

**Hearts Of Oak**  
*The Story Of Brothers Frank And Jim Madigan*  
*Their Service In The Royal Canadian Navy*  
*The Second World War*

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## **Prologue**

The Second World War had a great impact on the lives of many Canadians. Canada, then a small nation of only some 11.2 million, saw 1.1 million of its sons and daughters join the military in the army, navy or air force. That was roughly 10% of Canada's population in the day. It was a tremendous effort and for some, the ultimate sacrifice was paid.

What follows here is the story of two of Canada's sons, brothers, Frank and Jim Madigan, my uncles, who joined the nascent Royal Canadian Navy during the Second World War. Frank served on minesweepers in the Western Local Escort Force (WLEF), on convoy escort duty, in the Battle of the Atlantic; while Jim, on motor torpedo boats in England.

Their journey, beginning with the Royal Canadian Navy, was typical of many Canadians who joined Canada's Armed Forces and who served during the war. This narrative documents that journey and what many Canadian families endured while waiting for their sons and daughters at home.

The bulk of the research comes from many sources documented in the footnotes, as well as several interviews with Uncle Frank over the years. I am deeply grateful for his insights.

Any errors or omissions here are, my own and are unintentional.

This piece is dedicated to their service and that of their comrades and peers to whom our generation owes a great debt, gratitude, and deepest respect.

Gerry Madigan

Major (Retired), CD, MSc, MA

## **Introduction**

Canadian history to the modern reader is often considered as somewhat irrelevant, outside their personal sphere of interest, concern, or influence. In this way, those that have participated in our great history are often segregated from its immediacy. The part that they may have played for all generations, on behalf of Canadians, whether that be good or bad, is easily overlooked, discounted or pushed under the table. After all, life goes on. But it is also said that those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it.

In our day to day life, we often do not take the time to consider our past, or the lives of our ancestors. After all most of us are common ordinary people, we do not expect extraordinary things from the people we know. How false that assumption is. It is the common effort, by the common people, that often makes a difference, especially in the time of war.

Wars are not won or fought by great leaders and “heroes”. Wars are won by people, people who come together to make a difference.

I wrote an account of the beginning of the Second World War, “At the Crossroads of time – The Story of Operational Training Unit 31, RCAF No. 7 Squadron, and RCAF Tiger Force at Debert, NS”. In that story I recounted that beginning as it was remembered by my father, Vince. It goes:

“Vincent Madigan was a young boy of 13 years old, when war was declared on the 10th September 1939. He remembered the day as the one that ended the misery of the Great Depression. But on the 10th of September 1939, all those circumstances following the Great Depression changed. Vincent was playing pick-up baseball in Montreal. He was one of the younger boys chosen to fill in the field, so the older lads could play a game that day.

It was common enough to see young and old coming together, filling in time, waiting for the next job, which were not plentiful. Time weighed heavily for the older unemployed lads. There was little else to do but play ball.

For the younger lads, it was a time to impress and to earn respect of the older boys. The ballfield was the field of honour. Activity through sports was a time to forget the misery of the Depression, a time to enjoy a rare moment of pleasure and comradery.

Vincent remembered it as a wonderful afternoon. The air filled with the sound of joy, the bravado of sport, the crack of the bat as the boys played on that afternoon. But there was an ominous air on the horizon.

Word came down that very afternoon that Canada had declared war on Germany. It was as if a wet blanket dampened their exuberance and smothered their youthful joy at play. Silence and a grim determination soon descended upon the group gathered there. The field was immediately cleared of the older players who left and proceeded en-masse and joined up at local recruiting centres.

The field was abandoned and left to the younger boys. Vincent remembered it surreally. It happened all so fast. An ominous silence pervaded the field of play. A sense of profound loss descended upon him, one that was soon to be felt by many Canadian families during the war. It was the loss of innocence and of peaceful times.”

So, it came to be that change was about to occur when Canada’s young headed towards recruiting centres leading to a mass migration to all places near and far. There was a ground swell to join up. It was an indication of how quickly Canada mobilized for war. It was the way Dad remembered the start of his war.

