadian Newspapers and the Second World War,

[http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/newspapers/intro\\_e.shtml](http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/newspapers/intro_e.shtml)

(LAC Buchannan Obituary and other files)

*Author's note:* I normally attribute all my references. However, the bulk of the material found in this article came from Mickey Steven's history. I have taken the journalistic approach while writing this article to cite from the perspective of "with files from" rather than an academic citation style as it is based on the works of Mickey Steven.

Part 1 - In the beginning - Introduction "For the good times"

The summer of 2015 was busy for me punctuated with several interesting research projects on the history of Guysborough during the Second World War. Those projects were most productive and very enjoyable. They proved to dispel the myth that "Nothing ever happened here in Canada during the war." A lot in fact, did happen, and a lot especially happened in Guysborough County!

The research led to four Guysborough County related projects resulting in



three stories for this newspaper. The three were "Girl on the Wing", "Mystery on the Lake", and "What's in a name". A fourth project concerned the research on the Ventura bomber lost on Archibald Big

Lake. All these projects demanded much of my time and occupied me well until into late September.

I thought I completely exhausted the history of Guysborough County during the Second World War, but I was wrong. It had only just begun. Norma Cooke of Isaacs Harbour was very supportive of my research efforts that summer. Norma knew that there was much more out there. She asked, "Would you be interested in my files on No 5 Radar Unit at Cole Harbour?"

To be honest by the time she posed the question I was ready for a much needed break. I had just begun a last round of fishing trips for the season. It was a very dismal fishing season to that point. Despite my reluctance to begin another project Norma sent along her files with the name of a contact, Mary Richard at Larry's River.

That initial reluctance was soon replaced with great enthusiasm. I read the background information and found a wealth of on line information on No 5 Radar Unit (RCAF). The author of so many stories was Sgt Mickey Stevens of No 5 Radar Unit (RCAF) Cole Harbour.

Mickey`s stories are a time capsule of the life and times of Guysborough County during the war. His accounts are filled with fun, humour and pathos. More importantly Mickey`s stories address the issue of “Nothing ever happened here in Canada during the war”.

A lot happened here at home especially in Guysborough County. The Canadian story on the home front is often overshadowed by what happened overseas. It wasn`t all fun and games at home either. Many hardships were endured and shared by all. There were also good times in with the bad. Mickey shared them all and now it`s up to us to find, remember and recount them.

### [1942 - Getting Started Construction and Manning](#)

No 5 Radar Unit of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) was located at Cole Harbour Guysborough County Nova Scotia during the Second World War. It was one of Canada`s operational radar units on the East Coast. It began operations in August 1942 and existed for three short years to September 1945.

No 5 Radar Unit was Mickey Steven`s home on two separate occasions over the course of the war. His first postings there was as a simple LAC, more familiarly recognized amongst the lowest of the low in the more familiar rank as private. Mickey showed great promise for radar and leadership though. He was selected for additional training and returned to Cole Harbour on a second posting to No 5 Radar Unit in the rank of sergeant!

Beyond Mickey though, the actual planning for a radar chain in Canada actually began in 1940. It was a slow process moving from planning to implementation. There were two phases to it all. The first phase involved

the selection and construction of the sites. The second phase involved the training and manning of these sites for operations.

Much happened from planning, conception and to construction. Siting of these units occurred firstly. These had to be constructed and completed on both East and West Coast. Equipment orders were placed and filled. It all came together once the staff was trained, sites completed, and manned. The first stations were operational in 1942, the last in 1944.<sup>76</sup>

No 5 Radar Unit (RCAF) was built in Guysborough County. It is found on a site on the barrens above Cole Harbour. It was selected there because it was 300 feet above sea level and it had a visual horizon of about 20 miles. The official description of No 5 RCAF Radar Squadron's location said it was on Tor Bay, approximately 125 miles east of Halifax though.<sup>77</sup>

No 5 Radar Unit was actually one and a half miles as the crow flies on Second Cow Lake, north of Cole Harbour and not Tor Bay. But "as the crow flies" was a very deceiving concept. The walk to Cole Harbour from the station was 2-1/2 miles alone. It was a walk that many airmen took to escape the station and to enjoy a few pleasurable moments of peace elsewhere!

No 5 Radar Unit location was also attributed to Queensport. The reason for all these meanderings is unknown but it probably has something to do with where materials were being shipped during its construction. But that changed once construction of the station and the installation of the radar was completed. Once manned, up and running, it was officially re-designated as No. 5 Radar Unit, RCAF Cole Harbour Nova Scotia.

Regardless of what community was identified, the men serving at Cole Harbour came to have deep feelings, affections, and many fond memories of all the communities in and around the unit. These communities included

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid McLachlan, pg. xx6-7

<sup>77</sup> WW McLachlan, **Royal Canadian Air Force Personnel on Radar in Canada During World War II**, Publisher WW McLachlan, 2003, pg. xx-10

Queensport, Cole Harbour, Port Felix, Tor Bay, Guysborough, and many others in the surrounding area. They and the people there, soon became friends. The community was a home away from home for many a lonely airman.

It is a very compelling story. Unlike other militarized areas in Canada, there was little separation between military and civilian communities. There was a degree of integration not seen elsewhere. It may have been because of the isolation of this unit that brought people together.

The actions of those communities were truly singular and easily lost in the mists of time. Mickey's accounts revive that sense of community and tells a tale of common and of a shared effort. It is a tale marked by both great joy and sorrow. In the end, Mickey's story is the history of what was accomplished in Guysborough County during the war.

## 1. The Arrival September 1942

A naval and air battle was being waged in the approaches and coastal areas of the Gulf of St Lawrence in 1942. No 5 Radar Unit became operational during that period. Enemy U-boats boldly entered our waters and torpedoed and sunk over 22 ships before it was all over. U-boats were a cause for extreme concern, a matter of public safety, for they threatened both Canadian commerce and security.

Enemy submarines were of some earlier concern and were first considered a priority threat at the very beginning of the Second World War in 1939. Canada was most fortunate though that the German Navy was also unprepared for U-boat warfare to that point. It would be some two years later before the U-boat posed serious harm in the western Atlantic. U-boat inactivity in the Gulf left an impression that risk was low and acceptable. The U-boat problem was deferred, and the matter dealt with it later.

In the meantime, Canada was not idle. New bases were prepared and opened both in the Maritimes and Newfoundland.<sup>78</sup> The radar detachments were integral to Canada's preparations for maritime and air warfare. But the U-boat's entry into the Gulf was the game changer. The U-boat presence in the Gulf increased the sense of urgency to get things done.

There were 30 radar sites in the chain around Canada's east Coast. They all had different functions. These functions were broken down operationally as follows:

1. High flying early warning radar
2. Chain Home Low flying early warning radar
3. Ground Control Intercept Radar
4. Microwave Early Antisubmarine, surface Radar, and
5. United States SCR270/271 Radar.

No 5 RCAF Radar Squadron was one of the Chain Home low flying early warning radar detachments.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Hugh A. Halliday, **Eastern Air Command: Air Force, Part 14**, Legion Magazine, 1 March 2006

<sup>79</sup> Ibid McLachlan, pg. xx6-7

Radar was still relatively new. The training was conducted at Clinton, Ontario. Clinton became the central clearing house. Canada drew upon its universities for the selection and training of its officers and radar technicians. Training was conducted in two places, the first was at Research Enterprises Limited in Scarborough, Ontario. The second was at the Royal Air Force (RAF) School, Clinton, Ontario where the final preparation for duty was completed. Canadian recruits from all over this great country were soon trained and dispatched to their various posts overseas or duties on Canadian Shores.<sup>80</sup>

The day came when the first group of personnel finally arrived at Cole Harbour in September 1942. Amongst the first group to arrive was the newly trained LAC Mickey Stevens, radar man. The summer of 1942 was spent in building the H-huts and radar complex. As all its building were pre-fabricated, it took little time in construction and erecting the buildings to completion! But “completion” was a misnomer.

Mickey arrived at Cole harbour and made his way up a mountain road to the barrens above Cole Harbour where No 5 Radar Unit was located. It was preceded by a long trip from the train station at Monastery. The incoming radar men were herded in the back of an open box, then jostled and tossed along the road in the back of the station’s 4x4 quad truck. The roads were mostly unpaved and very rough in Guysborough County in the day! That journey was arduous enough. All our intrepid radar men wanted was a place to lay their heads in comfort.

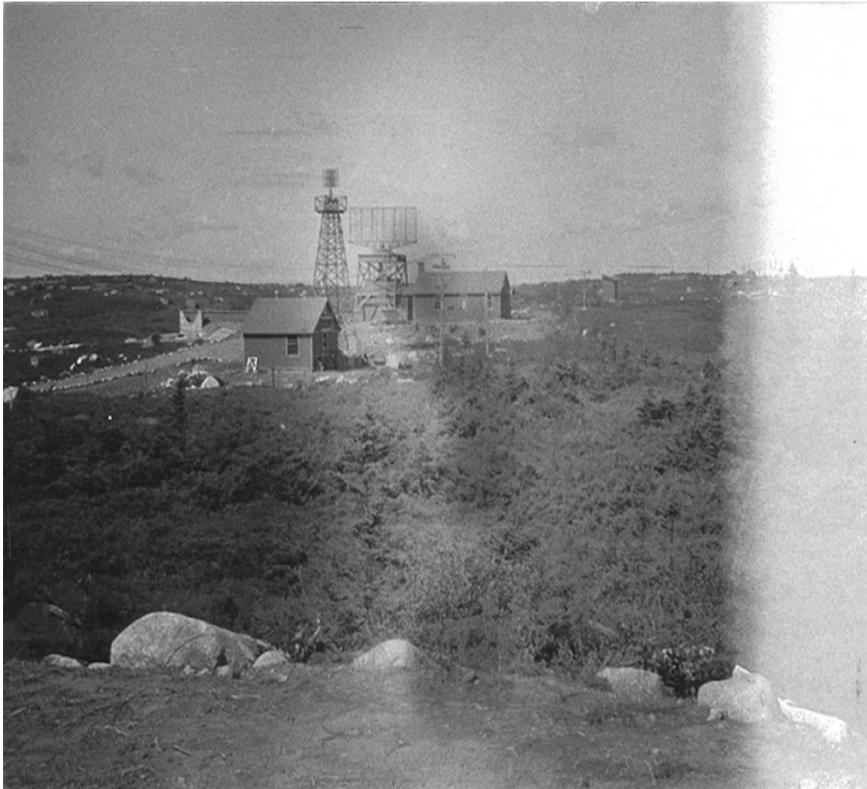
If we take that journey today, we’d find nothing much there. When Mickey arrived, there was nothing much there too! The Camp was in a state of disrepair and incomplete. The accommodations and H-huts still had to be fitted out with heating and other amenities.

The first priority was to make the radar operational. All the creature comforts were deferred and much came later. Still the men had some expectation that the facility was ready and fit for occupation, it wasn’t.

Their first few months were spent under very trying conditions. They were basically sheltered from the elements but essentially, they were living in the rough while heat was in short supply.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid McLachlan, pg. xx2



Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

What a home though! They were really out in the middle of nowhere and were left largely on their own.

There was one bright spot in their lives. They had electricity. Electricity was vital. Electricity was the lifeblood of the station, the sole source of power necessary for the operation of the radar unit. But it wasn't NS Power that was used. No, their electricity was

self-generated in a small garage in a nearby Diesel hut in Camp.

The station had three Caterpillar D1300 diesel generators that supplied the power for all the unit's needs. They were independent for their electrical needs but were very dependent on others for all the supplies to run the operation. Their Achilles heel was their reliance on depots for the resupply of fuel and other stores to keep them going.

Winter would soon demonstrate how isolated and dependent they truly were. That isolation was punctuated by time and space that made their lives both interesting and challenging. Service at No 5 Radar Unit soon proved that it was not for the faint of heart.

## 2. Beans and Hardtack

Food is a force multiplier. Food to the military palate is the one thing that greatly affects morale, both good and bad. Morale hinged on the ability of the camp's chef and staff. There was very good reason for concern. There were many variables to feeding those at No 5 Radar Unit.

Supplies were not readily available and had to be brought in from a great distance. The depot was at an Army Supply Depot located at Mulgrave. It was no easy trip getting to the grocery store to replenish stock either. Their re-supply runs were limited by the size of and what a truck could carry. Then there was always the issue of weather and roads.

Guysborough County roads at the time were rough and unpaved. They were easily navigable in the warmth of summer and fall, but any lick of snow or wet weather, often meant an epic journey on the re-supply run.

The first meal in 1942 at No 5 Radar Unit was a memorable one for the very first arrivals. It set the tone for the days ahead. Jim Vaughn remembered that meal as simple fare. Jim remembered it was mid-August. The Unit, still under construction, had only a rudimentary staff of one cook. The cook had no cookhouse or other facilities at hand to make a meal.

The men were bedded down in the partially ready administration build. It had the makings of "a regular camping trip". Somehow the cook managed to come up with a maritime favourite, baked beans and biscuits. He cooked on an open stove, exposed to the elements, outside the administration building where he fed the hungry group of men.

The men sat around in the open on benches and chairs. At that point it was very clear, everything affecting station morale rested squarely on the cook's shoulders. It was a testament to his skill that there were no complaints!



The Officer's Quarters are on the left. They occupy one end of the Administration and Stores Building.

On the right is the kitchen part of the Mess Hall/Canteen Building, with the added on Boiler Room showing at the extreme right

#5 Radar Unit, Cole Harbour.

Mickey Stevens photograph and comments— Archives of Mary Richard with permission

The cook's problems weren't just limited by a lack of facilities. Canada was greatly affected by wartime rationing too. Rationing often limited variety, quantity, and availability of food stocks. Wartime rationing also affected No 5 Radar Unit.

No 5 Radar Unit fared surprisingly well. In spite of rationing, it had an "institutionalized" menu of regular fare. The menu ensured all had a properly balanced diet. The "institutionalized" menu meant everyone had sufficient calories sustaining health. But "institutionalized" food was both monotonous

and boring.

Reliance on the Army for provisioning did not help their situation much. The Air Force was not large enough to maintain their own supply depots, specifically to meet its own needs. The common practice was to concentrate the depots centrally and have the Army act as the clearing house for all units in a geographical area regardless of service affiliation.

This was both a good and a bad practice. It reduced the foot print required to support Canada's armed services. It enabled a common system of supply and administrative support. But it fell far short when there were food shortfalls. Shortfalls should have been shared by all, but that wasn't necessarily the case.

It came to pass that No 5 Radar Unit received a dubious quantity of hardtack and stewed tomatoes on one supply run one day. Hardtack and stewed tomatoes were hard rations. Hardtack was the food stock of last resort meant to be used in an emergency.

The first shipment of hardtack was probably accepted given the state of rationing with nothing untoward thought about it. It was simply regarded as just one of those things. But a second shipment was viewed as slightly more than spurious. Hardtack was an insult to the palate. Hardtack was good for one of two things, breaking teeth or, for target practice.

It happened that the Stake truck was out on this dubious supply run loaded with this second shipment and also with a number of in-bound disgruntled passengers who already had the honour of the first round of hard rations from the Army. They soon realized what the supplies were sitting in the back of the box amongst the supplies being brought into camp. To their chagrin and disgust the returning group of men found the Unit was once again being resupplied with hardtack. They were both shocked and greatly displeased.

Matters were soon taken in their own hands. They proceeded to open the hardtack and tossed the hard biscuits at any target of opportunity that came along the road, all the way back to the Unit.

A considerable quantity of this miscreant foodstuff lay strewn across the country side. It seemed a terrible waste. Such a vast quantity did not go unnoticed. It eventually caught the Commanding Officer's attention. Strangely it incurred the CO's wrath in a wonderfully peculiar way.

The CO travelled regularly in the area. The tossed hardtack lay strewn hither and yon for days after it was disposed by his disgruntled airmen. It was not disintegrating at all.

The deposition of hardtack along the road actually gained his expressed gratitude! It ridded him both of the effort of disposing and tossing the stuff off station. Hardtack was not fit for man nor beast.

It was said that the CO's blood pressure rose every time he saw the stuff, as he passed by. It disturbed him greatly that they had not disintegrated, so much so that he raised a complaint and eventually blasted the Army Depot. No 5 Radar Unit for ever sending him unfit rations. It passed that No 5 Radar Unit never received hardtack again!

### 3. The Chicken Coop!<sup>81</sup>

A military dictum states always "Be 10 minutes early for a meeting". Military organizations are ruled by time. Time may be the difference between life and death. Time is also the measure between reward and punishment.

Time is the one thing that drives a serviceman to exasperation. It's not their own in the move from civilian to military life. The proud bearer of a uniform often realizes far too late that military life means a loss of privileges and time to do your own thing.

Military discipline always demands an expectation of obedience. Once an order was received, it was to be obeyed, immediately. A line of obedience was especially true regarding a posting order.

Sufficient time was allowed for a serviceman to make his or her way to the proper station. But it was always up to the serviceman to make sure he got there without fail, even if problems were encountered along the way. Hence lies the very valid logic behind the dictum "Always be 10 minutes early for a meeting".

It was the individual's responsibility to plan ahead. It was up to the individual to be there on time. It was the individual's responsibility to avoid trouble.

No 5 Radar Detachment at Cole's Harbour was located in an out of the way place. It was isolated and very hard to get too. Newly graduated radar man, Harry Brewes concluded because of this isolation, some leeway and flexibility existed to delay his arrival time on a posting there.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid Mickey Stevens, memoirs, **Remembering a guardhouse**,

Source: <http://67.69.104.76:84/Pinetreeline/rds/detail/rds5-9.html>

Accessed: 31 October 2015

Harry Brewes had recently graduated from the Radar School in Clinton Ontario. He was awaiting his posting order near Scarborough at Unionville training facilities. Time weighed heavily on his hands.

Harry's situation was fortuitous for amongst other endeavours. He was close enough to court his girlfriend, Helen. Those sunny days were about to end with orders to report to Cole harbour.

Harry thought this posting to the east coast was the jumping off point for a tour overseas. He concluded he would probably not see Helen for a good long time. What better time was there than then but to ask Helen for her hand in marriage? Helen accepted of course, and they were engaged.

It was a time for celebration! Harry and Helen celebrated by delaying Harry's arrival at Cole Harbour by five days. Harry was technically AWOL (away without authority). Needless to say, he was in big trouble by the time he arrived at Cole Harbour.

The new CO, Flt/L Clarence Jones, had some sympathy for Harry's situation. Harry might have had some other reasonable travel excuse for the delay, but an engagement was not one of them.

Many young people made such momentous decisions. It was a common enough occurrence in the day. But personal decisions were not to get in the way of the execution of a military order.

Flt/L Jones had a decision to make too. Harry was punished for his absence without authority. Jones' had no choice in the matter. Harry was charged, found guilty, docked five day's pay and given five days in the cells, to be exact.

The CO's punishment was probably considered well worth it to Harry. He had had the benefit and pleasure of the lovely Helen's company for a few more precious days!

Harry had recently arrived at the opening of the Camp during the first days of occupation that September in 1942. The new facility housed 36 men and was in various states of repair and construction.

Much was left undone, the messes, administration and other buildings were incomplete. The unit's priority was making the radar functional and operational. All other construction was delayed until those were up and running. The only structure in a completed state was the guardhouse.

Strangely enough, the guardhouse was one of the first priorities and projects completed. The guardhouse held the detachment of military police. It had a cell and duty room, from which they ventured forth to patrol the perimeter and guard the facility. Harry was to be their very first guest.

The guardhouse was also amongst the first few buildings with heat. It was first finished because the contractors used it as the project headquarters during the construction of the station. The contractors wanted to be comfortable while they were there.

The completion of the guardhouse was very fortuitous for Harry's incarceration. It was the only building with a coal and wood stove that really put out the heat on those now cooling nights!

The Airmen's Barracks were still some several weeks away from full completion. Everybody in camp was cold, damp, and miserable living in these shells of buildings. The barracks lacked proper heating and hot water systems. The days were pleasant enough, but the nights were now becoming bone cold.