His two brothers, Frank and Jim, became a part of that mass migration. Both joined and served in the Royal Canadian Navy during the Second World War. It has become a matter of great interest to me, and I have been constantly asked to write something about my family and the account of their war. And so, this is a part of their extraordinary story, the one of the common folk coming together and doing great things, the other is, the one that begins with me, is how their lives and service influenced my own calling. Surprisingly that began at a very early age and my uncles likely were unaware of how it led to a military career and beyond into retirement.

I am a retired Canadian Forces (in my day) Logistician having served my country 28 years in peace and, surprisingly, war too. I retired from the military in 2007 and moved to Nova Scotia to live in my dotage. I was looking for something to occupy my time in retirement apart from fishing. That something soon developed into a passion for researching local history. There were past influences that helped develop that passion. In part, the passion arose from my work and service in the Canadian Forces. That was one part of it, the other was the influence of family and their service careers.

I came by a military career naturally. I was always fascinated and intrigued by my Uncles' war experiences. My father's brothers, Frank and Jim both joined the Royal Canadian Navy. Frank served in the North Atlantic and Jim in the United Kingdom. My mother, Shirley, had a brother, Leslie who also served in the Canadian Scottish Regiment and fought through the Scheldt in Northwest Europe. The ephemera of war literally lay about their homes. It was easily found in souvenirs, medals and photographs.

But it was Uncle Jim's home that proved a treasure trove that excited the engines of a young boy's imagination. Uncle Jim and Aunt Dot lived with their daughter, Sharryn and son, Dan, on Duquesne Street below Hochelaga Street in Montreal's East End. In fact, the back of their home bounded on a Military Depot (Longue-Pointe) still in existence today, and railyard. It was a vast dangerous place, which was an expanse that Dan and I would explore, perhaps too much, as eventually the Military fenced it off.

Their home was a one and half (two storey) home built some time after the war. It had a basement in which certain treasures were held. First, there was a heavy white helmet clunking about the basement floor, that I presume Uncle Jim wore during the war. Second, was a Mauser rifle that Uncle Jim brought home from overseas. It was a fully functional weapon. Dan and I would draw the bolt back and discharge the empty weapon, time after time; perhaps so much so that over the years it literally fell apart from our abuse. Uncle Jim did demonstrate its efficacy once. Remember the rail yard behind the house!

Sadly, the rail yard is now long gone and with it the trains that brought the tanks, guns, and armoured vehicles of the Canadian Army to the shops for repair. But in its day, all the war materiel was there on display for two young boys to revel in as we played at war!

Longue-Pointe has changed completely and is now CFB Montreal. It still is a service depot, but it is also home to several military and other units of the Canadian Armed Forces.



Google Maps screen capture of [45°34'34\"/>](#)

How Uncle Jim came about the Mauser was the stuff of legend though. It had something to do with one of his missions on motor torpedo boats during the war that was never acknowledged or denied by him. Uncle Jim was very tight lipped about his war. In fact, he and all my uncles constantly admonished me, reminding me that “war was a terrible thing.”

Regardless Dan and I would march about the street with helmet and rifle in tow, something that wouldn't happen today without a massive police presence, a take down and arrest I'm sure. But those were more kindly, tolerant times. Young boys playing war was common place. The tragedies that face and beset us today were unknown then.

Finally, our last treasure, was Uncle Jim's battle ensign. It was a treasured memento.



It was an awesome flag, a white Ensign, made out of coarse jute, whose lanyard had two heavy brass grommets that would hold the flag on a mast. The grommets were made for quick fixing. They were in the shape of a C-clamp bound to a rope that transfixed the spine of the flag. There were two deep grooves in the grommets such that the person raising a flag could affix one grommet end to end to another at

a 90 degree angle and then turning them to hold, to raise a flag up a pole. It was a quick change feature that allowed a crew to either hide or expose their true identity, or replace its flag as required.