Harry reported that he lived the "Life of Riley" while incarcerated in the heated comfort of the cells. His stay was recorded as a most pleasant experience up until a point. The Service Police and Security Guards, unused to having guests treated him very well. They even brought him magazines and chocolate bars!

To top it off, the cells were luxurious and comfortable compared to the standards for the other inmates of the camp. The guardhouse was the storage area for the unit's extra mattresses, bedding and blankets.

Harry would have completed his penance in the lap of luxury had it not been for the CO's vigilance and his untimely visit. Normal military routine required the daily inspection of a prisoner to ensure of the prisoner's

general well-being. This task was normally performed by a duty officer. Flt/L Jones did those honours one day.

Harry had been in cells for two days by the time Jones finally stopped by. Flt/L Jones was more than a little gobsmacked at Harry's situation. It didn't take Flt/L Jones long to see just how poor Harry was suffering. Harry was immediately ordered out of cells and back into the cold barracks with the rest of the crew. Justice was finally served, at least in the mind of Flt/L Jones.

The cells were little used during the war. There was only one other occasion where a malefactor served any time there (but that is another story). What ever happened to poor Harry? He married Helen of course! Mr. and Mrs. Brewes lived a long and happy life after the war near Powassan, Ontario.

#### 4. Planes, Trains, and Automobiles

No 5 Radar Unit settled down into a regular routine that fall of 1942. Part of that routine was a series of aircraft overflights and approaches that tested its readiness. Once those were successfully completed, No 5 Radar Unit and the station was fully calibrated, and the unit was ready for war.

The unit began a dutiful watch for both enemy and friendly aircraft that included a lookout for surfaced enemy submarines. But planes, trains and automobiles set the tone and became the cycle of their lives. The radar calibration was conducted constantly.

Operational readiness was the watchword. The unit also relied on trains and automobiles to maintain this readiness. Distance was a great problem, especially distance to and from its supply depots and other facilities.



Monastery Train Station – Serviceman arrives  
Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

The unit had to be resupplied with fuel and food to remain operational. So, No 5 Radar Unit was vulnerable. The roads to the station were mostly along unpaved highways. Travel in and out was slow.

The unit had a number of vehicles to do the job, the most important of which was the 4x4 50CWT Chevrolet quad. It transported their supplies and people to and from the railhead at Monastery. The trip to Monastery was often supplemented with a side trip to the Army depot at Mulgrave. These

regular supply runs ensured that food, mail, other supplies and necessities all made their way to the station.

The most critical supply and need was diesel fuel. Diesel was its life blood. Diesel was the one necessity that ran the three Caterpillar D1300 generators that were the mainstay of power for the radar and that supplied all of the station's electrical requirements. So, fuel was the station's greatest vulnerability and its Achilles' heel!

The resupply run worked well enough the first fall. It soon proved difficult that first winter though! The 4x4 50CWT Chevrolet quad was mounted with a V-plow and wing that served a dual purpose. In winter, the supply truck was also its snow plow. It performed well if there was decent footing.

The road from Mulgrave to Guysborough proved to be the most challenging of its supply run. What was clear on the way out, was often blown in on the way back. Frustratingly too, the station's ration truck was prone to being stuck or storm staid out along the road in the blowing and drifting snow.

There was a particularly bad stretch along the road near Port Felix. It was the site of an uphill grade where the road tended to blow in. Numerous calls were made to the station for help! It became di rigeur and a necessity to dig out the supply truck. There was no lack of willing volunteers to help though. A call readily reaped the necessary crew needed to shovel and clear the road. It was quite simple why, everyone wanted their food, drink and mail!

Oftentimes the situation simply overwhelmed the men and machines of the station. The weather was bitter, unforgiving, and unpredictable. The people of Port Felix often helped and pitched in clearing the road and thus keeping the station re-supplied and operational. Their efforts were greatly appreciated by the men from No 5 Radar Unit.



Mickey Stevens photograph – Mary Richard photo archives- with permission

The men at No 5 Radar Unit knew by the community's assistance, they were neither abandoned nor were they alone! They now had friends who would stand by and see them through the tough times ahead.

Out on the lonely barrens north of Cole harbour, a friendly face or chat was a very welcome relief from the very discipline of military life. These interactions were the start of some deep bonds fondly remembered over the years and, long after the war had ended.

These bonds were based on shared experience, a common purpose, and pride. It was a joint effort, military and civilian that saw No 5 Radar unit remaining fully operational during the war.

## 5. Pride of Unit

It is said that No 5 Radar Unit's first Commanding Officer was F/Lt Clare Jones, was a man of exceptional character. He took extraordinary measures keeping his station "operational".

On one occasion No 5 Radar Unit's generators failed. It happened while F/Lt Jones was off-duty and asleep. The breakdown happened on the duty watch of the night mechanic, Harry Brewes.

The breakdown happened in the wee-hours of the morning. Harry didn't want to wake or to disturb F/Lt Jones. Harry Brewes now of guardhouse famed, took it upon himself to inform the filter room at Eastern Air Command (EAC) that the station's radar was down. He failed to notify his CO during the night though.

Jones was livid that he had not been informed the next morning. He was furious that EAC was advised that "his" station was now non-operational without his knowledge. It would seem that Harry Brewes was heading back to the jailhouse. He got off lightly with a dressing down and was informed that the CO would decide when and if the unit was non-operational, and not the duty mechanic!

F/Lt Jones was adamant that the station would be "operational" until he said otherwise! Jones would take both extreme and heroic measures ensuring operational readiness! It came to pass on another occasion with a spell of bad weather that would demonstrate how keen Jones was to make it so!

Freezing rain once covered his gantry preventing the Radar from rotating properly. Jones recruited Harry Brewes to help him clear it. They climbed the windswept gantry and fought against the freezing rain. F/Lt Jones used a blowtorch to melt away the ice while Harry mopped the water away with rags to prevent re-freezing. There were no medals for the effort, but F/Lt Jones ensured No 5 Radar Unit remained operational!

Jones' leadership and record were inspirational. His men admired his determination. The reputation of a man of that calibre quite likely spread to the community. Jones was a man who simply had to be followed.

## 6. “Getting to Know You!”

The Second World War was a hard slog for many of Canada’s young service men and women. The reality for many was that service was conducted where it was most required. Sometimes that service was conducted at home, in Canada. For all young Canadians who joined up, they all shared one common conviction, a strong desire to do their bit.

The war was a great social leveller, a coming together and gathering of Canadian youth. Thousands of young people were suddenly thrown together, all sharing much the same privations and experiences. People quickly sorted themselves out, set down to work, and then, in the off-hours, looked forward to the down time with an eye to a party or a good blast!

“All work and no play...makes Johnny a dull boy!” Getting away from the station or unit, however briefly to a nearby town, was a welcome respite to the humdrum of service life. Unfortunately, those posted to No 5 Radar Unit couldn’t simply hop the bus to town.

There was no public or ready transport available for that matter. The nearest big town or city was a good long ways away. So many hoofed it on foot to the nearest place closest to them, Cole Harbour.<sup>82</sup>

Halifax, Truro, and other large communities, were major military centres and attractions. They too had huge concentrations of military personnel. It was seen as a mass invasion of service personnel once the war had started. Those larger centres and their facilities were often overwhelmed by the huge mass of servicemen and women.

These larger towns and cities weren’t always very welcoming as a consequence of this huge influx. Servicemen were quite often restricted to

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<sup>82</sup> Sergeant R. W. Harris, **Memories of Debert, N.S.**, undated

Written account in Debert Military Museum Archives

Source: <http://www.debertmilitarymuseum.org/harris.htm>

Accessed: 5 October 2010

what they could do and where they could go too.<sup>83</sup> This problem was not unique to Nova Scotia. It happened nationwide and sadly all too frequently.

The servicemen`s experience at No 5 Radar Unit was comparatively a very different one to those service near the larger centres. The hearts and doors of the communities in and around No 5 Radar Unit were very much open to the servicemen and very welcoming as well.

There was constant personable contact with the boys from No 5 Radar Unit that made it so. Many young servicemen walked the two hours to Cole Harbour and back just to get away from the station. The treat was the journey out. They looked forward to a pop or chocolate bar at the local General Store. There was always a chance of meeting or talking with someone other than someone in uniform too.

The station`s stake truck was an important asset as well. It greatly assisted contact as it picked up supplies throughout the area. It brought news and people back and forth throughout the area. Relationships were being built along the way as the stake truck sallied back and forth throughout the county.

The local Legion also took a personal interest in the servicemen`s welfare. They arranged all sorts of entertainment for them. Movies, dances, socials and other entertainments were certainly most appreciated and highly anticipated at the unit. The Legion`s offerings were a welcome, happy diversion from station routine.

Such generosity and hospitality could not be ignored and was often reciprocated by invitations to the community to No 5 Radar Unit. Its messes were opened for dances and other celebrations to which all were invited and made most welcome. The degree of hospitality between the military and civilian communities was unparalleled and very rare for its time.

The true ties that bind though were being made in the memories and the relationships they were being built beyond its gates too!

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid Harris, undated archive account

## PART 2 – Settling in

### 7. Beyond the Gates the Refuge of Cole Harbour

The village of Cole Harbour was a place where Sheldon Myers's Family Store was once located all so long ago. Sheldon's store was a much loved and visited place. Here the airmen saw fresh faces, talked and bought some small comforts. Sheldon Myers's General Store reminded them of the store at home.

It was an easy walk to the Myers's General Store, especially in summer. That walk could take 3 hours round trip on foot in winter though! But the cold seldom deferred the boys from No 5 Radar Unit from taking the walk out. It was a way to pass time with folks, to soak in the village life, and it was time away from the unit!

William Munroe's residence also came to be an important spot for our airmen in early 1943. The water quality at the station was simply poor. Walter Harvey the Station's cook was fed up with the constant complaints about the taste of lake water in his cooking. He learnt that a local fisherman, William Munroe was willing to supply the unit a very limited amount of good quality well water.

The water resupply was an opportunity that Harvey couldn't pass up. So, in 1943 Hospital Assistant Scottie Moir was placed in charge of water procurement. The usual trip to Munroe's well filled three cans. But of course, there was a constant demand and need for re-supply.

Scottie never really had any trouble rounding up willing helpers. The water resupply run was one of those less onerous and more enjoyable tasks. It also had a pleasant attendant side benefit too. Foremost of course was the need for exercise and time away from the station. But there was another reason! There was always a chance of meeting some of the local single ladies.

Sheldon Myers had two very lovely and strikingly beautiful daughters, Dorothy and Jean. Dorothy and Jean were a beacon to the very lonesome airmen at No 5 radar Unit. The attentions of these young men were probably a great worry to Sheldon!

But it was worth the hike to the Myers's General Store. There was always the hope and chance, chance mind you, for romance. It was well worth the risk as long as you stayed on the good side of Mom and Dad of course.

It turned out that Dorothy and Jean were not the sole objects of the airmen's affections and attentions.



ART COOKE, London  
 LEM MELLETT, Regina  
 JEAN and MARGARET MYERS  
 Sunday in Cole Harbour



DOROTHY MYERS  
 LEO POULIOT  
 JEAN MYERS  
 ROGER OUELLET

Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

Wilford  
 “Diesel” Smith  
 served one  
 year at No 5  
 Radar Unit  
 from  
 September  
 1942 to  
 September  
 1943. Diesel  
 was borne  
 Saskatoon,  
 Sk. He was  
 posted from  
 the west to  
 east coast  
 from Alford  
 bay. His long  
 train journey  
 took him  
 across the  
 country to  
 Canada’s  
 Atlantic Coast

via the Gaspé. His trip ultimately cumulated at Cole Harbour, NS.

Diesel’s posting at Cole Harbour lasted one year. He was subsequently posted “overseas” to Labrador, September 1943. But over the time he was at No 5 Radar Unit, Diesel met and fell in love with the beautiful Edna Alice McCool of Pawtucket Rhode Island!

Wed at St. Thomas-Wesley



MR. AND MRS. WILFORD SMITH

—Photo by Thams.  
A quiet wedding took place recently at St. Thomas-Wesley Church with the Rev. R. W. K. Elliot performing the ceremony, when Edna Alice McCool, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles McCool of Pawtucket, R.I., was united in marriage to Wilford Smith, son of the late Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Smith of Saskatoon. The bride wore a light blue gabardine suit with black accessories and a corsage of pink roses and sweet peas. Miss Lois Clifford, who attended the bride, wore a blue suit with brown accessories and a corsage of red roses. Robert Giles was best man. Following the wedding ceremony a buffet supper was served at the home of the groom's sister, Mrs. A. Camponi, 814 Twentieth Street, west. After spending a few days in the city the couple will reside in Watrous.

Mickey Stevens Archives – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

How that happened, we will never know. It was to say the least, an extraordinary meeting. It was a chance encounter of a young Canadian serviceman who met an American woman from Rhode Island. Why was she living in Cole Harbour...in Guysborough...in Nova Scotia of all places? The odds seemed stacked against chance that anyone from Rhode Island would ever domicile in Cole harbour ...but Edna was!

Edna was a cousin of the daughters of Sheldon Myers family at Cole Harbour. Edna was “visiting” and working at the Myers family store helping out, when one “Diesel” Smith chanced into her life.

It was one brief encounter with one young man with time on his hands that led to something that changed both their lives forever. “Diesel” and Alice fell in love. They had a long distance courtship

and happily married soon after the war.

Diesel was not alone in meeting the love of his life at Cole Harbour. Jim Vaughn of Parry Sound Ontario also met Helen Snow. Helen was the local school teacher. She eventually married Jim and they moved to Coldwater, Ontario after the war.

Another young serviceman also succumbed to local beauty. John Voth met and married Opal Ehler of Queensport. It would seem there were some worthwhile benefits of a walk to town after all!



John Voth

John married Opal  
Ehler of Queensport

Mickey Stevens photograph –  
Archives of Mary Richard with  
permission

The story of love and relationships at No 5 Radar Unit was not just limited its single unmarried men. The war was particularly hard on married couples. Couples were forced away from one another and had to endure long separations.

The community of Cole Harbour was an unusual opportunity for many married servicemen. There were no military restrictions to spousal visits nor for arranging private married living arrangements.

Many married men rented accommodations for their wives who either visited or lived in and around Cole harbour during a posting there. This amounted to a huge bonus for the married man. It was an opportunity for a normal life, even if only temporarily.

It was a rare opportunity indeed to live the semblance of married life. The one proviso though was to be back in time for a duty shift. So, Cole Harbour was a bonus for those married couples who were able to live together for the duration of the posting.



Jack Minnis of Windsor Ontario made such arrangements for his wife Eileen. They lodged with Wil and Bessie Munroe of Cole Harbour.

Jack Minnis in front of Will and Bessie Munroe's house where he and his wife Eileen lodged.  
Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

## 8. Oh, What a Lovely War

No 5 Radar Unit was an isolated posting. Getting away from Cole harbour to the lights of Halifax or other urban centres was simply beyond the time limits of a 48 hour pass. It took the better part of a day getting out and getting back there!

Then there was a lack of funds. Pay was not plentiful for a simple servicemen. Pay was a paltry \$1.10 a day for a Leading Aircraftman (LAC). In order to have sufficient funds for a good time you simply had to save up for a bit. The only reasonable way out of No 5 Radar Unit for a very good time was to have a large credit on your pay account and the time to do so.

Time was the limiting factor. You had to have time to get out and back in. That was most difficult to do during the war. Cole Harbour was a long ways from anywhere. A simple weekend pass simply wouldn't cut it, especially in winter!

So time, money, and circumstances limited the range of our wandering serviceman. It often led to taking advantage of what was available locally. The young lads at No 5 Radar Unit were very fortunate in that regard too. Their refuge of choice was the Grant Hotel.

The Grant Hotel was then operated a by Charlie and Hilda Jenkins. Charlie worked for the county where he maintained and cleared the roads. Hilda ran and managed the Hotel.



GRANT'S HOTEL, GUYSBOROUGH

Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

Anyone who has spent time in an H-hut or subjected to military food knows of the need to get away from it all for a time, however briefly.

A common desire amongst servicemen was to sleep and to dine like a normal person, free from all responsibilities. Time away refreshes the soul and was good for morale.

The Grant Hotel became the place for the homesick serviceman as the Grant truly reminded them of home. The Grant Hotel was both warm and

welcoming. More importantly it was a place where our servicemen could easily get away for a short bit in the time available.

The rooms at the Grant were such a relief from their Spartan life and the drabness of the barracks. The Grant was in fact quite the opposite. The Grant Hotel was the epitome of luxury and comfort! The beds were brass or white cast iron frames with warm comforters.

The meals.... the meals were what every serviceman dreamt of and lived for. They were recorded as “simply divine”. Hilda’s cooking was a rare taste of homemade food! And the prices ...reasonable; 75 cents for a night and 50 cents for breakfast on fine china. Every meal was excellent! What more could a lonely serviceman ask for?

There was more to it though. Charlie and Hilda reminded those lonely servicemen of whom they missed most, Mom and Pop back home. The Grant Hotel was that welcoming. Many servicemen became repeat guests throughout their stay at No 5 Radar Unit!

Bridges were built in the visits, meanderings and relationships. No 5 Radar Unit had simply become an important part of the community!

1943

## 9. Food, Food Glorious Food

The Annapolis Valley is famous and known for an abundance of apples. But food production and distribution were closely monitored during the war and sadly, that included apples too. It was a necessary evil. Rationing maximized use, conservation, and preservation of the crop that ensured an equitable distribution of food in scarcity.

Rationing thus resulted in canning of a crop for future use. This was especially true of apples. Huge quantities of applesauce were readily available but try and find a fresh apple...well that was another thing.

Mickey Stevens knew his Canadian geography well. He decided to take one of his valuable leaves in the Annapolis Valley for an "apple" hunt! His plan was simple. Mickey would offer his services to help with the apple harvest in 1943. He hoped to procure a barrel of apples. Mickey's aim was simple too; bring back a barrel to the Unit so the boys could enjoy a fresh one!

Mickey proceeded on leave to the Valley and found an apple orchard five miles outside of Kentville. He met a farmer and explained his mission and plight. Mickey should have been tossed out on his ear but surprisingly he wasn't. He was invited in for dinner with the farmer and his family.

The farmer explained that he couldn't simply sell Mickey the apples. His apple crop was under the total control of the marketing board. This explained why there were huge quantities of applesauce and why there were no fresh apples available at the station.

The farmer was sympathetic to Mickey's plight. But he explained that he simply couldn't sell Mickey any apples, but he could donate them to the station! Thus, an arrangement was made. Three barrels of apples weighing 40 lbs apiece were sent C.O.D to the unit. The delivery charges were covered by No 5 Radar Unit.

Mickey accompanied the barrels of apples back to the Unit. He sold the first barrel at a nominal charge to cover its freight and his costs. The remaining two barrels were then donated and enjoyed by everyone in the Mess. It was one of Mickey's more successful adventures.

The inmates of No 5 Radar unit assumed because they were nearby the Atlantic coast that fish would be a big part of their diet. It was an incorrect assumption. It would be 10 months before any saw an actual fish dinner in camp. No one officially knows why.

Meatless Tuesdays was one thing that was done on a grand scale. The alternate proteins were either legumes or fish. Fish was probably not available in quantity. It was quite likely that fish was in very high demand and needed to feed the hungry mass of city dwellers now that meat was strictly rationed. Eating fish was ways and means of reducing meat consumption that likely led to scarcity elsewhere.

Fish may not have been readily available locally or in the Army ration system. If the boys wanted fish, then they would have to buy their own and with their own mess funds. That was often done.

But not everyone had such simple tastes in their quest for gastronomical delights from the sea. Some of No 5 Radar Unit's inmates had very unique and sometimes rustic tastes that needed satisfying. Morris Rachlis, from Winnipeg was one with eclectic taste.

Morris had a hankering for pickled herring. How anyone from Winnipeg acquired such a taste was truly mind boggling. Trouble was, there was no pickled herring to be had, anywhere locally.

What to do? Rachlis decided to make his own. He acquired the herring and proceeded to pickle them... in the sinks.... of the washrooms... on the station. Rachlis commandeered 8 sinks that he marked out of bounds. He barred them all from further use. The question is, "Was he ever successful at making the pickled herring?"