Uncle Jim's flag was unique. It had many holes in it that in my naïve youth assumed were moth holes. It was only many years later that I deduced these to be bullet holes and that the flag was in some battle of significance. Why Uncle Jim allowed us to play with such a sacred object, I'll never know. One thing I do know is that many Canadian Veterans simply wanted to get on with their lives and forget the war. Perhaps this was Uncle Jim's way of getting on with life, that was surprisingly much like Uncle Leslie, my mother's brother, who let me play and parade with his medals as a young boy without a care in the world.

Regardless Uncle Jim was very proud of his flag. He kept it safe for many years. One day he proudly raised his much treasured war flag either on Canada Day or Remembrance Day in one of his last years living in Dollard Des Ormeaux where he and Dot moved from Duquesne Street. It was flagrantly stolen from his property. He was so devastated and disappointed at the cruelty and disrespect that this theft represented.<sup>1</sup>

The last thing of note found in Uncle Jim's basement was an ancient stand up – tube radio. It was approximately 4 feet high and about 2-1/2 feet wide. The dial was unique. Not only could the listener pick up the local stations, this radio had a shortwave feature that allowed the listener to hear programs originating overseas. It was a unique and important feature that allowed loved ones at home get immediate news concerning their young service men and women first hand.

I do believe that Dan and I tried it out and turned on this ancient beast at some point, out of mere curiosity. It did work, and the noise of hiss, sparks and muffled sounds and voices did emanate from it in monotone hushes. It brought to mind the reports of Ed Murrow and other news casters of the day from Europe. There was always a certain immediacy and intimacy to those reports.

I joined the military at age 28 in 1979. The early years were spent at Gagetown, NB, then Ottawa, followed by a tour in Europe where I eventually found myself posted to Qatar in the Persian Gulf where I participated in the first Gulf War. This was subsequently followed by our return to Canada; first to Debert, NS and then

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<sup>1</sup> E-mail Donna Madigan (niece) 6 November 2018

for my final years of purgatory, NDHQ Ottawa. But it was at Debert that I began to investigate some of its history. Regrettably, the larger study was put off for some years.

Along the way I was promoted to Major and eventually retired 2007. I had a varied and interesting career, serving in various parts of Canada, with a peacekeeping tour in Cyprus, and a war in the Persian Gulf.

It was the war in the Persian Gulf that brought my memories back to Uncle Jim and Aunt Dot though. I had arrived in Qatar early December 1990 to take on the duties as its Financial Comptroller. Along the way I acquired a transistor/shortwave/cassette radio that proved to be a god-send and lifesaver. I was able to amass quite the library of music that kept me entertained, less isolated, and stopped me from being so lonesome in my off-hours.

The radio proved its worth on the first night of the war. Tensions were high, and the situation was heating up in the Gulf. The UN resolution against Iraq was about to be enforced by the coalition of the willing in which Canada participated. Our Padre, of all people, was dispatched amongst the huts, living quarters, and accommodations around 2200 hours raising the alarm for all to take their PB tablets “NOW” just as I was finally settling in for the night! We knew something was in the offing as PB tablets were a partial antidote used at the onset of chemical warfare.

In the dark of the early morn, an operational alarm was raised, and we had to get in our NBW survival suits and hunker down. There in our humble hut, three of us lay on the floor, trussed up like bandits in our bunny suits. Saddam launched a pre-emptive strike against us but by this time our forces had already blinded him. His SCUD missiles could not be directed effectively and landed harmlessly out of range.

Still as we lay in the quiet of our room, our bunk mate, the engineering officer, lay on the floor gasping for air, slowly choking. We feared the worst! Fortunately, my Sergeant-Major had the presence of mind to investigate and pulled an offending plug that blocked the air from entering the engineer’s gas mask, now allowing him to breathe freely. First rule of thumb in a war zone, make sure your kit is serviceable. Rule 2 in a war zone, always carry your helmet with you when war is declared, something I learned to my own chagrin and embarrassment but that’s a story best left untold.