Food was the one thing that is always on the minds of hungry men. But there was more to it than hunger, there was that need for comfort food too. The problem was given No 5 Radar Unit's location, the staff couldn't always easily nip in for a meal in Guysborough at the Grant Hotel or other locally

eateries...sometimes they had to make do with what was in the kitchen, just like home.

The Unit's kitchen was a busy one. Things became a little more relaxed in the kitchen as the Unit settled in. The Cooks were a sympathetic lot too. There was a need for constant feeding. The cooks soon realized that they couldn't be on call 24/7. The kitchen was open for use after hours and wasn't necessarily out of bounds. The camp kitchen soon became a part of the serviceman's extended home.

Cpl Walter Harvey, Head Cook, allowed the rank and file use of his cooking facilities for making of snacks and other fare. There was one proviso to Harvey's generosity though. The men could use his facilities as long as they kept it clean and ready for his use.



Cooks Andy Thompson (1) and Jim Hare (3) providing a snack for late shift workers Ken Strachan (2) and Frank Sargent (4)

Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

That kitchen of No 5 Radar Unit became part of the fabric of service life! All were welcome to satisfy an eclectic mix of eating.

Airmen would show up with a couple of friends from a fishing trip and cook up a mess of trout for all to enjoy. Others would simply nip down to the village and bring back a few lobsters. There

was a very real desire for comfort food. A simple can of pork and beans on toast was often a treat on cold wet days!

No matter the disruption, the kitchen was always kept spotless, cleaned, and ready in time for Cpl Harvey's duty day. The inmates at No 5 Radar Unit never failed Harvey in keeping their promise. The cooks got at their work every duty day without a major clean-up. The faith and trust of Cpl Harvey was never abused.

## 10. There's no such thing as "routine" 1943

No 5 Radar Unit's normal routine that first fall and winter of 1942-1943 was the monitoring and reporting tracks of aircraft and maritime traffic along its "arc of fire". It had become a part of the chain in the fledgling radar warning system.

The plots they mostly tracked were aircraft. Most times those tracks were limited and only out some 50 or 60 miles off shore. On the rare occasions, when the atmospheric conditions were good, they could plot out to far greater distances, some say well out toward Sable Island!

No 5 Radar Unit and the others diligently kept watched for possible enemy attack as they monitored all aircraft and shipping off our eastern Atlantic shores. Keeping track of plots and tracks, distinguishing friend from foe, was vital. They also assisted in the rescue of downed aircraft or ship. They were critical to identifying the given position of all targets in their area.

No 5 Radar Unit had a very job to do whether the threat was real or not, That very important job became a matter of routine and was recorded in their daily diary reports. The daily war diary summarized the events that happened on the day. Those events were often no more than one or two lines that marked how routine the work had become.

Routine seldom changed. The unit diary reflects the pace and rhythm of life much like a heartbeat, a slow and steady rhythm until 14 March 1943.

The 14<sup>th</sup> of March began as a regular day. Range and weapons training was scheduled that day. The unit required a wide variety of weapons for its protection and defence. These weapons required regular maintenance and cleaning after use. One weapon in particular was the Sten gun.



Harry K. Brown,  
Toronto

Mickey Stevens photograph –  
Archives of Mary Richard with  
permission

The Sten gun was a close support weapon whose construction was very simple. It was stamped out of metal, was quickly produced, and was easily manufactured. Still it was a formidable weapon when fired in a fully automatic mode. In a semi-automatic mode, the 9mm calibre ammunition held in a 32 round magazine clips was rapidly discharged. The Sten could be fired either in single or multiple round mode.

On 14 March 1943 LAC Butch Buchanan was handling a Sten gun. There is little detail what happened, but the weapon accidentally discharged. There were two possibilities for the accidental discharge.

First the weapon may not have been properly cleared or made safe and discharged. Second Buchanan may have accidentally hit an object causing the weapon to discharge even though the weapon had been made safe!

Regardless, a 9mm round entered Buchanan's head just above his left eye, exiting the top of his head. Little hope was held for Buchanan's survival. Sgt GE Daine, Hospital attendant immediately came into action.

Daine performed what was described as a miracle that day. With very meagre supplies, Daine managed to stem the bleeding, doctored the wound and kept Buchanan alive until Dr Stanton arrived from Canso some 2-1/2 hours later.

Dr Stanton too held little chance for Buchanan's survival. But Buchanan surprised them all. He was still alive when additional help was finally brought in from a military hospital at Mulgrave. Additional doctors and

nurses arrived and gave Buchanan intravenous fluids. This stabilized him and kept him going until another two doctors finally arrived from RCAF Station Sydney.

Buchanan was medically evacuated at 7:30 pm that night. He was flown to Montreal where a delicate operation was performed. It took a marshalling of considerable resources to save him, but it was done.

Everybody in Camp wore long faces that day. It was a dreadful accident. It truly demonstrated how fast "routine" became most urgent and then dire. The accident brought everyone closer together. They all worried for Buchanan's safety. It cast a pall on everyone's mood as they waited for news about Buchanan's well-being.

News was closely monitored. Word came down from the Neurological Institute in Montreal on 15 Mar "that LAC Buchanan has improved after his operation." These were words of hope. Maybe, just maybe, Sgt Daine and the other medical staff had indeed pulled off a miracle! Such simple words raised everyone's spirits.

There was still more encouraging news posted in the unit daily diary on 16 March 1943. The Neurological Institute at Montreal updated the unit once more with more encouraging news on Buchanan's condition. Once again, the news perked up everyone's spirits. Things gradually were getting back to normal at No 5 Radar Unit.

There was nothing recorded on Buchanan's condition on 17 March diary report though. The only entry of note concerned the movie supplied by Canadian Legion War Services. Simply "The movie was enjoyed by all".

The movie helped break the gloom. The Camp diary commented "Legion has done outstanding work in providing recreation facilities here and their work is greatly appreciated." Life had indeed the appearance of getting back to normal.

The men on No. 5 Radar Unit wanted to do something in appreciation for all the medical assistance provided in the delivery of LAC Buchanan. A committee was organized on 19 March 1943 for a Red Cross blood drive. The work of this organization brought home to No 5 Radar Unit that it was blood serum from the Red Cross that undoubtedly saved Buchanan's life. So, all wanted to help out.

Buchanan's story goes strangely quiet at this point. Nothing more was written about him in the unit diary. The reports of prior days raised many hopes that Buchanan would eventually recover, discharged, and sent to some very reputable convalescent hospital for neurological rehabilitation. Regrettably that was not meant to be.

LAC Butch Buchanan succumbed to his most grievous wounds most likely on 18 March 1943. The unit may not have been aware of his passing or perhaps the event was too painful to mark in the unit diary. But Butch's passing was noted in the Globe and Mail on 19 March 1943. The Globe and Mail recorded "Robert Hugh, LAC Buchanan, was dangerously injured on active service in Canada". He was survived by his father J. G. H. Buchanan of Vancouver, BC.

Part 3 – 1944 a year that was!

## 11. The Stuff of Legend

Late in the summer of 1944 the stuff of legend was born. Flight Lieutenant (F/L) L.B. Monasch was now the Commanding Officer of No 5 Radar Unit at Cole Harbour, Guysborough County, Nova Scotia. Monasch was another well-respected and admired Commanding Officer.

F/L Monasch was noted for a hands-off approach in running his unit. His men greatly appreciated that. His men were afforded the rare privilege of

performing their regular duties without interference or micro-management from above!

Monasch largest problems were unit morale and boredom. Duty at Cole Harbour had indeed become routine by the time he was installed as CO. The regular tracking of aircraft and the sea-lanes around the eastern shores of Nova Scotia out on Canada's east coast was still most important. The problem was there was little excitement and drama to show for the effort.

The situation was exacerbated by the unit's location. There was not much to do or see out on the "Barrens" above Cole Harbour apart from sports,



F/L L.B. Monasch  
Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary  
Richard with permission

mess, cards, and hobbies. These too could become routine and boring.

On the one hand, the isolation of Cole Harbour was a perk. It was a settled and idyllic site, way out of harm's way. But on the other hand, it left the men up to their own devices; especially when it came to entertain themselves.

Being left up to their own devices meant getting up to no good. This was the little threat. It was a threat that would eventually come to upset the peace and quiet of the station's routine much to F/L Monasch's discomfiture.

The boys needed an outlet and a break from the monotony of life on station. Regrettably there were few opportunities to do so. Then if the CO wouldn't organize one for them, the boys would take it upon themselves to organize one for him!

Wandering down the road to the small communities for the odd pop, treat and local inter-action just didn't cut it anymore. Some way had to be found and soon to bust up the routine and the monotony of station life. That opportunity soon presented itself in the course of their work.

The young men stationed at Cole Harbour were likely amongst the first to pioneer what is now known today as "virtual dating". It was invented well before the days of the World Wide Web. The station had a modern technological marvel, in direct radio and telephone communications!

Radio communications linked them to the filter room at Eastern Command Headquarters in Halifax. The boys at No 5 Radar Unit also had access to this equipment. They employed these to good ends.

The filter room at Eastern Air Command (EAC) was populated with their female counterparts, the WDs, the women's division of the RCAF. Using the equipment for official business was an opportunity to hear the sound of a woman's voice, so luxurious and rare in their isolated and male domain.

It transpired that when traffic was light or non-existent, the young operators and WDs would sometimes engage in some verbal repartee over these means. This was only practiced though during the down times or when operations were slow to non-existent. They had to be cautious though.

They were always under the watchful eyes and ears of the controller and duty officer. So, there was a certain challenge in getting away with it.

These infrequent conversations probably resulted in some mutual curiosity. There may have been a downright desire to meeting the sultry voice at the end of the line. It was a tantalizing prospect.

A chance came via informal use of government communications to arrange a meeting. What better way of getting to know one another better than by offering an open invitation to the WDs to come by for a visit. The challenges involved were most tantalizing if only the outcomes could be achieved!

Some dates were indeed arranged by this method over the three years of No 5 Radar Unit's existence. Some young folks had arranged to meet while on leave in Halifax. These chance interludes did lead to brief romances, encounters and friendships. Others were more enduring. They resulted in love and marriage. But that was an individual affair, it was not the mass invasion of female pulchritude that would soon descend upon No 5 Radar Unit!

It was clear that the boys at Cole Harbour were quite persistent in the pursuit of the young women at the Woman's Division (WD). Temerity led to boldness. Persistence in the pursuit of the WDs in the filter room led to success. The effort and invitation to come to Cole Harbour for a visit, finally bore fruit!



On leave in Antigonish, Audrey Peach – Regina, George T Reid-Toronto, Brenda Cruikshank (eventually Mrs. Reid) - Toronto  
Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

It was a long haul. What began in 1942, only bore fruit two years later. Perhaps there was some reluctance from the WDs to accept such an invitation and for very good reason! Still female curiosity must have been piqued at the filter room in Halifax. A visit was finally agreed to. It wasn't just one

young woman who showed up on Cole Harbour's doorstep. No, in fact it was twelve!

No reasonable young lady would ever show up at an isolated station alone or unchaperoned. No 5 Radar Unit was in the middle of nowhere. No young lady in her right mind would wander into this den of wolves alone. There were at least 30 or more single men at Cole Harbour! If was to be done, it would be done in force! After all, there was safety in numbers.

So, after 2 years on the line with the boys from No. 5 Radar Unit, the WDs finally came to town. Halifax was getting just as boring and routine for them as well. The visit to No 5 Radar Unit was just the opportunity to break their routine too! Finally, they would see where the boys at No 5 Radar Unit lived. The mystery of those living on these isolated shores would become known. It was just enough to peak the curiosity of the WDs to visit!

The trip was arranged but without the official sanction of F/L Monasch. Monasch's solitude, quiet, smooth station routine were about to be disrupted. He had no idea. Monasch was simply approached with news that of a bevy of females from the Women's Division had arrived and were descending upon him one Friday evening.

It can easily be imagined as it may have unfolded in this way:

"Sir we have a problem."

'What is it Sergeant Stevens?'

"LAC Barkhouse is on the phone on the duty run to Mulgrave. There are 12 WDs waiting for a ride from the Monastery station, Sir."

'What? WDs? Where?'

"From Monastery to the unit, Sir. They say they've been invited."

'What!...By whose and under what authority, Stevens? ...what in blazes is going on? Why wasn't I told?'

"Don't know sir. They just arrived at Monastery unannounced. It's late in the day sir... we just can't leave them there."

'Can't we? Stevens, this is an RCAF station - not a bordello! This is trouble Stevens...nothing but trouble!'

"But if we leave them stranded there, there'll be more trouble, sir."

'Alright Stevens ...they can come... if they fully understand that:

- there are no facilities for the WD's at Cole Harbour?
- they will have to ride in the back of an open transport truck?
- it is sixty-five miles to the radar unit, and that only twenty-five of which are paved?

and Stevens...if anything goes wrong'

"Sir"

'It's all on you!'

“Understood sir.”

‘Alright then... bring them in....and Stevens...find out who instigated this bloody fiasco. Dismissed!’

“Sir!”

What was also made clear to Sgt Stevens was the WD stay was temporary. They were supposed to be put on the next train back to Halifax the very next day. It didn't work out that way. Little did F/L Monasch's know, there was no return regularly scheduled passenger train until Sunday.

Was this simple bad luck or good planning? That too will never be known. In the meantime, F/L Monasch simply had no choice. He reluctantly contended with the unusual and unwanted presence until then.

F/L Monasch hurriedly made arrangements to accommodate the 12 WDs. Sleeping quarters were arranged in the Administration building. Monasch assigned men to remove the office equipment and files from his administration room. It was all ready by the time the WDs arrived late that



Men's accommodations – not the lap of luxury! Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

Friday night around 11pm.

Monasch's worst fears never materialized. The following day, the usual boredom of station life was replaced by conversations and laughter. Young men and women simply mingled, shared some

laughs, and had a great time.

It was the much welcomed break from discipline and routine for all. For one small moment they forgot the war and enjoyed one another's company. It was as simple as young people, sharing a moment, playing card games and volley ball. It was a joyful respite from the regular and the mundane routine.

The women enjoyed themselves immensely. They were treated like royalty and were waited on hand and foot. There was no lack of hospitality.

But after two days of fun, the WDs were once again driven back over the long bumpy road, back to the railway station at Monastery. They returned safely and on time to Halifax, where they once again resumed their duties at the filter centre. But enjoyable or not, such a visit was never, ever repeated.



The ride over the rough road to the Station  
Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

## 12. The Fall out

The WD visit was over. It was a resounding success! All that remained was speculation in the aftermath was the question of “whodunit?”

Sgt Stevens thought it was all over now. He thought that as the WDs had safely returned to Halifax that the CO would quietly drop the matter. He was soon proven wrong on that account. There was fallout. The CO still wanted to know who was responsible. So, Sgt Mickey Stevens embarked on an investigation by rounding up the “usual suspects”.

Sgt Steven’s hit list was very small. There were only nine inmates at the



Sergeant Mickey Stevens - Winnipeg  
Mary Richard Archives with  
permission

unit who had direct access to the phone lines and radio. They were all his subordinates, radar men. He reduced his hit list to three probable principals. Quite high in Steven’s mind were two radar operators, Gordon Chisholm, of Toronto and Bill King, of Victoria.

Regrettably and to Steven’s utter dismay, these two stalwart radar men had air tight alibis. Both Chisolm and King were at Monastery railway station on the day of the WD arrival. They had passes on their

way to Halifax! They were only at the station when the train arrived with the WDs on board. Stevens suspected that they knew what was happening and were only leaving the area before “shit hit the fan”. Steven’s had little hope of pinning the blame on them.

His third and final suspect was radar operator, Al Snow of Montreal. Snow was noted for his was most conspicuous absence at certain times throughout the WD visit. But having suspicions and finding proof were entirely different matters.

It was only later that he learned why F/L Monasch wanted to know who the culprit was. Monasch realized that the visit actually had been handled rather well. More importantly, Monasch had not been left with any problems. In fact, station morale was vastly improved because of it. Monasch no longer wanted to reprimand the guilty party, all he wanted to know was who had so much moxie to do it in the first place!

In the end the matter was quietly dropped. The incident of the uninvited WDs eventually passed into legend in the pantheon of the Unit’s history. But it did have at least one intended or unintended consequence. One Norma Stevenson, WD met one radar operator Marvin Miller on this visit. They later married!



Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission -, The WD Visit

Sadly, there was never a return visit. It could have been easily have been arranged. The first visit was a huge success and changed the CO’s opinion and demeanour. Sgt Stevens suspected that the only reason why there was never a return

“escapade” was practicality. The thought of another journey on the back of

the transport truck over those rough roads was enough to put off another attempt.

It was quite the intrepid journey over 60 miles of rough travel with no pit stops that likely kept the WDs away. Surprisingly, F/L Monasch never issued any order prohibiting a repeat visit but, then again, he never said he would allow one either.

### 13. The Difference Between Revenge and Justice Served!

No 5 Radar unit was a well-disciplined unit. There were very few occasions where its commanding officers had to exact any sort of military justice. The guardhouse jail was the most under-utilized facility on the station. It was eventually put to good use and converted as a chicken coop!

The occasions when the chickens had to be evicted were salutary few and far between. Most infractions were of a minor disciplinary nature. It just wasn't worth the effort opening the cells. Yet justice had to be seen to be served if discipline and military order was to be maintained. The CO's justice often amounted to extra duties and duty watches.



These fellows "accidentally" missed the truck at Guysborough and returned to the station one day late.

L to R : Court Stone  
Vaughan Williams  
Hal Mackenzie

Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

There was one occasion when an infraction was of a more serious nature. What to do about a "hijacking" that involved Morris Rachlis of "pickled herring" fame.

Morris and several airmen were picked up at the train station by the ration truck. The group was returning from leave. The driver of the truck had a notoriously bad

reputation for poor driving. It hadn't improved by the time the group got back from leave.

They made it as far as Guysborough where a coffee break was always taken. The group expressed their safety concerns to the driver. They lambasted his bad driving habits while on the paved road from Monastery to Guysborough. This section was the smoothest and safest part of their journey. They feared for their well-being on the coming dicey part of the journey and made that very clear to him. It was obvious that their complaints and issues had fallen on deaf ears.

Morris took matters in hand by bodily removing the driver from the truck and throwing him in the back with his comrades. He personally drove the group to the station. The driver promptly laid a charge before the CO regarding the unauthorized use of a military vehicle upon their arrival.

The CO was in a pickle. What to do? He knew of several serious complaints concerning the safety of this one driver. Morris Rachlis was given a verbal reprimand that satisfied the sensibilities of all. Justice seemed to have been served.

Some matters were thus easily resolved and brushed under the carpet if you will. Others demanded a more severe reaction and response. This was especially true when matters garnered the expressed interest of a superior headquarters.

Soldiers, airmen, and sailors commonly complain orally and in writing. It was abnormal if they didn't. Complaining was a valuable tool to measuring the pulse of the unit. Sometimes those complaints had merit and needed to be addressed.

"Bitching and complaining" was usually a local occupation and concern. The chance of a higher headquarters involvement was low. But every piece of correspondence leaving a unit was vetted by military authorities and censors.

One piece of correspondence from No 5 Radar Unit garnered unusual interest and attention of the military censors. One service man had written something particularly nasty and offensive, bordering on mutiny and insurrection. It did not go unnoticed and had to be addressed.

Mickey Steven's recounts, "Sam Engels, of Montreal, had a letter to his brother intercepted by a censor. Some of Sam's fictionalized account of life at #5 RU offended a censor." The tale was not a security issue, and Steven's concluded that perhaps they should not have bothered with it, but they did.



Sam Engels (Engelberg)  
Montreal

Mickey Stevens  
photograph – Archives of  
Mary Richard with  
permission

Several officers descended upon the quiet station and disrupted their lives for several long miserable days. A mountain was made out of a molehill and a charge laid against Sam Engels. Steven's forgot what the actual charge was.

The investigation had turned into something of a witch hunt. When the investigators finally made up their minds, Sam was placed in detention in one of the cells. They made an example of poor Sam for their efforts. They concluded that Sam Engels was indeed a villain.

Later on, that evening, after the investigating officers and aides had done their duty, they wanted to relax on their final evening on station. Not one was looking forward to the long ride in the Ration

Truck to Monastery Junction the next morning. They already knew what lay ahead. The majority of them would have to ride in the box on the back of the truck with the dreaded driver. They were dreading it.

The investigators wanted to relax a bit before this ordeal with a game of bridge. Unfortunately, they were short one good bridge player. It seemed that nobody on station was inclined to play or was available because of work schedules. Sam Engels was the only one available. The investigators had the Service Police release Engels from cells for the evening to take a hand in the game.

The Service Police did everything by the book. They had the investigating officers sign for Sam. The investigators came to regret that decision.

Mickey Stevens said “I kid you not! I should also tell you that Sam and his partner cleaned their clocks! If they were going to lock him up he certainly was not going to let them win at this game if he could help it.”

It was strange that there were no other players available. After all there were 30-60 personnel on station at any time over the course of the war. Not all were on duty at any given time. So, it would seem that the censors were set up. Everyone on station wanted some form of revenge for what they had just put the unit through.

Oh yes, revenge was sweet. Sam was noted as a notorious station shark to be avoided at all costs. He relished being let in amongst the fishes and fleecing them for all that they were worth. It would seem that station justice was exacted after all!

Retribution and justice was meted in the form of a friendly card game dealt by the sharks from No 5 Radar Unit. The investigating officers were fleeced for all that they were worth. There were no further unwarranted visits from higher headquarters after that.

#### 14. It's the most wonderful time of the year..."

Every serviceman looks forward to holidays. Christmas is a favoured one. Christmas holds a certain nostalgia of home for all. It brings a longing to be with family, friends, and loved ones. Christmas is a most treasured time of the year.

There was never any guarantee that a serviceman would ever be home for the holidays. This was especially true during the war. Servicemen and women made do, at the unit, with the people there. They were after all now an extended family.

It was a very lucky airmen indeed who managed to wangle some hard-earned and well-deserved leave. "Oh, to be home for the holidays!" Sometimes it was just the luck of the draw. The CO simply couldn't let everyone skive off for the holidays. He still had a station to run, a job to do, and a war to fight after all.

But some lucky few were lucky enough to be relieved and get that trip home for the holidays. For the rest of the station though, the holidays were spent together. A CO's prime jobs was looking after the welfare of his men.

Christmas and New Year's made a CO's task much simpler. Military traditions helped make and shape the holiday season as something special to be savoured and enjoyed however briefly.

Hopefully operational circumstances allowed for the arrangement of a "Men's Christmas Dinner" or a "New Year's Levy". These were held even if the scale was simply reduced to serving a traditional turkey dinner, boiled sweets and plenty of liquid refreshment to enjoy on the day.

Sometimes it was only a few hours or minutes of stand down. Whatever route taken, it was most appreciated while each man or women took their turn to eat and enjoy the day.

The war was long and hard for the men at No 5 Radar Unit. The separation from family and friends was deeply felt especially at the festive season.

F/Lt Monasch made a special effort for both he and his men that festive season of 1944/45. New Year's Eve 1945 was a celebration that would be spent with family, but not away at "home" but at No 5 Radar Unit.

A number of wives simply made their way to Cole harbour over the Christmas of 1944 and New Year's 1945. They were the special guests at their New Year's celebrations at the station that year. F/Lt Monasch's wife and son were amongst those attending.

It was a special occasion. The mess was decorated with wreaths, branches and other festive ornamentation. The room was uncharacteristically warm and bright. The room was immaculate.

All was finally prepared and ready for the arrival of family and other guests from Cole Harbour and the surrounding area. It promised to be a New Year's to be remembered. Looking forward to 1945, it was a year that would see dramatic change, trials, hope and possibly, finally the promise of peace.



Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

The time came, and everyone sat down, and pictures taken marking the occasion. It wasn't very formal. The tables were set in a hollow square and everyone gathered round. There was no fine china or crystal glassware. The table was set with the coarse table and glassware that was used every day. Table cloths were the cleanest sheets from the laundry laid upon the tables.

The fixings of the celebration were simple too; apples, beer, food and sweets. They were set here and there, all around available for all to enjoy. It truly was a family gathering. It was an occasion that was most memorable to F/Lt Monash and his family.

New Year's Day was also a time where his men probably saw him for what he was, a family man and a human being after all! But there was a certain solemnity and sadness in the air in the group photograph taken that day marking the occasion.



NEW YEAR'S DAY 1945 at #5 RADAR UNIT

L. to R :  
 The child is Victor Monasch - Irene Monasch - Rex & Marion Hunter,  
 Helen & Jerry Girard - Ed Calder - Andy Thompson - Dunc Clark - ?  
 - ? --- ? - -. Standing : Tom Gray - Red Caillier - Marvin Miller  
 - ? --- ? - - Stewart Hamilton  
 Villagers of Cole Harbour had provided rooms for these wives,  
 allowing them to visit in the area.

# 64

Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

The Festive Season of 1944/1945 was supposed to be a happy one. No 5 Radar unit had had a challenging year. They worked hard and diligently at their post.

One lucky group of airmen was rewarded with well-deserved leave for the effort! Leave to go home and spend Christmas and New Year's with their families and not at the unit. It was their reward in recognition of their hard work and diligence.

There was no certainty on who would get leave or when. But once told for those selected that year, excitement would build day by day until the lucky day they departed. The mood would certainly have been festive! That day came when an intrepid group set out for home on 20 December 1944 for Christmas at home.

All selected posed for a parting shot. Mickey Stevens was amongst them. He unfortunately was not one of those who got to go home that year. Mickey had to stay in Cole Harbour.



Small group of airmen prepared to walk across the "Barrens" home for Christmas leave. Foreground Marvin Miller behind the group, Norman Paquet at the right, behind the toboggan buttoning his coat. Man with the white cap is Ed Flowers watching Mickey Stevens attaching the luggage to the toboggan.  
Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

Despite their joy there was a trial getting out of the station. The trouble began 19 December 1941. The morning of 19<sup>th</sup> started out well enough. The Stake truck proceeded out on a routine administration run. It wasn't due back until that evening.

The weather became overcast during the day. It turned into a raging blizzard by evening. The boys looked forward to the trucks return. There was no movie put on that night because of the poor condition of the film. They all waited anxiously in anticipation of the arrival of the stake truck. They wanted to get on their way home.

After struggling for 2 1/2 hours to go 16 miles through 4-foot drifts, the stake truck driver finally gave up the ghost. He elected to stay at a farmhouse approximately 19 miles from the Station that night.

No mail was received by the station that night due to the storm. More importantly the means out was stuck in the snow until it could be dug out! Our group was stranded.

The 20 Dec 44 was a regular day. The weather had cleared but roads were still badly snowed in. A panel truck was dispatched to Queensport with a group of men charged with shovels to clear the road, so they could get the stake truck in. But the snow soon overwhelmed them.

Our intrepid travellers had no choice but to walk out on the Barrens if they ever wanted to get home in time for Christmas! Arrangements were made to meet and pick them up at Queensport.

An Army Transport Unit was dispatched instead to meet and take them to the train station. The station's panel truck finally returned to station with its rations and work crew at approximately 4PM well after they had walked out. The Stake Truck was still stuck in the snow. It was too late for the group to use anyhow.

The men who walked out to Queensport were picked up by the Army truck for their final leg to the train station. It turned out to be an eventful and tragic journey.

No 5 Radar Unit received a horrific call at approximately 8PM that night. The Army Truck had come to harm in Half Way Cove, about 25 miles from

station. They were further informed that the Army truck was involved in an accident and that there were RCAF casualties.

The RCAF personnel, passengers in the truck, were all listed as injured. A later report modified and updated the initial report. Sadly, R282593 LAC Flower, EJ had been killed. The others were still listed as injured, suffering shock. All were expected to live. It was a sad Christmas. The next of kin were soon advised.

An inquest was held immediately after the accident. The inquest found Ed Flower's death to be accidental. No 5 Radar Unit formed a "Committee of Adjustment" and had the unpleasant task of gathering and cataloguing Ed's belongings. They also had the sad duty of selecting an escort to accompany Ed's body back to his family.

But Monasch's ordeal had only just begun with the notification of the accident. He as senior officer proceeded to Antigonish on 21 Dec 44. His duty was clear. Monasch made the necessary funeral and transportation arrangements in Antigonish to repatriate Flower's body to his family. He also obtained Flower's death certificate and burial permit. It was a very sombre journey that F/Lt Monasch made that day.

Monasch had the other airmen to attend to as well. They were all at St. Martha's Hospital in Antigonish. Each man was examined by Dr. McKinnon. They were lucky enough to be released. They had only suffered shock.

Monasch's job still wasn't over. There was always outstanding administration. Monasch had to inform the Senior Medical Officer at Sydney of the death of an airman. He then contacted the RCASC Depot in Sydney. He needed a wrecker to get his Unit's 4 X 4 truck back to Cole Harbour. The 4x4 was still stuck fast in the snow. It was simply one thing after another for F/Lt Monasch that day.

Ed Flower's body began the final journey to his family on 22 Dec 44. The weather was good, but it continued to be extremely cold. LAC Flower's remains were shipped to Toronto under the escort of LAC Chisholm also of Toronto, a very sad duty.

A blanket of gloom surrounded the Unit that Christmas season. A movie shown on the night of the repatriation of Ed's body helped to raise their spirits. But it wasn't long until the gloom was brought back to them.

Canadian Press phoned F/Lt Monasch for a statement on the death of LAC Flower. It was an untimely reminder to all of what had happened.

Ed Flower was only 29 years old at the time of his death. His passing was deeply felt by his father Frederick and mother, Maude Jean Flower of Toronto. Ed was simply going home for Christmas, the most wonderful time of the year. It was a very sad Christmas for his mother and father that saw the loss of their beloved son.

Ed's passing was deeply felt by his military family too. There was a hole in the fabric of station life. It was greatly felt amongst this small but tight group of men. But the saddest Christmas was felt by Ed's wife, Edna M. Flower, of Toronto. Edna lost a loving husband.

## Part 4 - 1945 The End Was in Sight!

### 15. No 5 Radar Unit Winds Down

Some twenty ships were sunk in the Gulf of St Lawrence when No 5 Radar Unit first became operational during 1942. None of those sinkings occurred in No 5 Radar Unit's operational area.

This battle crystallized the purpose and need for the unit's existence though. The radar operators had to be alert and at the top of their game in support of all ongoing operations. The team was comprised of many trades and talents.

All trades from cooks to medics, from clerks to police, from mechanics to truck drivers played a role in supporting the radar men. All who served there were part of a vital effort that made Canada safe.

The radar operation came to be a day in, a day out, affair that was interspersed with moments of high tension, excitement, and sometimes dread. But for the large part, it was routine.

The routine played out over the course of three long years of tracking. The day in, day out routine would continue until it was "stopped". No one knew when that day would come.

The War in Europe finally ended in May 1945, yet the work at No 5 Radar and other Units continued for a time. The daily extract for 1 June 1945 gives us a sense of the tempo:

"Weather bright and clear. S/L Hambley and F/Sgt. Sayers returned to Sydney on morning run to Monastery. Off the air part of the day, phasing party still at work."

Nothing had changed. The unit tuned its radar for continued operations and maintained a continued high state of readiness.

The daily extracts until 13 Jun 1945 were marked by further routine entries. They noted monitoring of ranges and tracks of aircraft. They were also

interspersed with routine administrative matters and weather observations. There was nothing untoward recorded.

That all changed on 14 June 1945 with this entry:

“Weather dull with fog. LAC's Bunn and Garnett arrived on temporary duty from Sydney, also Sgt McAskill. **Signal arrived advising that unit is disbanding 20th June 1945.** 24 Tracks. Maximum range 54 miles. 68 miles longest track. Lancasters again. Weather clear and warm in evening.”

No 5 Radar Units days were suddenly numbered. Its war was indeed “finally over”. The Unit began winding down and wrapping up operations.

Preparations for disbandment were almost immediate. Additional instructions concerning that endeavour were received on 17 Jun 45. By that time, the disbandment was well under way and was ongoing. It proceeded in two general phases; the movement of critical stores first, followed by non-essential stores second.

On a cloudy, rainy and foggy 20 Jun 45, No 5 Radar Unit's operations finally ceased at 2359 hours GMT. The Unit's final operational entry was:

“6 Tracks. 32 Miles maximum range. 60 miles longest track. Station officially off the air 2359 GMT”.

By 21 Jun 45 the dismantling and packing of the critical stores began with the unit's C1 Beacon. It was a complex piece of equipment. F/Lt Markham arrived on temporary duty from No. 1 TSU to complete its dismantling. The work was completed by 22 Jun 45.

A hectic pace was maintained. On 23 Jun 45 lumber was purchased locally to pack barrack and technical equipment. The weather remained foggy and cool. But the good news was that the C1 Beacon was finally packed and ready for transport that day.

The shipment of station essential critical stores and materiel began 24 Jun 45 and was finally completed 27 June 1945. All that remain now was a final cleanup of the Unit area.

The 27<sup>th</sup> Jun 45 was a warm and bright day. The final transport left for Sydney. Some technical equipment was taken to the railhead at Monastery. The Unit received notice of posting of several personnel. The unit wound down to a standstill.

The transport returned from Sydney on 28 Jun 45, a very quick turnaround. The cleanup of camp began after packing of unnecessary non-essential equipment. It was all but over and done with by 30<sup>th</sup> Jun.

The 30<sup>th</sup> was a warm and bright day. It was quite the opposite from the weather of the fall of 1942. The weather may have been somewhat prophetic in foretelling of hope and promise of better days ahead. But the war wasn't over yet. The books were closed, and the lights turned off.

No 5 Radar Unit (RCAF) closing is summed up in the final remarks in the monthly synopsis of the unit's daily extracts:

“State of Health for Month of June 1945.

The state of health for June was in general very good, no hospitalizations. A number of personnel on the station still require refraction tests.

Commanding Officer,  
No. 5 Radio Unit, RCAF,  
Cole Harbour, Guysborough County, Nova Scotia.”

With that final entry though, No 5 Radar Unit's war was officially over!

## Conclusion

### 16. For the Good Times

The year 2011 marked a significant milestone for many veterans of the Second World War. It was a year to remember. It was the remembrance of some very important milestones.

The first aircrew training commenced training here in 1941. This was the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan's (BCATP) of those first airfields role in that training in 1941. Many veterans of the BCATP descended upon Nova Scotia that year to remember and pay their respects. It seemed a propitious time for many veterans of No 5 Radar Unit to come to Nova Scotia too!

A number of celebrations and gatherings were planned. Many surviving Second World War Veterans made their way back to the places of their youth. For some, it would be a final journey to Canada's east coast.

CFB Greenwood hosted RV2011. It held a special dedication of "The Bay of Fundy Memorial". This was a memorial and monument to those airmen whose lives were sacrificed in training and on operations here on Canada's East Coast. Many aircrew were lost. A good number have no known graves. The seas in and around Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are littered with their bodies. These seas are their final resting place.

The lack of rescue resources and the pressures of operations during the war meant that a search for the lost was never extensive nor exhaustive. So, when an aircraft down, it was often final.

The radar units played an important and vital role here. They tracked the many aircraft flying out of Debert, NS, Greenwood, NS, Pennfield, NB, and Summerside, PEI. Although this and other resources were so few to be of any help, the radar units at least offered some hope and comfort.

The radar units were the eyes that tracked the aircraft and gave airmen some chance and slim hope of rescue in pinpointing a location if they ever did go down.

It is important to remember that fact. Canada's radar men played an important role on the east coast. On 19 and 20 June 2015, all surviving veterans and their families who served at No 5 Radar Unit were invited to the opening of a new Interpretation Center and a Legion service at the former site of RCAF Station Queensport/Cole Harbour.

Veterans of No 5 Radar Unit made their way to Nova Scotia for their own special commemoration and dedication service at Cole Harbour. It was a last chance to stroll through the ruins of Radar Unit 5, to remember their lives spent on the Barrens of Guysborough County Nova Scotia during the Second World War.

Amongst those who made the journey were Mickey Stevens and his wife Lillian. Mickey left an enduring legacy of the life and time at No 5 Radar Unit. His memoirs, photographs, and stories are a great legacy for the people of Guysborough County.



Mary Stevens personal photo archive (with permission) – Mickey Stevens

Mickey`s story and work are truly impressive. It is a true record and account of the conditions under which the community and many young men lived and served.



When Art Cartlidge arranged for his wife, Cecelia, to stay with William and Bessie Munroe in Cole Harbour, they had one daughter, Nora.

In 1959, when they had three girls, the Cartlidge family visited Cole Harbour and the Munroes.

L.to R. Karen, Art, Cecelia, Nora and Linda.

Will was a bit of a carpenter. The swing around which Art's family is gathered was built by Will.

Mickey Stevens photograph and comments – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

It is also the story of the bonds between service men and community. That community wasn't just limited to the military family. It included those who came to be their extended family on Canada's East Coast.

No 5 Radar Unit's history is part of our story. It is the fabric of our time and place in Second World War in Guysborough, Queensport, Port Felix, Cole Harbour, and the many other communities in Guysborough, all

too numerous to mention here.

Mickey was well over 90 years old when he returned that June of 2011. Despite his age, he and the other veterans walked with purpose, from the

marker on the road where the Interpretation Centre is located, up the hill to their former Unit on the Barrens.



The way up the hill starts gently enough. It is a good stiff walk even for a young man. The path steepens up an incline. The road, which although has narrowed over the years from the undergrowth, remains well packed and visible.

The road winds to the top of the hill to where the camp was once located, a good kilometer or more upward, always upward. It was quite a slog in the day but for a man of 90, it was not a slog, at all. It was a labour of love. Mickey and his comrades walked the whole way without complaint or rest.

Little of No 5 Radar Unit remains today. The weather was good the day Mickey and his comrades made their journey. Once they crested the top of the hill they found the Barrens had largely reclaimed what once was their home.

At the top of the hill they surveyed their former domain. They enjoyed the picnic lunch provided by the Legion. As they sat by Cow Lake, enjoying the sun beating down on them, and enjoying one another's company, they reminisced and talked over old times. The nostalgia of times past was

visible on their faces as they cast their eyes about, remembering the good times, and comrades now long gone.



Gerry Madigan photo archive...on a wet, foggy, cold damp day  
November 2015

Ray Price sang a lament penned by Kris Kristofferson called, "For the good times". It is a song of lives lived, loves lost, the memories of what once was. Price's lament captured the moments of lives truly lived.

Mickey's story was written in the same vein. Most of his

photographs and stories featured smiles and happier times. Very few stories were sad or grim. There was loss. No 5 Radar Unit tragically lost two comrades over their three years there on the barrens.

Mickey is no longer with us. He generously bequeathed his life's work and archives to the people of Guysborough County, a very generous legacy indeed! It is a labour of love and was written after all, to remember the good times.

## 5. **“The place I remember...”**

The Story of Halfway Cove, 20 December 1944

as told by Leslie Ryter



Prepared by Gerry Madigan

9 August 2016

## Part 1 – The Place I remember

One pleasure when writing on Guysborough County's rich history during the Second World War has been meeting its people. This was especially true in meeting with the people who were actually there!

Looking around Guysborough County today, you would think that nothing of importance ever happened in such a small place. But many important things did happen there. Guysborough County was situated in a very important strategic location during the Second World War.

My most recent endeavour was "***The story of No 5 Radar Unit - For the Good times***" that recounted the tales of Sergeant Mickey Stevens (RCAF). Mickey served in and wrote about his stay at Cole Harbour during the war. We were in Mulgrave the very day the first in the series of Mickey's stories were published in the Guysborough Journal on 6 July 2016.