By about 2-3 am the alert had passed, and we were stood down but had to remain semi-dressed in these suits. My Sergeant-Major (MWO Frank Churchill) and I sat outside as I turned on the radio, adjusted the shortwave band to BBC London and listened in. There, just like the broadcasts of Ed Morrow, came the BBC reports of the war, first hand, over the ether, fading in and out much like home radios of the Second World War. That brought me back to Dot and Jim's basement and the old radio resting on the floor.

My records indicate that we had come under either potential or actual attack over some 27 times before and during the war that we were called to stand-to. Four I noted as serious incidents given the length between the call to stand to and stand down, which seemed interminable as we lay on our floor waiting for the worse to happen. Another writer puts that number as eight serious attacks launched directly towards Qatar over the war. The good news for us was that the worse never happened.

We remained on a pretty hectic schedule (24/7) throughout the war. Still we found time for other things. The Salvation Army provided us with an envelope letter stationary upon which we could write a short note to family and friends. I sent out a number of these, one of which to Uncle Jim and Aunt Dot.

Many years later Aunt Dot commented on this letter. She said it reminded her so much of those she and Jim sent back and forth during the war. Oddly enough she commented "I'm not surprised you joined the military, you were always marching about as a young boy!"

Life goes on and sadly Uncle Jim passed away while we were living in Ottawa. I was able to visit him in hospital and would go there directly from work in uniform. Aunt Dot and I spent sometime together reminiscing about old times.

Two songs I especially remember, were played at Uncle Jim's funeral; one "til we meet again" which Aunt Dot sung too, and the other "The Heart of Oak", played as his recessional hymn as his casket was taken out of the church. Uncle Jim was very proud of his service with the RCN. "The Heart of Oak" was his tribute to that service.

Cousin Sharryn recalls her father attending his last Remembrance Day in Ottawa the year before he died. He was amongst the many Second World War and Korean Vet's sitting in the bleachers proudly looking down on the procession, perhaps at

the time he remembered his fallen comrades in the knowledge that he too may soon be meeting them once again.

All this comes to the story of Uncle Frank and Uncle Jim. Our family has served and continues to serve this country in peace and in war to this day. We have lost family members directly and indirectly in the service of our country. We all share a common bond and purpose in the rewards of freedom of this great land. We truly have no idea what our uncles endured, and like many of their generation and so many Canadian veterans, they are often too modest in acknowledging their accomplishments, and what the young men and women of this generation achieved.

I shall attempt in the next few pages to render an account of Uncle Jim and Frank's war. Regrettably I have few personal details to go upon, so I shall be drawing in large measure from the written accounts of others that were there. In this way, you the reader, will have some sense of the intensity of their war, what was endured and what sacrifices were made.

### **Frank Madigan**

Uncle Frank was only 17 years old when he joined the RCN in 1942. He served until 1945 when he was demobilized and discharged. Over the three years he served, Frank sailed on two ships. The first was the Medicine Hat, the second, Dundas.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Personal Interview Frank Madigan, Uncle with Gerry Madigan, Nephew, 4 Jan 2017

@1100 hrs



Madigan Family Photograph Archives – Frank Madigan Signaller

Uncle Frank did not remember much detail around his service out of North Sydney aboard the Medicine Hat when I interviewed him for a project on HMCS Esquimalt in 2017. But he did recount how he got to be posted there.

Uncle Frank trained as a signaller very near his hometown of Montreal at Ste Hyacinthe Quebec. He was posted to Ste Hyacinthe with 44 other candidates. His course was promised a 14-day Christmas and New Year's leave if they passed. Uncle Frank was one of the 9 candidates who had successfully passed. Any one who failed the course was not allowed to re-take it. They were posted for other training. On the plus side for these people, they got the 14 day Christmas/New Year's leave. Not so for Uncle Frank. The Navy's promise of Christmas and New Year's leave was never fulfilled for he and the other successful candidates as there was an urgent need for signallers.

For their outstanding efforts though, the nine successful candidates were posted immediately and never saw the promise of the Christmas/New Year's leave. They were urgently required and posted immediately to sea billets. Uncle Frank was posted to Medicine Hat at North Sydney. He arrived in the port on Christmas Eve and found Medicine Hat ice bound, stuck some few feet from the wharf.