It happened that my wife Melodie and I were out visiting the Mulgrave Museum looking for more information for a follow up on the article. I was exploring the story of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps (RCASC) in Mulgrave. The 1<sup>st</sup> Fortress Company Det (RCASC) was amongst the many units posted there.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Fortress Company Det (RCASC) serviced all military units in the area. Their service interested me as I am a retired logistician of the Canadian Armed Forces and a former member of the Logistics Branch. The Logistics Branch will be celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 2 February 2018. My research was geared to writing an article for their newsletter in celebration of that event.

On the very day we visited the museum, I received a telephone message from Mr. Leslie Ryter formerly of Halfway Cove, Guysborough County. His voicemail perked my immediate interest. I returned Leslie's call later that evening. Leslie said "I read your story...very interesting...but did you know about the accident that happened at Halfway Cove during the war? I was there."

I was shocked to say the least. After all these years, an eye witness was around to recount the events of Ed Flower's death. You may recall that Ed Flower was a servicemen heading home on Christmas leave out of Cole Harbour NS on 20 December 1944. His story is found in "***It's the most wonderful time of the year***".

Leslie was there and was able to provide some additional details and insights to what happened that dreadful day. Furthermore, Leslie's story is a great insight into the life and times of a young boy living in Halfway Cove before, during and after the war. Leslie's story is a most interesting and compelling tale.



Small group of airmen prepared to walk across the "Barrens" home for Christmas leave. Foreground Marvin Miller behind the group, Norman Paquet at the right, behind the toboggan buttoning his coat. Man with the white cap is Ed Flowers watching Mickey Stevens attaching the luggage to the toboggan.

Leslie now 85 years old, was only a young boy of 14 at the time this tragic event occurred. But Leslie's memory of the day is sharp as a tack. Leslie recounted his life story in remembering this sad event.

Leslie was born 24

March 1931 at home in Halfway Cove, delivered by a midwife, which was fairly typical in the day. Sadly, his father had recently died of leukemia only four days earlier, 20 March 1931 leaving his mother Ella a widow. Ella would become the sole provider for her family of two; Jean (Mary Jane) his sister, who was 12 years older, and Leslie, the newborn baby.

Those days for Ella were both joyous and sad occasions. The days in March 1931 were the bookends of her life. They marked the death of her husband and the birth of his son.

Life was hard for Ella, but she managed somehow and survived with the help of her family and neighbours. She remained a single mother for the rest of her life. The family was greatly assisted by Leslie's maternal grandparents and uncles, Austin and Phillip Dort.

Austin, Ella's older brother, worked at the steel plant and lived in Sydney. Austin materially helped Ella in many ways. Phillip the younger brother lived at home with her parents. Phillip helped with the day to day chores.

Circumstances soon improved for the Ryter family but only for a very short while. Ella and daughter, Jean assumed the management of the Post Office in 1937. They enjoyed that privilege for a few short years from 1937 to 1939. Running the Post Office was their primary source of income. The lives and fortunes of the Ryter family improved considerably at that point.

But hard times soon followed once again. Ella was diagnosed with a non-malignant tumor and required an operation in 1939. She had to give up the post office. Happily, her tumour was successfully removed but regrettably she was unable to return to the Post Office.

It wasn't until 1940 when Ella's family finances once again improved for the better. Ella applied for a widow's allowance. A Miss Hamilton then of Social Services reviewed her case. She inquired if Jean could assist Ella financially in any way. The government's purse strings were as tight as ever. Miss Hamilton wasn't about to dole out the government's money frivolously or lightly.

At this time, Jean worked at a boarding house in New Glasgow cleaning and cooking. Jean earned the princely sum of \$10 a month, board included. Miss Hamilton stated that surely Jean could use some of those earnings toward her mother's upkeep.

Unfortunately, Jean's meagre earnings barely supported her own needs much less her mother's. Jean worked hard for her keep and earned just enough to cover her living expenses while working in New Glasgow. It was a nil sum game. Jean was unable to help her mother financially in any way, shape or form. Sadly, it was just the way life was in the day!

Their situation was neither rare nor unusual. It was just the way life was. But it wasn't all misery, doom or gloom. There were good times too! You made them. They were found in the special occasions and in daily living, while at work, or at play. You made the most of what life had to offer which was so rich in many other ways!

For example, on the occasion when a young person hit the jackpot and came into a little money or could afford a treat, the princely sum of 25 cents could buy the simple pleasures of pop, chips, and a chocolate bar. Those were rare treats and were certainly appreciated. They were well-remembered. It made your day!

It was the day to day routine that made the difference too and that was a blessing for those living in rural Canada at the height of the Great Depression. It just wasn't seen that way at the time though.

There were about 15 families living at Halfway Cove when Leslie was a young boy. The principal occupation was fishing. There was some forestry too. But everyone was involved in some form of subsistence farming. It was the farm and the garden that put food on the table.

Leslie said, "the only dollars made is what came from the Chedabucto Bay". But for Halfway Cove when the war came little changed. The military presence in the area hadn't change their standard of living or way of life in any way. There was no increase of work. If you wanted a job or war work, you simply had to leave.

Halfway Cove was an isolated community. If you wanted heat in the winter, you cut your own firewood. There were no hydro lines or phones. The nearest electricity was at Queensport who made their power from a generator to operate the two fish plants located there.

Leslie's family hardly had two cents to rub together. But they were in the same boat as any other family! The residents of Halfway Cove all had acreage of some sort. It was the key to their survival from which they harvested wood, raised livestock, milked cows, and grew the gardens for their sustenance. They lived off the blessings of the land and sea, which were freely available to them through the fruit of their labours.

The typical farm ranged anywhere from 50 to 250 acres. But only 4-5 acres were cleared. The rest was woodland and swamp. Given this range and

diversity of holdings, Halfway Coves' residents were spread out about the landscape.

Characteristically, no one had electricity. Everybody had wood heat and wood stoves, so they were basically self-sufficient. There was no need to fear for lack of heat or light if the power went down. There was none after all! They all relied on woodstoves for heat and coal oil lamps for light. No one needed to run to the general store either. Everyone kept a cow for milk.

The Ryter family woodlot was essential for home heating that made them independent from other fuel needs and reduced their costs. But Leslie was too young to help harvest fuel wood that was necessary to heat the home. Leslie said, "Mother held an annual chopping party." It was a community event that she hosted for the help of about 4 or 5 neighbours and her brothers who would show up to bring in her wood for the winter.

It was the way in the community of Halfway Cove that they saw many go out of their way to help those in need. It wasn't money, it was their labour that ensured no one went without. The community kept everybody together and helped one another more so than the government did in the day.

The men would come, chop and buck the wood for this single mother and her family. In return Ella hosted a Jiggs dinner consisting of corned beef and cabbage. Supper was always ready by 4PM for the men who had started working at 8AM. Many were hungry by that time as most had not brought a lunch with them. "Mother always managed a huge dinner for them in appreciation for their help."

Times were tough, but the people of Halfway Cove were rich in other ways. The heart and soul of these little communities were their churches and schools. The schools were key institutions that connected families and communities daily.

The school at Halfway Cove was a typical one room school house. Leslie said that there was a school house in every village. The school was always located at the center of a community. The school was at the hub and always constructed within a 5-mile radius of the natural boundaries of every community.

This layout gave people options especially for those living on a community's edge. They had the option of choosing the nearest school.

They were able to split the walking distance for their children who went a school nearest the home. This cut the distance of a walk to between two and 2.5 miles.

The grades taught in these one room school houses ranged from grade one to ten. Those who desired a higher education beyond grade 10, went to Guysborough. There they finished Grade 11-12 advancing to senior matriculation, and if some could afford it, advanced to higher education beyond their community.

Leslie remembered his teachers at Halfway Cove. First there was Mr. Hardy, followed by Ms. Lila Heart, Sara MacAllister, Pearl Calhoon, Annie Sangster, Marion Cooke, and Lee Rhynold. Mrs. Sangster was most likely the school teacher in 1944.

The layout of Leslie's one room schoolhouse was typical of those built in the area. It was heated by wood fired in a long box stove. The stove was set in the middle of the room to maximize the radiation of heat. But the radiation of heat was often dubious at best.

There were 30-35 students of all grades in attendance. One year they even had a high of 49. No matter they all sat freezing in the cold of the school room that year!

During Leslie's first year at school the wood was brought in directly from the outdoors. The wood had been exposed to the elements. Often as not, it was wet, and snow covered.

The wood that first year had to be laid under or around the firebox to dry it off before it could be reasonably burned and provide heat. The snow would sizzle to water before drying out. Then it was finally thrown into the fire box to burn closer to the end of the day than the beginning. It proved to be a long cold day for all!

It was often two o'clock in the afternoon before the stove finally threw out enough heat to warm the small building. It was a problem. The children were cold and miserable for the better part of a day, and that was not very conducive to learning.

The problem was resolved very shortly the next summer before Leslie's second school year. A porch was built which added wood storage for the school house. The porch proved to be a welcome addition.

The students could now hang their coats in a warm spot. More importantly, the wood was now kept dry in the new storage bin and available for instant use. All that was needed was help of the older students in fetching the wood and stoking the fire. They would now finally be warm and comfortable.

But the resolution of the one problem led to another. The stove was dodgy. Leslie's teacher feared for the very lives of her charges. The stove's flu was an imminent fire hazard. The flu stretched through the ceiling to the roof. Both the flu and roof had seen better days. The roof was in very poor shape and was dry as a bone. It could be easily set afire by a random spark. The dubious nature of the stove pipes and flu necessitated a fire watch.

Each day the older boys, two at a time, would take turns up in the attic for an hour or two, keeping watch. Ironically, they sat there alone, with a lit coal lantern, in a very precarious position. In any case the school room was now a warm spot in winter. Their situation had materially improved with the addition of that porch. The fire watch made them safe. That was all that mattered.

School years have natural rhythms that unfold as highs and lows each season. Those rhythms are punctuated by work, holidays, and celebration. The one social occasion that young and old enjoyed to the fullest was Christmas. Christmas was a season well remembered by Leslie.

There wasn't much money in the Ryter house. But Christmas was always well turned out and was very memorable. Leslie never anticipated very much in his stocking. With only one parent, money was always tight, so he never expected much in the way of presents.

Christmas was all in the preparations. Leslie remembers one Christmas when a neighbour gave the family a duck for Christmas dinner. It was cleaned, roasted and enjoyed by all. It was the Christmas bird that truly made the day. It was a time for the family to gather round the feast and enjoy their blessings.

Christmas fowl played a big role in the enjoyment of the Ryter family's day. Leslie remembered keeping chickens as a young boy. They had always kept two roosters that grew pretty well. The question was always, which one would be chosen for Christmas dinner? Eventually one would be chosen and fattened each year. It brought a whole new meaning to the term "our favourite bird!"

But we have to look beyond the Christmas feast too. The day to day living was just as important. His family never went hungry. They were always able to snare rabbits, and augment rabbit with a little salt pork. The combination of the two made an excellent meal.

The family had an abundance too for they grew their own potatoes. The garden patch filled their pantry with abundance from what was preserved and harvested. It was their farm that ensured that they ate well and never went hungry.

In fact, no one in the community went hungry. They all lived this same lifestyle in self-sufficiency by growing their own. "If you could grow it, you raised it."

Leslie's family Christmas was helped in other ways. Ella's brother, Austin, lived and worked in Sydney Cape Breton. He generously gave his sister each Christmas \$20 from his wages. His gift always arrived just before Christmas. Twenty dollars was a considerable sum that bought quite a bit in the day.

So, Leslie and his sister Jean always had a little something at Christmas. Their stockings were hung and loaded with grapes, oranges and candy. Leslie fondly remembers his uncle's generosity.

Uncle Austin's generosity yielded some treasured Christmas presents over the years. Leslie remembered the simple little farm set he received as a present one Christmas day. He was a very young boy. The farm was made of metal and had lead mold figures of farm animals. The figures were animated and brightly painted. He remembers building the barn out of a cardboard box (probably the box that the figures came in)! The play farm enthralled him for hours.

Another year he received a novel metal fire engine. It was a remarkable piece of engineering. It shot sparks out of its chimney as he ran the engine

across the floor. The friction of the wheels on floor ignited a flint in its interior works that sent sparks up the spout as he whirled it round and round upon the floor. It was a magical toy!

Some Christmases weren't so magical though. Leslie recalled one Christmas when he was 6-7 yrs old when he had food poisoning. A doctor was required and was sent for. The doctor's verdict and diagnosis, Leslie had eaten some contaminated candy on an empty stomach that Christmas morning. Leslie was sick as a dog, but he fully recovered 2 days later. It's hard to speculate whether he ever ate candy so early on Christmas morning ever again... but I suspect that he did!

## Part 2 – Tragedy Strikes

In Part 1 of this article we left off with Leslie's fond remembrances of Christmas Past and his life and time at Halfway Cove as a young boy. Christmas was fondly remembered throughout the recounting of his story. But not all Christmases were remembered that way.

In all the jumbles of Christmas past, Leslie especially remembered the Christmas of 1944. It began as a simple one. He was much older, 14 at the time. There still would be presents from Santa under the tree. He did not recall what he received that year.

Leslie was now one of the older boys in the community. He recalled that Halfway Cove was very alive with the Christmas spirit that year. It was such a joyful time with everything leading up to the big event, Christmas day. Dances, pie socials, and live entertainments were held. A musician from Queensport showed up and played accordion that greatly entertained all in the community. It was such a joyful happy time.

The festive season was also festooned with recreations, sleigh riding, and coasting. There was joy and happiness in the air. Happier still, school was out on 20 Dec. The school already had its annual Christmas concert some days earlier.

There was nothing left to do now but count down the days to Christmas and enjoy the season; except that for Leslie, there were still chores to do! Leslie was now the man of the house. He was now responsible for chopping and stacking wood for the fire. He was now 14 years old and in a few short years, would soon be off in the world.

All his work was done by late in the day on 20 December. Leslie was out and about looking for his friends. It was dark and snowing. But death was lurking in the shadows and the Christmas season was about to turn deadly in the tiny community of Halfway Cove.

It happened that some servicemen were travelling through by truck that day and were on their way home for Christmas. They were heading to the station at Monastery for their trip home. They didn't make it past Halfway Cove. Their truck was involved in an accident.

Leslie said that there was heavy snow on the road at the time. The scene of the accident happened very near his home at Halfway Cove, one half mile away on the road where he lived heading towards Canso.



Photograph archives of Leslie Ryter with permission – Taken from Halfway Cove Bridge Circa 1927

Leslie had not witnessed the accident directly. He arrived on the scene after the fact. But he was privy to the events in its aftermath. From what he saw, the cause of the accident was obvious. The truck was proceeding down a hill with some military men in the box on the back of the

truck. The truck lost its footing and slipped off the road over an embankment and then rolled.

Leslie estimated that there were 4-6 men in the box from the casualties that were spread upon the ground. The accident happened very near a telephone/electrical pole on the road. That pole came to have a big role in the rescue later.



Looking towards Queensport – main body village today: This is the probable spot today. We're looking uphill here towards Queensport. The Army truck would have been proceeding downhill toward the bridge on the day. You can see at the top of the hill a curve bending to the right from this perspective. The truck would have been coming in the opposite direction around the curve, lost its footing and tumbled down over the embankment. The power/telephone line on the left lower corner of frames lines up hill with the details of the accident from Leslie's memory of the events in 1944.

Source: <https://www.google.ca/maps/@45.3462920,-61.3741132,870m/data=!3m1!1e3>

Leslie arrived on the scene shortly after the accident with 3 or 4 of his friends. He remembered Donald George, Donald's brother and several others being there too.

They were all eager to help in anyway. But they were much too young. They were only boys of 13-15 years of age and were told to stay out of the way.

However, while standing around, it was very clear to the boys that some men were trapped by what appeared to be a heavy box. The rescuers struggled in vain to move that heavy box. The box was being transported in the back of the truck with the airmen who were heading home for Christmas. The box was dislodged in the rollover.



An example of how men and material were transported  
Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

In the jumble and tumble of the rollover, it happened that the box subsequently trapped a leg of one of the passengers when it finally settled. It was an unfortunate circumstance. The man's leg

was suddenly lodged across the throat of Ed Flower. That leg was pinned and could not be dislodged because of the weight of the box. There was indeed a sense of urgency to the desperate efforts taken by the rescuers. But it was all to no avail, neither the leg nor the box could be moved in time.

Ed was pinned to the floor of the truck and life slowly eased out of him. A Bren gun carrier happened to be in the area and was brought into the fray. A rope and tackle set were hooked up between the truck and the Bren gun carrier. The Bren gun carrier then attempted to set the truck upright. It was not enough.

All efforts failed. They needed leverage. Finally, they realized that a telephone pole could be used as leverage point. The block and tackle were reset, and another attempt successfully dislodged and set the truck upright. The pressure and strain on the pinned leg was gone and the box easily removed. But the effort was far too late for Ed Flower. By this time Ed Flower was dead, the life choked out of him.

Leslie witnessed the extraction of Ed Flower's body. Ed's lifeless body lay on the ground. His face was blue as he laid there peacefully in the headlights of the rescue vehicles upon the cold winter ground. It was dark and gloomy beyond those headlights.

Leslie's opinion and that shared by many there, was that this accident was both a needless and a senseless tragedy. It was the box of heavy equipment in the back that was the problem. The accident would have been survivable if the box hadn't been there.

The truck wasn't travelling at great speed because of the snow on the road. It simply slipped over the edge and tumbled down the ditch, pitching all its contents to one side. If its cargo was all men, they simply would have been tossed about like rag dolls.

Our servicemen probably would have laughed it off, dusted themselves off and gotten on their way. The box though made it a deadly enterprise. The box was an immovable projectile and where it finally rested had tragic consequences.



No 5 Radar Unit Stake truck stuck in the snow after heavy storm – Port Felix  
Mickey Stevens photograph – Archives of Mary Richard with permission

It was a sad Christmas. Nature played a cruel trick of fate. No 5 Radar Unit's own transport was still stuck in the snow because of a blizzard the day before. The vehicle wasn't

cleared in time for the transport to Monastery.

The arrangements made with the Army to hitch the ride to the station had unintended consequences for all. There was no malice in the act. It was simply a goodwill gesture to aid other service men to get them home and on their way in time for Christmas. "Getting home for Christmas" was the one desire and hope shared by all, but duty often intervened. So, if they

could make just one serviceman happy that Christmas, it was worth helping out.

The truck used to transport the men was merely on a routine service run. The men sat in the back amongst the paraphernalia of war to get to their destination. It was a normal procedure. All this was done with good intentions when suddenly fate lent a hand. Fate dashed all those good intentions that lead to disaster. The scene of the event remains with Leslie to this very day.

Two short years later Leslie turned 16 and would leave Halfway Cove. He quit school and went to work full time in 1947. His first job was building highways in Guysborough County. He worked on the stretch from Guysborough to Canso picking stones for the road as there was no crushed gravel available at the time. That material was surface mined in the area of Dort Cove and Halfway Cove. It was hard work as they used only shovels. He did this for two months then went to work with his brother-in-law land surveying and working on a transit crew.



Photograph archives of Leslie Ryter with permission – a younger Leslie Ryter with his first car a 1936 Plymouth (Circa 1953)

Leslie worked a number of jobs and moved from opportunity to opportunity to improve his lot in or near Guysborough County. But he finally took the big plunge when he was 25 Years old. Leslie moved to Halifax. He worked at a number of jobs there, first at Perley Brothers doing maintenance on Naval Ships (9 months), then at Halifax Wholesale, where he subsequently was transferred to Halifax Wholesale (New Glasgow depot) for a time.

Leslie was a hardworking man. He took whatever he could to make a living. His big break came in 1958. He landed a job

at the Halifax Vocational School, then on Bell's Road. Leslie worked there for 25 years. It proved to be a fortuitous opportunity for this is where he met his wife Mary. They married and raised a family (1 girl – 4 boys).

Looking back over old times, Leslie remembers his starting salary in 1958 at the Vocational School. It was \$1950 annually. It wasn't enough to sustain his growing family, so he started a small moving business on the side to supplement his income. The job at the Vocational School and the moving business proved to be the right combination to buying their first home.

Like many families in the aftermath of the Second World War, Leslie and Mary pinched pennies and saved the \$150 down payment to purchase their first family home in Dartmouth. It was valued at \$1500. They bought it in 1966 and lived there until 1981.

Leslie looking to his retirement wanted to return to Halfway Cove and started building a home there in 1980. His wife Mary moved in on its completion in 1981 but Leslie had to remain in Halifax for a time. He finally returned to Halfway Cove for good in 1982 when he was able to retire from the Vocational School.

Leslie then in his early 50's, took a job working watch on fire towers each summer off Lundy Road. He did this for 9 fire seasons until he reached 60 years old. It was a good life.

Leslie and Mary lived happily at Halfway Cove until very recently. They now reside at Antigonish Manor. They moved there about a year ago but still have many fond memories of home in Halfway Cove. Leslie said, "I am pretty satisfied with all the blessings in my life, but I do miss the hunting and the fishing!"

Leslie has reflected on that Christmas of 1944 many times over the years. "I have been very fortunate that tragedy of such a nature has never touched my family. My mother and her brother all lived well into their 80's and all had a full and happy life. All my children are about me. I often wondered about the man and his family who died in Halfway Cove that Christmas. They were not so fortunate. I am truly blessed."

Leslie has few regrets but one. The thing he misses the most are the people in his life. He counts his blessings for those who were a part of his life and are now gone. He fondly remembers his mother Ella and uncles Austin and Phillip. He still has the pleasure of his sister Jean's company. Leslie and Jean still talk on the phone quite regularly. But he so misses the

company of friends now passed on. He remembers Halfway Cove as “The place I remember.”

## **6. “A Memory Stirred”**

The Story of HMCS Esquimalt - 16 April 1945

Prepared by Gerry Madigan  
29 Jan 2017

# Stories Of Heroism As Minesweeper Is Lost 1945

By ERIC DENNIS  
Staff Writer, The Halifax Herald

Canadian navy men do not whimper when they die in action.

Sailors of the torpedoed minesweeper, H.M.C.S. Esquimalt, who perished in the icy cold of the North Atlantic's waters while waiting for rescue gave up their lives with smiles and prayers on their lips for their comrades and grief in their hearts, not for themselves but for the loved ones being left behind.

Gripping tales of how the fighting men went to their deaths as they lay in the bottom of carleyfloats tossed about on the icy seas were told by their surviving shipmates while recovering in a Royal Canadian Navy Hospital.

"They kept up their determination to the last—until they could fight for life no longer and then, knowing death was coming, said good-bye to us and their families or girl friends," said Able Seaman Frank Smith of Edmonton, one of the 27 survivors of the 78-man crew.

Most stirring of all, perhaps, were the last moments of Huntley Fanning of Drum Head, Guysboro County, who had been promoted to Chief Electrical Artificer only the night before the torpedoing.

As he lay with his head huddled against Smith's shoulder and with his body numbed beyond all further suffering he spoke to his fiancée back in his Nova Scotia home town whom he was to have married on his next leave.

"It looks as if we are not going to make it. I guess we won't be able to get married this time," the dying sailor whispered. A few brief moments of silence followed as his buddies gazed into one another's

eyes, then a "So long, fellows; keep plugging" and his body stilled into death.

"He had kept telling us about the girl he was going to marry when he got home next leave and said we had to make it because he didn't want to let her down. He kept asking if there was a ship in sight. It was awfully hard to tell him there wasn't any ship coming. Five minutes or so before he went he handed us his paddle and said he was too cold to use it anymore. He seemed to be talking more to his girl friend than to us in his last few moments."

"There was no whining among the fellows out there. They knew what was coming and they went out quietly," said Able Seaman Joseph Wilson of Prince Albert, Sask., and Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

Seven out of the 13 on his carleyfloat died.

"Some just passed out—too darn cold to speak. One fellow was so determined to live he got up and said 'There is no future in this' and then jumped overboard and started swimming. He went down a few minutes later while he was trying to get back to the float," he recalled.

A young stoker, Jimmy Devons of Port Arthur, Ont. and Halifax, died with his head in Able Seaman Smith's lap asking his buddy to say good-bye to his wife for him.

"He kept asking if there was a ship in sight and then when he knew he was going asked me to carry the message to his wife if I got through," Smith said.

Many of the Esquimalt's crew died in the water-filled rafts while waiting for help which did not come for six hours.

*Huntley Fanning*

From Archives of Norma Cooke, Isaac Harbour, NS from which this account was drafted

## Introduction

The Second World War has left few places in Canada untouched in its wake. That was very easy to see in the numerous casualty lists published in so many newspapers over the war years. There wasn't a day that went by without at least one story of its trials. The story of the sinking of HMCS Esquimalt, 16 April 1945 was one such example.

HMCS Esquimalt's loss on 16 April 1945 was felt far and wide across this great country. Perhaps it was the sad realization that Esquimalt's loss happened so close in the final days of the war. The very promise of peace was felt in the air. But Esquimalt's tragic loss left many families bereft.

The memory of HMCS Esquimalt was recently stirred by an old news

clipping received from Norma Cooke of Isaac Harbour in "Stories of Heroism as Minesweeper is lost".

This clipping was written upon the death of Huntley Fanning of Drumhead, NS lost aboard HMCS Esquimalt. It also stirred a long-forgotten memory of mine.

### A Memory Stirred

Frederick Percy Mimee, a relative of my family, was one of the lucky handful of survivors left alive on the HMCS Esquimalt that day. Fred was the husband of my mother's cousin Geraldine. The Mimee family of five boys and one girl lived on 5219 Orleans Street in Montreal's East end, not very far from my family's home then on 18<sup>th</sup> Ave Rosemount, only two blocks over.<sup>84</sup>

We remained close all the years we lived in Montreal, sharing the same school, church, and activities. But we drifted apart as our families moved separately, mine to the North Shore of Quebec in 1964. The Mimee family moved out of Rosemount in the 70's then to Ontario in the 80's. We then saw less and less of one another because of these moves, and over the years simply lost touch until recently.

My mother, Shirley shared this thought in passing one day shortly before we left Montreal: Uncle Fred was a survivor. Fred was one of the few survivors left on HMCS Esquimalt torpedoed just outside of Halifax very near the end of the war.

This lingering memory was stirred by Norma Cooke's clipping that began what was to be a personal journey of discovery. This journey was fueled by a request following my recent story on Halfway Cove "The Place I Remember". Leslie Ryter who was featured in that story asked me to investigate a submarine attack on a naval vessel near Sydney, NS at some time during the war.

My paternal Uncle Frank served on HMCS Medicine Hat at Sydney, NS during this period. So, I called and interviewed my uncle, Frank Madigan,

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<sup>84</sup> Telephone Conversation Brian Mimee/ Gerry Madigan 17 January 20125

which not only yielded some interesting insights on his war service, but also an eye witness account to the events preceding HMCS Esquimalt's loss.

The confluence of these many threads culminated at one common point, HMCS Esquimalt, 16 April 1945, the tragic story of survival and heroism in its final hours.

## 16 April 1945

April 16, 1945 was purported to have been a very nice, calm day. Smooth sailing was expected off Halifax Harbour. There was nothing to suggest that HMCS Esquimalt was to come to any harm. Yes, there were indeed warnings of U-boats in the area, but the war in Europe was so close to the end. Surely nothing would happen now?

A great sense of optimism hung in the air. The growing optimism for the end led many to believe that the war was already won, a done deal if you will. The promise of a happy future loomed in the minds and hearts of all.

Uncle Frank was a sailor aboard his second ship, HMCS Dundas tied up in Halifax 15-16 April 1945. His ship was berthed right next to HMCS Esquimalt.<sup>85</sup> Frank was one of Dundas' signallers.



Photo Gerry Madigan, family archives

Uncle Frank remembered 15 April 1945 as Esquimalt was about to put to sea that day. Esquimalt carried a new crewmember, a fellow signaller from Dundas, cross posted to Esquimalt to fill a vacant billet. The memory of the chap's name now escapes him, but he does remember that this signaller came from western Canada. More

<sup>85</sup> Telephone Interview Frank Madigan, Uncle with GD Madigan, 4 Jan 2017 @1100 hrs

importantly to his recollection was the fact that the signaller could not swim.<sup>86</sup>

There were six communication specialists aboard HMCS Esquimalt. The trade group included signallers, coders, and telegraphists, when she was torpedoed. This group included Gregory Joseph Clancy (20 -Toronto, ON (deceased)), Byron Ross Downie (23 - Vancouver, BC (deceased)), William James Henderson (23 - Winnipeg, MB (survived)), Edward John Granahan (25 - Toronto, ON (deceased)), John Hamish Stafford (24 - Victoria, BC (deceased)), and Edward McGrath (age unknown -St James, MB (survived)). Of the six, only Henderson and McGrath, both prairie boys, were lucky enough to have survived the coming ordeal.<sup>87</sup>

Frank Madigan's description narrows down the unknown posted signaler to be most likely either William James Henderson of Winnipeg or Edward McGrath of St James, Manitoba.

Uncle Frank recalled that whoever the incumbent was, whether the young Henderson or McGrath, the draft to the Esquimalt offered a unique opportunity. The Esquimalt was slated to protect a convoy overseas whose terminal point was Scotland.

The allure of Scotland was, for either Henderson or McGrath, a matter of special importance. Scotland was the "ancestral home". It seemed that this

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<sup>86</sup> Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax Herald, Tuesday - May 8, 1945, **List of Casualties In Esquimalt Sinking are Announced by Navy, Ottawa - May 7** , [Archiver](#) > [NOVEMBERA-SCOTIA](#) > [2002-10](#) > 1034422759,

<http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/NOVEMBERA-SCOTIA/2002-10/1034422759>

Accessed: 3 Jan 2017

<sup>87</sup> An Ancestry.com community, Roots web, NOVEMBERA-SCOTIA-L Archives, [Archiver](#) > [NOVEMBERA-SCOTIA](#) > [2002-10](#) > 1034422759, Halifax Herald, **List of Casualties In Esquimalt Sinking are Announced by Navy Ottawa - May 7**, 8 May 1945

Source: <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/NOVEMBERA-SCOTIA/2002-10/1034422759>

Accessed: 10 Jan 2017

was the last remaining opportunity to visit there before the war ended. But the war was far from over at that point.<sup>88</sup>

### The Promise

The promise of a posting to Esquimalt heading overseas and to Scotland proved too alluring for one young man. The journey, despite the risks, beckoned one sailor to come forward to fill a vacant signal billet aboard Esquimalt. It was the vacancy and the opportunity, that was the quid pro quo for taking the risk.

Fate played a role too. It could have easily have been my Uncle Frank had not someone stepped forward and volunteered. After all there was a ship to run and war to fight.

A ship, large or small, was a small community. It took many skills to make Esquimalt a combat ready entity. Apart from the obvious need for Captains, XO's, and combat officers, it took many skills and trades too.

The trades found in small, thriving communities ashore were very much in demand afloat too. They included a broad spectrum; from electricians, mechanics, cooks, waiters, to shop keepers, plumbers, lamp-trimmers, clerks, butchers, sail makers, and postal clerks.<sup>89</sup>

They all were needed. They all were indispensable in their own way! It was the combination necessary toward building a combat team necessary for a fighting unit. It's what it took to make an efficient ship.<sup>90</sup>

These trades and skills were drawn from across Canada. So, a ship was a diverse melting pot of Canadian culture well before that terminology became seared in our national psyche.

A ship also tied the families, friends and love ones ashore with those serving on it to parts near and far and wide across Canada. After all a ship

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<sup>88</sup> Hal Lawrence, **A Bloody War— One Man's Memories of the Canadian Navy 1939-45**, MacMillan of Canada, Toronto, 1979, Pg. 186

<sup>89</sup> Ibid Lawrence, 1979, pg. 189

<sup>90</sup> Ibid Lawrence, 1979, pg. 188-189

carried their friends and loved ones. These were the bonds that tied so many Canadian families to their ships and to their ship's fate!



*Photo courtesy of William R. Henderson  
Permission to use "For Prosperity's Sake"*

A fighting ship was a living entity. It had a life and pulse of its own. Apart from the Captain and XO, the person or trade most likely to have a sense of that pulse was the ship's signaller.

Communications were the ship's lifeblood.<sup>91</sup> That was to be young Henderson's function aboard HMCS Esquimalt. It was a role of great responsibility, and a position of great trust for the young man of twenty-three.

The signal log held the record of the ship's history so had to be scrupulously accurate and well maintained. The signal log constantly unfolded as it chronicled daily life.

The log detailed and proscribed the lives of its crew; from who was in hospital, to who was released, who was in jail, or who was promoted or

posted. Messages were the means of notification detailing who would come and who would go.<sup>92</sup> Communications commanded the ship's fate, where it would fight and possibly die too.

The signaller was amongst the first to know all of this and how the ship was performing her duty. Young Henderson was a part of a brotherhood in the fabric of his ship that passed along this lifeblood that made a ship "go"!

Whoever took the posting to Esquimalt, Frank Madigan questioned the man before leaving Dundas, "Are you sure?" This posting didn't seem to be such a good idea to Frank. In reply he remembered, "Yes, I'm sure."

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid Lawrence, 1979, pg. 189

<sup>92</sup> Ibid Lawrence, 1979, pg. 189

Frank wished his friend well, and said, “Then be sure to drop me a line when you get there,” and “Good luck!”

My uncle Frank saw Esquimalt slip its moorings the evening of 15 April 1945 as Esquimalt put to sea. Esquimalt moved away out of his sight and left Halifax Harbour in the dark of night. Esquimalt first conducted an anti-submarine patrol in the approaches, and then finally was to rendezvous with its sister ship, HMCS Sarnia later on the sixteenth.<sup>93</sup>

The Esquimalt was torpedoed and sunk a short time later. Young Henderson soon found himself clinging for his life in a Carley float along with 26 others who managed to survive that day.<sup>94</sup>

### Sketch of HMCS Esquimalt

The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) began the war in 1939 with a mere 13 vessels but grew in strength to nearly 400 vessels with 100,000 uniformed men and women by war’s end. A naval building program helped Canada to build the fourth largest navy in the world.<sup>95</sup>

HMCS Esquimalt was amongst the many class of ships built in Canadian Shipyards during the Second World War. Canada built corvettes, motor torpedo boats, tenders and other vessels in addition to the minesweepers.

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<sup>93</sup> The Canadian Encyclopedia, **Sinking of HMCS Esquimalt**,

Source: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sinking-of-hmcs-esquimalt/>

Accessed: 9 Jan 2017

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, An Ancestry.com community, Halifax Herald, Dyan Matheson, **Esquimalt Casualties**, 8 May 1945

<sup>95</sup> Canada, Royal Canadian Navy, **History of the Battle of the Atlantic**, 2015-06-01

Source: <http://www.navy-marine.forces.gc.ca/en/navy-life/history-view.page?doc=history-of-the-battle-of-the-atlantic/hujqx8pp>

Esquimalt was a Bangor Class Minesweeper. <sup>96</sup> Each type has its own history to tell.



Source: *For Posterity's Sake* website, *HMCS ESQUIMALT J272*,  
Copyright unknown

HMCS Esquimalt had five commanding officers over its life. Lt F.J.L. Davis, RCNR was its first commanding officer upon commissioning. He commanded Esquimalt when it first arrived at Halifax on 21 November 1942. <sup>97</sup>

Esquimalt operated primarily as an anti-submarine escort although it was designed as a minesweeper. Esquimalt mounted a capable defence, armed with a 12-pounder gun, a 2-pounder, two 20 millimetre Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns, and she carried seventy depth charges. <sup>98</sup> HMCS Esquimalt truly was a formidable weapon of war.

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<sup>96</sup> A Royal Canadian Navy Historical Project, *For Posterity's Sake*, *Ship Index* ,2002-2016  
<http://forposterityssake.ca/RCN-SHIP-INDEX.htm>

Accessed: 10 Jan 2017

<sup>97</sup> Ibid *For Posterity's Sake*, *HMCS ESQUIMALT J272*

<sup>98</sup> Ibid Fisher, 1997

HMCS Esquimalt spent a great deal of time at sea while on active service. Lt. Gordon Ball, RCNVR, of Toronto recounted some of the ship's history at a Toronto Bond Rally on 11 May 1945.

(Ball) "I would like to tell you of one little escapade off Newfoundland. We had already had a submarine report, and it was time for me to go off watch. I tried to get some sleep, but at 2 o'clock the action bell rang through the ship, and in 1 minute 30 seconds every man was at his post."

"The fog had closed in as the submarine surfaced 500 yards off our stern, but we could not see a single thing. It was like being trapped in a dark room with a murderer. He can't see you, and you can't see him, and neither of you can do a thing. There was a heavy sea running, and after half an hour everyone's nerves were quite on edge".<sup>99</sup>

HMCS Esquimalt engaged that submarine. Ball said, "it was presumed sunk as there was no further activity in the area following HMCS Esquimalt's attack".

Ball's observations paints HMCS Esquimalt as a hardworking ship that was dispatched to dangerous areas, areas perhaps where minesweepers should not have been deployed but were deployed out of sheer necessity:

"Another time we were up in the Arctic circle and were blocked in by ice floes for 14 days. We could not move either forward or backward and had to sit there and stand watch for the entire two weeks. You get to know your shipmates pretty well in that time."<sup>100</sup>

No matter the punishment, HMCS Esquimalt served her crew well and always brought them home safely. There was a price to pay for all this punishment though.

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<sup>99</sup> Anon. Esquimalt Officer tells of Heroism when vessel sunk, Globe and Mail, 12 May 1945; Canada, Canadian War Museum Archives, 149, War, European, 1939, Canada, Navy, Minesweeper, Esquimalt

Source: <http://collections.civilisations.ca/warclip/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=5057698>

Accessed: 11 Jan 2017

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, Esquimalt Officer tells of Heroism when vessel sunk, 12 May 1945

HMCS Esquimalt was chronically plagued by many mechanical problems. She was constantly under repair for one thing and/or another, undergoing extensive refits, and went into refit in Halifax, March 1943. But she was still beset by continuing problems, and brought back in, spending most of May 1943 under repair.<sup>101</sup>

Once fully repaired, HMCS Esquimalt was re-assigned but this time to the Newfoundland Force. She served there until September 1944 when she was subsequently transferred back to Halifax to serve in its “Local Defence Force”. And before she could do so, HMCS Esquimalt underwent another three-month refit upon reaching Halifax Harbour that September.<sup>102</sup>

Esquimalt’s commanding officer was replaced during this time. Lt Robert Cunningham MacMillan, DSC, RCNVR assumed command on 02 February 1945 as part of a routine transfer. MacMillan would be Esquimalt’s last commanding officer.

MacMillan was a very distinguished and an experienced officer. But disaster befell him and Esquimalt on 16 April 1945. MacMillan’s command was torpedoed and sunk beneath him. U-190, Esquimalt’s adversary, lay a mere five miles off Chebucto Head, near Halifax when this happened. Forty-Four of Esquimalt’s crew were doomed to die that day.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid For Posterity's Sake, *HMCS ESQUIMALT J272*

<sup>102</sup> Ibid For Posterity's Sake, *HMCS ESQUIMALT J272*

<sup>103</sup> Ibid For Posterity's Sake, *HMCS ESQUIMALT J272*

## The Adversary U-190

There was a new U-boat threat that came with a change of tactics that was very dangerous to Allied vessels in 1945. The U-boat now had a new technical advantage of Schnorchel, which cloaked its operations.

Schnorchel, essentially an air pipe to the surface, allowed U-boats to operate stealthily while running sub-surfaced when charging the boat's batteries. Schnorchel thus reduced a U-boat's target profile to the area of the surfaced air pipe. A U-boat with this modification proved very hard and difficult to spot.

Esquimalt's adversary, U-190, was now commanded by Oblt. Hans-Erwin Reith. U-190 was one of the eighty-seven Type IXC/40 then in service, April 1945.



*Courtesy of Wikipedia –  
U-190 June 1945<sup>1</sup>*

Fitted with the Schnorchel underwater-breathing apparatus, U-190 had a range of 13,850 miles while cruising at 10 knots. U-190 too was equipped with a formidable array of 22 torpedoes, four loaded in the bow and two loaded in the stern tubes.<sup>104</sup>

U-190 conducted only six active service patrols. It was employed as a training vessel for most of the war. Its limited successes included one ship of 7015 GRT and a warship of 590 tons. The latter warship was to be, unfortunately, HMCS Esquimalt on 16 April 1945.<sup>105</sup>

In early April 1945, Reith lay somewhere in wait just off Nova Scotia. Reith sighted two merchant ships on April 12<sup>th</sup> and attacked both with torpedoes. His attacks failed but U-190's presence from then on was known to all. Reith moved ever closer to Halifax during the night of 15/16 April for better opportunities.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid U-boat.net

<sup>105</sup> Ibid U-boat.net

<sup>106</sup> Ibid Fisher, 1997

Just as U-190 made its moved towards Halifax, the hands of fate brought HMCS Esquimalt towards U-190's sights. On the night of 15 April, Frank Madigan bade a shipmate farewell, good luck and god speed on posting to Esquimalt when Esquimalt left Halifax Harbour and made its way towards its final destiny.

### Aboard HMCS Esquimalt and the Encounter with U-190

Esquimalt conducted a routine anti-submarine patrol in consort with HMCS Sarnia the evening of 15/16 April 1945. The plan was simple. Both were to carry out a sweep, then rendezvous off Chebucto Head at Buoy "C" the following morning. <sup>107</sup> HMCS Esquimalt never made that rendezvous.

HMCS Esquimalt's routine patrol the night of 15-16 April began quietly enough. Towards dawn at 0600hrs, Lt John Smart, officer of the watch ordered the depth charge crew to stations. Lt Smart did not bring the ship to general action stations at the change of the watch.

Lt Smart was simply following routine procedures at the changing of a watch. Nothing untoward was expected or in the offing at that time. It had been a quiet, uneventful night.

The sea was calm, and all eyes were directed to the light ship off the Harbour only some three miles way. The depth charge crew was stood down from action stations ten minutes later at 0610hrs. The old watch was finally relieved, and the new watch undertaken without incident. <sup>108</sup>

Those aboard Esquimalt were unaware of the looming presence of U-190 or the menace that lay immediately beneath them. But U-190 was very much aware of Esquimalt's presence. Esquimalt pinged its sonar as it patrolled all about the approaches that night.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid Fisher, 1997

<sup>108</sup> Ibid Fisher, 1997

Those aboard U-190 listened intently as the Esquimalt appeared to be drawing ever so nearer, circling, and then paused overhead. It must have seemed an eternity. HMCS Esquimalt circled overhead U-boat for 10 long minutes. No attack followed.

Reith took U-190 up to periscope depth for a quick look around after a while. HMCS Esquimalt was seen off in the distance at a range of 1000-2000 meters, moving away from him. Esquimalt was too close for his comfort. But when the Esquimalt suddenly reversed course, and rapidly made for U-190's position, Reith must have assumed that he was under attack. Reith launched an acoustic homing torpedo towards the approaching Esquimalt from his stern tube.

All hell summarily broke loose. U-190's torpedo ripped into the Esquimalt's hull on its starboard side at approximately 0630 hrs. Water flooded in, the ship was settling and rapidly sinking. Esquimalt listed to starboard, then its emergency lights suddenly failed.

MacMillan, HMCS Esquimalt's commanding officer, emerged from below, his situation was clear. MacMillan had little choice but to give an order to abandon ship. His signalman was stunned by the explosion. No distress signals were sent and, more importantly, no other crew member had the presence of mind to launch any distress flares to draw the nearby light ship's attention to Esquimalt's immediate plight.

The ship sunk so rapidly that the lifeboats became trapped in their davits. Only four Carley floats were successfully deployed. The surviving crew plunged into the icy April waters with little clothing on them and made their way in the frigid waters towards the safety of the Carley floats. It was their only hope of survival.<sup>109</sup>

### Chaos in the aftermath

Terry Manuel remembered that change of the watch. Terry was 20 years old and the Ship's writer. He was just released from duty at approximately

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid Fisher, 1997

0610 hrs. He was on the dark-watch and slipped below to his berth in the Chief and PO's mess for a much-needed rest. Terry stripped off before going to ground and was fixing his lifejacket to use as a pillow.<sup>110</sup>

As soon as Terry's head hit the pillow, he heard a large crash. He assumed it was just the minesweeping gear shifting about up on deck. But the ship shook violently, listed and began to keel over toward the portside.<sup>111</sup>

Terry immediately jumped from his bunk and made his way up an emergency hatch. But that way was blocked, the hatch wouldn't budge. The plates of the ship's deck buckled over the hatch sealing Terry and others in. It was a desperate situation.

Terry literally fell back down into the communications mess. He struggled up another escape hatchway towards another companionway. This one was free from obstruction. Finally, there was hope of escape! But once more Terry was thrown back down into his sinking ship.<sup>112</sup>

The situation was total chaos. Men desperately struggled trying to get out. Just as Terry climbed up the hatch almost to the safety of the free companionway, Petty Officer Carl Jacques of Nova Scotia came up and vaulted over his shoulder. The force of Jacques' vault pushed Terry backwards. He tumbled back down into the mess that now was quickly filling with the sea.

Terry finally managed to escape, but as he did, the ship rolled and sank beneath him.<sup>113</sup> He was thrown violently into the water by the force of the rolling ship. He and another sailor swam for it. They both managed to find a single floating lifejacket. There they clung desperately until it too became so water logged, it began to sink, taking both beneath the waves with it.

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<sup>110</sup> Nathan M. Greenfield, *The Battle of the St Lawrence – The Second World War in Canada*, Harper Collins Publishers Ltd, 2004, pg. 238-239

<sup>111</sup> Ibid Greenfield, Pg. 238-239

<sup>112</sup> Ibid Greenfield, Pg. 238-239

<sup>113</sup> Ibid Greenfield, Pg. 238-239

Terry estimated that it was just a mere four short minutes before the lifejacket gave out. Terry clung to his companion. Carl Jacques saw their imminent peril. Jacques dove into the water, dragged them and placed them aboard the Carley float.<sup>114</sup> Carl Jacques saved Terry's life that day.

Terry's Carley float carried 18 other survivors. It was going to be a long day. Sadly 10 minutes later, Carl Jacques succumbed to the cold of the frigid waters. Jacques' self-sacrifice and bravery saved Terry.<sup>115</sup>

Terry remembered "There were 18 of us in and around the float in terribly cold water. It didn't take long for the water chilled by the ice currents that came down from the Arctic, to take its toll. One by one, men around me died and floated off. Carl Jacques was one of them."<sup>116</sup>

Terry recalled two overflights of passing RCAF aircraft. The first overflight occurred only an hour after Esquimalt sunk at around 0700hrs. Esquimalt's surviving men waved frantically for help. The overflying aircraft ignored the desperate men. The aircrew assumed the waving men to be simply fisherman who routinely waved as they flew by while on patrol.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid Greenfield, Pg. 238-239

<sup>115</sup> Ibid Greenfield, Pg. 238-239

<sup>116</sup> Ibid Greenfield, Pg. 238-239

<sup>117</sup> Ibid Greenfield, Pg.239



*Ventura Bomber – type flown at Dartmouth NS Venturas from 145 BR Squadron flew Harbour Entrance Patrols off the Halifax harbour <sup>1</sup> DND Historic photograph, Lockheed Ventura*

Rescue appeared to be at hand once more at approximately 0800 hours. The group sighted a minesweeper off in the distance. It came close and was almost within shouting distance. Once again, the men tried vainly, in utter desperation, to attract the attention of this passing ship. But the ship and the hope of their rescue, simply turned away, not spotting the now desperate men.<sup>118</sup>

More died while waiting. Finally, seven hours later, Esquimalt was spotted by a second plane. HMCS Sarnia arrived on the scene soon after and began the grim task of picking up the dead and Esquimalt's remaining 27 survivors.<sup>119</sup>

It was an agonizing day, a living hell. Much suffering occurred, men died slowly and in agony. Rescue was often seen and then lost. It was frustrating, rescue was always so close by!

HMCS Sarnia was only just a few miles way patrolling and prowling about the East Halifax lightship. But the Sarnia was unaware of Esquimalt's plight. How could Sarnia know? No distress signal had been sent, nor was any flare raised by the Esquimalt in the aftermath of its torpedoing.<sup>120</sup>

The authorities knew that something was amiss though. No one ashore informed Sarnia of the fact that Esquimalt had not been heard from, that she was unaccounted for, and that she was likely missing as one reporting deadline passed after another.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid Greenfield, Pg.239

<sup>119</sup> Ibid Greenfield, Pg.239

<sup>120</sup> James B. Lamb, **On the Triangle Run**, MacMillan Of Canada, 1986, Pg. 221

<sup>121</sup> The Sarnia Journal, Phil Egan, **Sister ships in peril on a cold, gray sea**, 11 April 2016

Source: <http://thesarniajournal.ca/sister-ships-in-peril-on-a-cold-gray-sea/>

Accessed: 15 Jan 2015

In the six to seven hours of this misery, a few survivors sensed their lives ebbing away. Some left messages of farewell with comrades for family or a sweetheart. Remembered amongst those who left such messages were Seaman Don White of Peterborough, Ontario and Huntly Fanning of Drumhead, Nova Scotia.<sup>122</sup>

The pain of the cold waters proved to be too excruciating. Delirium drove others into the sea. A tenacious few grimly clung to life and did so for as long as their hearts could hold out. These were the few finally rescued by the Sarnia, where it was said, “the dead outnumbered the living”.<sup>123</sup>

### HMCS Sarnia’s Story

HMCS Sarnia and Esquimalt were sister ships. Fittingly, Sarnia came to the rescue of Esquimalt on 16 April 1945. Both had been assigned to conduct a radar sweep ahead of a convoy leaving from Halifax later that day.<sup>124</sup>

The two ships were scheduled to rendezvous at sea at 8 a.m. once the sweep was done. Both ships were aware that there were at least two German submarines lurking in the area.<sup>125</sup>

HMCS Esquimalt failed to rendezvous as scheduled. Sarnia became concerned and vainly tried to reach Esquimalt by radio. But Esquimalt had already been sunk by 6:30 am.

Failing radio contact, Sarnia initiated a search on its own, but those efforts were twice delayed. Sarnia detected the presence of U-boats. Sarnia pursued those contacts as its first duty. It attacked the contacts with depth charges but to no avail.<sup>126</sup>

This may explain why the Esquimalt’s survivors twice saw a ship seemingly turning away. By now Esquimalt’s survivors had been in the water for over six hours. Sixteen men succumbed to hypothermia and exposure during this time.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid Lamb, pg. 222

<sup>123</sup> Ibid Lamb, pg. 222

<sup>124</sup> ibid Phil Egan,11 April 2016

<sup>125</sup> ibid Phil Egan,11 April 2016

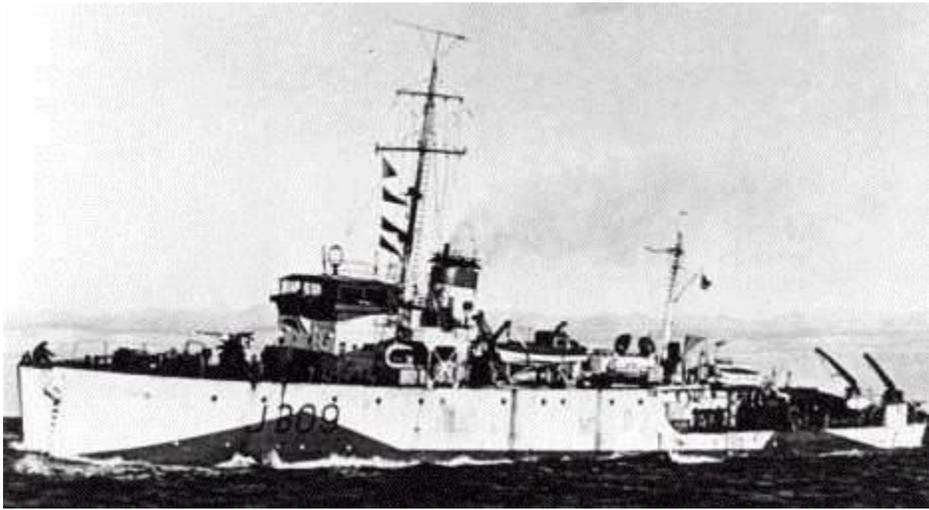
<sup>126</sup> ibid Phil Egan,11 April 2016

<sup>127</sup> ibid Phil Egan,11 April 2016

At long last Esquimalt's survivors were finally spotted. Sarnia approached and came to a full stop leaving Sarnia completely defenseless and exposed to submarine attack. Sarnia rescued twenty-seven Canadian sailors and reclaimed some bodies floating there in the sea.<sup>128</sup>

John Stokes, a stoker petty officer aboard Sarnia, remembered the plan to rendezvous and the events leading to the rescue. Sarnia was to meet with Esquimalt at a certain time and area on the ocean just outside of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Sarnia was in position at the assigned time and location, but the Esquimalt had failed to show up.<sup>129</sup>

Sarnia patrolled around for a while longer, then its captain decided that to take a wider berth to see if Esquimalt could be located. Sarnia was not very far away from the Halifax [East] Light Vessel at the time.<sup>130</sup>



*With permission For Posterity's Sake, HMCS Sarnia J309*

Sarnia finally received notification of Esquimalt's plight and its precise location. Sarnia immediately went to the rescue, finding the Carley floats with Esquimalt's survivors on it.

Sarnia's lifeboat crews were dispatched and approached the Carley floats independently from the ship. John Stokes remained aboard the Sarnia and observed two Carley floats tied together with a group of survivors.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *ibid* Phil Egan, 11 April 2016

<sup>129</sup> [Story and/or images courtesy of John Stokes. The Memory Project. Historica Canada. 2017](#)

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid* John Stokes, 2017

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid* John Stokes, 2017



*Source: Story and/or images courtesy of John Stokes. The Memory Project. Historica Canada.*

Sarnia pulled alongside and lowered its scramble nets over the side. Stokes and another sailor went down and grabbed a hold of the tied Carley floats.<sup>132</sup>

Stokes saw “There were some dead laying in the bottom of the Carley float, some were alive.” He was both shocked and surprised for there amongst the living was his childhood friend, Fred Mimee.

Stokes: “I recognized him right away and, of course, he would be the first one I passed up on deck.”<sup>133</sup>

John Stokes turned to Fred and said “What the hell. Fine time to go swimming, at a time like this... can’t you pick a better day?” Fred started to laugh. It was a sure sign that Fred was alive and going to live.<sup>134</sup>

John Stokes and the crew of Sarnia brought Fred and other survivors up off the Carley floats to the waiting deck and the welcomed sanctuary of HMCS Sarnia. The need for their immediate care was obvious. “There wasn’t time to count the living from the dead, you don’t start counting who were there and who was not there.”<sup>135</sup>

Sarnia was soon underway taking Esquimalt’s survivors to the safety of Halifax Harbour. They were met there by ambulances. Esquimalt’s survivors were taken off the ship and moved quickly to hospital.

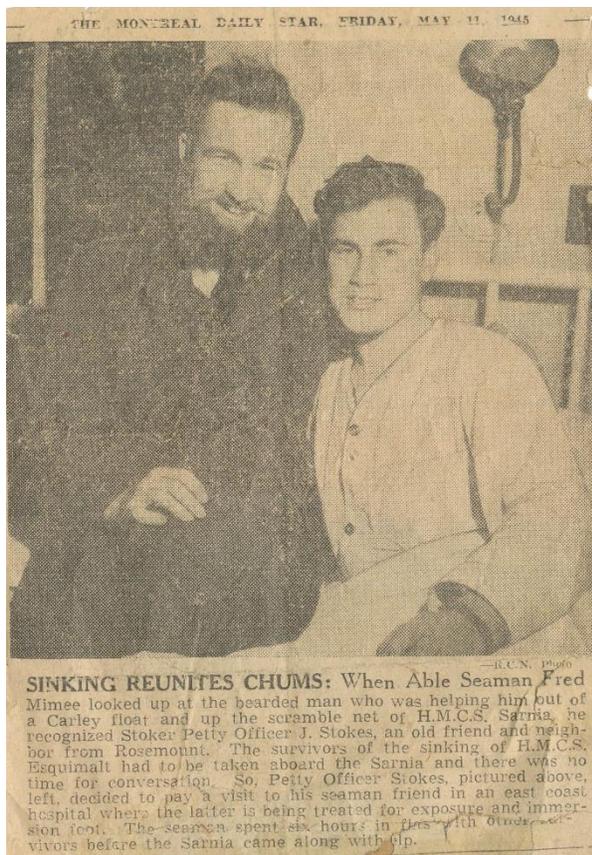
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<sup>132</sup> Ibid John Stokes, 2017

<sup>133</sup> Ibid John Stokes, 2017

<sup>134</sup> Ibid John Stokes, 2017

<sup>135</sup> Ibid John Stokes, 2017



Source: *Story and/or images courtesy of John Stokes. The Memory Project. Historica Canada.*

Esquimalt's survivors were confined to a separate ward, far away from prying eyes and public view. No visitors were allowed. The surviving crew was now held incommunicado for reasons unknown.<sup>136</sup> But this effort failed.

Stokes went up to the hospital the following day to see Fred. Esquimalt's survivor had lost everything. Stokes wanted to bring his old friend Fred some creature comforts from Sarnia's canteen to brighten his day.

At first, Stokes was barred from visiting. The head nurse said "No one was allowed in." But John Stokes persisted. He finally told her the facts "Fred and I went to school together. In fact, we grew up as kids, joined the navy together!" So, she finally relented and let John in.<sup>137</sup>

As John sat there talking to Fred, naval photographers quite suddenly arrived. They questioned Stokes how he got in and if he had permission to be there. The cat was now out of the bag when they found out the full extent of John and Fred's story.

It proved irresistible. The naval photographers found their story was pure gold! They simply took a picture of John and Fred sitting on the bed. The

<sup>136</sup> Ibid John Stokes, 2017

<sup>137</sup> Ibid John Stokes, 2017

story of their incredible tale and adventure was published in the press, and so, the Esquimalt's loss was brought to the public's attention.<sup>138</sup>

## Heroic deeds

A little over three weeks later, Lieut. Gordon Ball, RCNVR delivered a speech at noon to an audience at Toronto City Hall. Lieut. Ball was one of Esquimalt's surviving officers. The war in Europe was finally over. Ball delivered a rousing speech at a bond rally in the hope of raising \$20 million for the continued prosecution of the war still raging against Japan.

The events of the Esquimalt were still very fresh and raw in his and the public's mind. Lieut. Ball's speech recalled the heroism, terror and loss in the sinking of HMCS Esquimalt.

Ball told the audience "There were Bill Stevens and Herb Knight. Herb was married last fall to a girl from Leamington. He dove off the ship and swam to a Carley float. He noticed that the bottom had been blown off, so he dived off and swam over to another float, and dragged it back, securing both floats together.

Herb then climbed back on one of the Carley floats, but died about five minutes later from exposure and over exhaustion. He saved the lives of some of his shipmates before he died. Those two floats kept them alive."<sup>139</sup>

Ball's speech recounted the growing and mounting losses that day.<sup>140</sup> "Johnnie Monahan left one of Toronto's East End high schools two years ago, He will never come back".

Skipper Bellezzi married and had three children in a small French village in (Varenes) Quebec. He will never come back. Jimmie Roberts of Victoria,

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid John Stokes, 2017

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, Esquimalt Officer tells of Heroism when vessel sunk, 12 May 1945

<sup>140</sup> Ibid Globe and Mail, 12 May 1945

B.C., came back into this war in his 40's, and had been in since the beginning. He will never be back.<sup>141</sup>

Johnnie Smart married a Toronto girl. He will never be back. Johnnie Parker was from Vancouver, and one of the best sportsmen on the west coast. He will never be back .”<sup>142</sup>

Huntley Allison Fanning, Drumhead, Guys Co. “He will never be back”

Amongst Esquimalt’s dead was Huntley Allison Fanning. Huntley had a lot to look forward to in 1945. The son of Leonard and Theresa Fanning of Drum Head, NS, Huntley was then newly promoted as Chief Electrical Artificer on the Esquimalt. He was soon to be married. Huntley Fanning looked forward to war’s end and his pending nuptials.

Ironically Fanning’s promotion came on the evening of 15 April. His skills and trade would have served him well in civilian life. But his plans and like the plans of many others were torn asunder 16 April. His final thoughts were recorded by a AB Frank Smith of Edmonton.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid Globe and Mail, 12 May 1945

<sup>142</sup> Ibid Globe and Mail, 12 May 1945

<sup>143</sup> Eric Dennis, Staff Writer, The Halifax Herald, **Stories of Heroism as Minesweeper is Lost**, undated April 1945



Huntley is the one on the far right in civilian clothes. Ford Fanning and Geraldine Flick are the other two. White house on the far left was Huntley's home.

With permission – from the archives of Norma Cooke

Huntley was amongst 13 on a Carley float. <sup>144</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, Eric Dennis, undated April 1945

Frank Smith recounted the horrors about him and sadly, Huntley's last moments;

“Most stirring of all, perhaps were the last moments of Huntley Fanning of Drum Head, Guysborough Co. As he (Fanning) lay with his head huddled my shoulder with his body numbed **beyond all further suffering** he spoke of his fiancée Dorothy back in Toronto, ‘it looks as if we are not going to make it. I guess we won't be able to make it this time.’”<sup>145</sup>

Fanning was dying. A few moments later as he gazed into Smith's eyes “So long fellows; keep plugging.” His body stilled peacefully into death with his last breath remembering his love for Dorothy. He planned to marry Dorothy on his next leave home.<sup>146</sup>

Seven of the 13 initial survivors aboard Smith's Carley float eventually succumbed and died too. Some also passed along their messages of love and wishes in hope a survivor would tell their loved ones.

Others, in desperation, acted. Smith observed “One fellow was so determined to live he got up and said, ‘There is no future in this’ and the jumped overboard and started swimming.” He succumbed a few minutes later while trying to get back onto the Carley float.<sup>147</sup>

Huntley Allison Fanning's name is inscribed on the Halifax Memorial, erected by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to commemorate the men and women of the forces of the Commonwealth who died in both world wars that have **no known grave**.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Telecon Norma Cooke/Gerry Madigan 21 Jan 2017 @ 1545hrs, last name unknown, found from local source who remembered her first name and place of residence.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, Eric Dennis, undated April 1945

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, Eric Dennis, undated April 1945

<sup>148</sup> Commonwealth Graves Commission, Halifax Memorial

Source: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/400620/Halifax%20Memorial>

Accessed: 12 Jan 2017

Fanning's body was lost to the deeps with no known place for his family to come or to mourn the loss of their beloved son. Lieut. Gordon Ball's lament holds true for Huntley Allison Fanning, "He will never be back."

## Concluding Remarks

Joseph B. Lamb wrote in "On the Triangle Run" about the deep anger felt through out the East Coast naval establishment following HMCS Esquimalt's loss. "It seemed so stupid, so unnecessary; with Germany's surrender, obviously only hours away and with everyone at sea anxious just to survive, the wiping out of forty-four young lives in the very moment of final victory was almost too cruel to bear."<sup>149</sup>

Fred Mimee's attitude was different He was one of the 27 that survived. Fred's son, Brian speaking on behalf of his family recounts "My Dad's attitude of, after surviving such an ordeal, of having known the loss of all his friends, was no matter what happens in life, nothing could be worst."

"The best thing is never complain (which he never did)". In Fred's words "You pick yourself up, dust yourself off and move on, cause that's what you do in life."

Fred lived by those words. Brian said of his father's life, "He didn't speak to us about that tragic day because there was really nothing to say. He was one of the lucky ones. It happened and as all good Canadians, you move on.

My Dad was our hero and we were lead to believe that he was also one the last of the survivors to pass away."<sup>150</sup>

Sadly, a life well lived was not meant for the 44 who died that day. The war in April 1945 was only in its final days. Victory was neither hours away, nor was it ever assured.

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid Lamb, pg. 221

<sup>150</sup> Brian Mimee to Gerry Madigan, e-mail, date Stamped 1 February 2017 4:57PM

There was yet much more fighting and dying to come following 16 April 1945.

A final reckoning had yet to be presented, put paid as “FINAL” if you will. The war at that point was very much an open account.

Surrender and victory in Europe finally came three weeks later. Until then, both Esquimalt and U-190 were fair game. It was all a question who would be left standing and accounted amongst the living and the dead at the war's end.

Esquimalt's tragic loss was truly felt throughout Canada. Esquimalt's story was not just about tragedy, but it was also one of boundless courage, willingness to sacrifice, devotion to friends and of valour too.

This coming 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 marks the 72<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of HMCS Esquimalt's loss. It was the last RCN vessel lost to enemy action during the Second World War. Now some 72 years later, it is time to remember HMCS Esquimalt and those who served on her.

## **7. End of the Idyllic Summer of '39**

By Gerry Madigan

Dated: 15 Jul 2017

Summer 2017

## Part 1

### Introduction

Historic Commercial Cable Building at Hazel Hill, Nova Scotia will be demolished in the very near future. This despite all efforts taken over 10 years to save it from destruction. The Commercial Cable Rehabilitation Society tried its very best to save and restore the historic building but were unable to do so in the end. Truly it is sad to see its loss, not because it is a remarkable building, but for what it represents, our history.

The Commercial Cable Station constructed in 1888, was at the forefront of a communications revolution in its day, as one of the largest cable relay stations in the world housing some of the most technologically advanced equipment available. Nine thousand miles of cable carried news of world events and communications between Europe and North America faster than any other means. Its very existence was a vital communication link.<sup>151</sup>



Nova Scotia Public Archives, 2017 – Commercial Cable Company  
Hazel Hill, NS

Hazel Hill station was closed in 1962. Bit by bit Guysborough County and many other rural communities are losing what amounts to large pieces of their heritage because of a rapid state of decline and the lack of investment necessary to sustain them. The reasons vary but truly it is due in large part to the stinginess in economic

opportunities and the failure of government to invest in rural communities that is at the heart of the matter. We see that constantly by the conditions of our roads and in the sad state of rural services and infrastructure.

Guysborough County's fate is one marked by this trend as well as the continued out-migration of our young people to economic opportunities elsewhere. Their hopes for a future in raising a family and a living wage should be here but lie elsewhere. The evidence lies in declining school

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<sup>151</sup> Helen Murphy, **Commercial Cable Building soon to be demolished**, Guysborough Journal, 12 Jul 2017, Pg. 1 & 3

enrolments, business closures or contractions, the loss of public infrastructure post offices, or general stores because the population no longer exists to viably support them. This out-migration, if you will, is largely due to failures to adequately invest in rural economies or technical opportunities that offer some hope for our young to stay here and invest in the future. It wasn't always so.

Much will be lost with the eventual demolition of the Commercial Cable station. With it goes a part of Guysborough County's remarkable history. Hazel Hill was once an important asset not only to Guysborough County but to Canada. It had to be willingly protected from harm or destruction. It is now suffering a fate facing many other Nova Scotia rural communities in similar circumstances. Guysborough, Cape Breton, and elsewhere were once important both strategically and economically to Canada. There is evidence of that in the measures taken here during the Second World War. It all happened here one idyllic summer in 1939.

### Idyllic Summer

War loomed on the horizon in 1939. Yet in the spring and summer of that year, Canada and the world only hoped for the best, yet the worst was also feared. Still there were some bright spots that summer. One welcome diversion from the inevitable was the Royal Visit of their majesty's King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (the Queen mother) to Canada 17 May to 15 June 1939. The Royals arrived in Canada that May to much fanfare, receiving warm welcomes wherever they travelled.

The Royal Visit was just a whirlwind tour with a side trip to the United States. By 15 June the Royals made final stops in Nova Scotia at Pictou where they travelled by rail from New Glasgow to Antigonish. Their visit soon ended thereafter. They sailed from Halifax and less than three months later, Canada and the world were at war.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Peggy Feltmate, **White Head Harbour, Guysborough County, NS - Its Stories, History and Families**, Toronto Canada, 2011 (fourth printing 2017), pg. 99



It didn't seem so though on August 30, 1939, which was a typical summer day in the Strait of Canso area, reporting a balmy 27C. It had not rained in days. But there was uncommon activity there. Lead elements of the Pictou Highlanders arrived and occupied quarters at Hazel Hill NS. The Highlanders rented some space from the Commercial Cable Company to house a total of 25 men who

Gerry Madigan Archives – Chisholm-MacKeen Family Souvenir Royal Tour Spoon 1939

would eventually be billeted there for local

defence. This was roughly a platoon strength of men.<sup>153</sup>

It was odd that a military unit was stationed there at all, after all, Canada was still at peace. War was only declared 10 September 1939 that was still some days away. And war was never ever a certainty. There was always hope for peace despite the shades of a looming disaster that lay visibly on the horizon.

Winston Churchill in "The Gathering Storm" warned of the impending dangers. His and others persistent warnings were disparaged, cast aside

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<sup>153</sup> Canada, National Defence, Dead Files 46-4-2, S&T Services, Accommodation for Troops, Strait of Canso Area, 321.009 (D265) Correspondence, Reports, Returns, Requests, Etc. RE ACCN for Troops in Strait of Canso Area, D/15 Sep 1939 / 16 Mar 1940, Initial Dispositions and Accommodations worked out by 25 Sep 1939, Pg. 4/97

many times over in the public eye. He was considered a war monger, so his warnings were largely ignored or discounted by world leaders until later proven in action, word and deed that autumn of 1939.

There always was a vain hope for peace, that war could be avoided, and that any impending disaster could be avoided at all costs, even through appeasement. Peace was the option truly desired. It was paid in kind through a treaty that ostensibly guaranteed peace in our time. But in the end, war was only delayed, the end, that was the inevitable and the expected reality.

Hitler eventually attacked Poland on 1 September 1939. Two short days later, Great Britain and France were at war with Germany. Behind the scenes, Canada made vain last diplomatic efforts. The Canadian government cabled peace appeals to Germany, Italy and Poland on 26 August 1939.<sup>154</sup> Mackenzie King's diplomatic efforts had no effect. What was to be, came to be.

Mackenzie King's government took steps beyond this failed diplomatic effort. Amongst the dispatched telegrams that possibly passed through the Commercial Cable Company were those of his government commencing Canada's mobilization of its Armed Forces.

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<sup>154</sup> A.R. Byers (ed) et al. **The Canadians at War 1939.45 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.**, Reader's Digest Assoc., 986, pg. 12



Churchill's War Room – Chiefs of Staff Conference Room, Gerry Madigan's Archives – June 2014

The Pictou Highlanders commanded by LCol S. MCK. Fraser were called out on 26 August 1939. The Pictou Highlanders were subsequently tasked with local defence and protection duties. The unit was placed on active service on 1 September 1939, some nine days before the government's actual

declaration of war on 10 September 1939.<sup>155</sup>

The government's move to invoke active service is indicative of how quickly the troops were mobilized and moved to protect key vital areas that included the Commercial Cable Company. It was a key and vital communication's link. And yet, it has often been observed that "Canada was unprepared for war".

The regular army of 4500 men, augmented by 51,000 partly-trained reservists, possessed virtually no modern equipment. The air force had fewer than 20 modern combat aircraft while the navy's combat potential consisted of only six destroyers, the smallest class of ocean-going warships. It was a modest beginning.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Canada, National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage, **THE NOVA SCOTIA HIGHLANDERS**, Queen's Printer, Ottawa, publication A-DH-267-000/AF-003, pg. 6/9 (2-2-166)

<sup>156</sup> Canadian War Museum:

Source: [http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/chrono/1931goes\\_to\\_e.shtml](http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/chrono/1931goes_to_e.shtml)

Accessed: 27 Sep 2016

What is significant in the above concerns Canada's reservists. It was remarkable that Canada's 51000 partly trained reservists, were amongst the first to be mobilized and moved quickly to fill the gaps in our local defences.

LCol Fraser's actions in the aftermath of his government's declaration of active service was indicative of the readiness of the reserves to mobilize to do that duty. First above all was the quality of the staff work, some of which must have been ongoing in the background. There were probably warning orders, movement orders and reconnaissance's conducted in anticipation of Canada's coming war footing.

The Highlander's had need for accommodation, winter was only a few short months away. The earliest letters of 11 September requesting accommodations acquisition and approvals points to LCol Fraser's outstanding staff work and leadership. His forethought of planning and proactive approach, anticipated the needs of his command that ensured his men were housed under hard accommodations before the winter snow fell. Failure otherwise meant the Highlanders would have been left out in the cold and under canvas that year.

Canada's partly trained reservists did particularly well, given the circumstances. They reacted quickly and asked the appropriate questions, so it would seem then that the blanket statement that Canada was totally unprepared for war was not totally correct. Canada's reserve leadership was indeed intellectually prepared and ready to take on the task at hand. Canada, as a nation, simply failed to adequately provide the necessary budgets or tools in anticipation of the coming war.

## Part 2

### The Pictou Highlanders Arrive

On 30 August 1939, the lead elements of the Pictou Highlanders arrived in Guysborough County. It was the beginning of a coming wave of military personnel to the county. Many military personnel of all Canada's Armed Services would descend upon the Canso Strait Area and the eastern shore, most notably at Mulgrave and Port Hawkesbury. The first elements in the strait area were led by LCol S. MCK. Fraser, the designated Officer Commanding, Strait of Canso Defences.



Nova Scotia Public Archives, 2017 – Pictou Highlanders  
Aldershot, NS June 1939

The Strait of Canso, including Cape Breton, was considered a vital area. Cape Breton was indeed an island in those days. The Port at Sydney with its industries and products were of strategic importance not only for convoy to support Britain overseas but also to Canadian industry inland.

The Strait of Canso was a gateway for products coming to and fro on the railway ferry between Mulgrave and

Port Hawkesbury. This key link had to be protected to ensure the free flow of goods and services, vital to Canada's materiel needs during the war. Everything flowed through the Strait to the industrial heartland to build the weapons of war.

In the coming days of early September 1939, LCol Fraser's time was totally devoted to the protection and defence of this vital area. His first step was to lay out his defence and dispositions. His next step was to find lodging and shelter to accommodate his growing force. Finally, he was tasked with training the area defence. LCol Fraser's task was monumental but his key difficulty proved to be accommodations!

Finding suitable accommodation was problematic even when it was available. LCol Fraser wanted to lease what was known as the "Irish Facilities" for use as the Battalion's Officers' Mess. On 11 Sep 1939, one short day after war was declared, LCol Fraser's request was considered by

his superiors but denied as this facility was designated for use as a hospital.<sup>157</sup>

It was the problems of means that would become the bane of LCol Fraser's existence over the coming months. The problems of command, the stresses of leadership, and problems of proper equipment and accommodation for his men were to have a dramatic impact on his health.<sup>158</sup>

Still LCol Fraser worked out all his initial dispositions by 15 September 1939. His was a far-reaching defence area that not only included Mulgrave but areas as far as St Peters in Cape Breton. The OC Strait of Canso Defence was responsible for the disposition of 562 men of the Pictou Highlanders that also included elements of 86th Bty. R.C.A. His command and responsibilities continued to grow to an even greater number of men and materiel throughout the next year.<sup>159</sup>

The Pictou Highlander story in Mulgrave was not all glorious. Yes, there were difficulties in getting established. Those difficulties were met with for the most part professionally and with compassion. But the Highlanders were also famous for raising a little hell too.

First there was the hell raising. The first lead elements of the Highlanders occupied quarters at Hazel Hill NS and allegedly trashed their quarters. The space was rented from the Commercial Cable Company, which justifiably raised the ire of the company's manager resulting in a claim for compensation for damages. It was an inauspicious start that did little neither for the regiment's reputation nor for LCol Fraser's health for that matter!

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<sup>157</sup> Canada, National Defence, Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4, **S&T Services, Accommodation for Troops, Strait of Canso Area, 321.009 (D265) Correspondence, Reports, Returns, Requests, Etc. RE ACCN for Troops in Strait of Canso Area, D/15 Sep 1939 / 16 Mar 1940, Correspondence on file: 1,** Accommodation Arrangements for Pictou Highlanders, H.200- -4 15 Sep 1939, pg. 2/ 97

<sup>158</sup> Ibid Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4, 17 Nov 1939, pg. 30-32/97 – personal letter from LCol Fraser CO Pictou Highlanders to OC Military District 6 MGen CF Constantine

<sup>159</sup> Ibid Dead Files 46-4-2, File 200-1-4, 25 Sep 1939. Pg. 4/97 Initial Dispositions and Accommodations

Then there was the good. Certain soldiers on foot patrol came to a farm house one day asking for water. They observed a little girl and were shocked to see the little four-year-old with a leg bent, hobbling about on home made crutches.

The little one suffered from tubercular knee and ankle disease. Her parents were too poor to afford an operation. The soldiers were quite distressed by the sight. They could not bear seeing the little one suffer so. They brought news back to the unit asking for help. The men donated the cash and rushed her to the children's hospital in Halifax for surgery hoping for a miracle.

With the surgery, over and when she returned home, the soldiers of the Pictou Highlanders revisited her. They found her in a cast but more to their surprise she was bright, happy and all smiles with rosy cheeks. They were happy to learn that a little girl would eventually recover from her ordeal to walk and play like a normal child.<sup>160</sup>

## First Steps

The first steps to winning the war were being taken in Mulgrave in late 1939 and early 1940. The Pictou Highlanders played a huge role. The Pictou Highlanders continued to serve on local defence duties until 31 Dec 1940. They were disbanded that day but immediately reformed and posted for overseas duties 1 January 1941.

Their first stop was Newfoundland. Elements of the unit served there from March to August 1943. They were now a part of Canada's home defence establishment within Atlantic Command. In September 1943, one company was later despatched to the Bahamas where it remained on garrison duty until 28 March 1946.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> OZORAK, Paul. **Abandoned Military Installations of Canada, Volume 3: Atlantic**. [Ottawa: Paul Ozorak, 2001]. **ISBN Number: 0969512732 / 9780969512738, pg. 204**

<sup>161</sup> Ibid NS Highlanders, pg. 6-7/9 (2-2-166 to 2-2-167)

But the larger part of the Battalion was re-designated the “1st Battalion, The North Nova Scotia Highlanders, CASF” on 7 November 1940, who embarked for active service in Northwest Europe on 18 July 1941. The Battalion participated in D-Day, 6 June 1944, landing in Normandy, France, as part of the 9th Infantry Brigade, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division.

The men of the Pictou Highlanders fought bravely and with distinction throughout the North-West Europe campaign until war’s end. The battalion was finally disbanded on 30 April 1946.<sup>162</sup> But it was in Guysborough and Victoria Counties where the Pictou Highlanders first gelled and trained as a unit at the end of that summer of 1939. Their service here was the beginning of an odyssey. It was to be the end of idyllic days for some time to come!

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid NS Highlanders, pg. 7/9 (2-2-167)

## 8. Epilogue

Every community across Canada has a rich but often a hidden history concerning their contributions and efforts during the Second World War. Most times those contributions are the singular stories of the times and sacrifices of the veterans who fought during that conflict who returned home or were lost. Other times, it is the story of great and varied activity in a community in support of the war effort.

Canada was indeed a nation at war. Many Canadians though feel that Canada was largely untouched by the ravages of that war. We escaped the greater part of the massive destruction that consumed both lives and property elsewhere. That is largely true to a certain extent. But the Second World War was “total war” that ensured all of Canada’s resources and citizens were engaged in all aspects towards victory whether that effort was industrial, civic, agricultural or military, all our citizens were involved and fully occupied with the war in one way or another.

These small stories in Guysborough are indicative as to the extent of that involvement and there are still many more stories to research and record.

I hope that this effort in some small way documents what was achieved in Guysborough County, Nova Scotia and that it inspires others to take up the torch and seek out to record their own local histories across this great nation.

Gerry Madigan

9 April 2018