A ladder was passed from the wharf to the focsle upon which, Uncle Frank made his way across and jumped onto the deck. A tug came along that pushed and shoved Medicine Hat from the ice and she was finally dislodged. Uncle Frank was on his way to sea, on Christmas Eve, on convoy duty. He was only 17 years old.



Prosperity Sake – Photograph HMCS Medicine Hat J256

Medicine Hat was built at Montreal and commissioned there on 04 Dec 1941. The ship arrived at Halifax on 13 Dec that year and was allocated to Western Local Escort Force (WLEF).

The following short operational history was found in and taken from Wikipedia concerning HMCS Medicine Hat:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> **HMCS Medicine Hat** ([pennant](#) J256) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMCS\\_Medicine\\_Hat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMCS_Medicine_Hat), accessed: 10 December 2108

“After arriving at Halifax, Nova Scotia on 13 December, the vessel was assigned to the Western Local Escort Force (WLEF) as a convoy escort in the Battle of the Atlantic. In June 1942, *Medicine Hat* transferred to Sydney Force, the patrol and escort force operating out of Sydney, Nova Scotia.<sup>[6]</sup> During this period, *Medicine Hat* was one of the *Bangor*-class minesweepers assigned to take coastal convoys through the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the St. Lawrence River. The Battle of the St. Lawrence began in May 1942 and carried on through the summer. *Medicine Hat* escorted the first Quebec City-Sydney convoy, QS 1.<sup>[7]</sup> In January 1943, the minesweeper rejoined WLEF for six months, transferring to Halifax Force for patrol and local escort duties out of Halifax in June.<sup>[6]</sup>

*Medicine Hat* remained with Halifax Force until May 1944 with the exception of November–December 1943. During that period, the minesweeper joined Newfoundland Force, the escort and patrol unit based in St. John's, Newfoundland. In May 1944, *Medicine Hat* shifted back to Sydney Force and remained with that unit until January 1945. That month the warship joined Newfoundland Force until the end of the European war. Following the end of hostilities in Europe, *Medicine Hat* performed miscellaneous duties along the Atlantic coast until paid off at Halifax on 6 November 1945. The vessel was laid up in Shelburne, Nova Scotia until 1946 when the minesweeper was placed in strategic reserve at Sorel, Quebec.<sup>[6]</sup>

*Medicine Hat* remained at Sorel until 1951 when the minesweeper was reacquired by the Royal Canadian Navy during the Korean War. The vessel was taken to Sydney, Nova Scotia and given the new hull number FSE 197 and re-designated a coastal escort.<sup>[8]</sup> However, the ship never recommissioned and remained in reserve at Sydney until 29 November 1957 when *Medicine Hat* was formally transferred to the Turkish Navy. Renamed *Biga* by the Turkish Navy, the vessel remained in service until 1963 when it was discarded.<sup>[6]</sup> The vessel was broken up in Turkey in 1963.<sup>[9][10]”</sup>

Uncle Frank would have served on *Medicine Hat* from December 1942 to 1945. He came to the war at a critical time. That past summer, the Germans had penetrated the Gulf of St. Lawrence, sinking 22 merchant and other ships there that cause considerable loss of life, loss of cargo and consternation and concern to the Canadian government and fear amongst its citizens. It was likely one of the reasons

that he had no time off at Christmas that year. Further the Navy was expanding rapidly and had many demands and billets to fill.



H. M. C. S. "MEDICINE HAT"  
JULY 15th, 1944

Elliott, J. S.A., Ukrainetz, W. O/Tel., Cuchato, Y. Sto. I., Hart, C. I./Sea., Zaharik, P. Sto. II., Spence, D. E.R.A., Cooke, A. S.R.A., Steel, G. C.K., Borellino, J. A.R., Bergen, B. Sto. I., Nicolson, M. Sto. II., Nowar, B. Sto. I., Steele, R. Sto. I., Kerrea, A. A.R.,  
McLain, R. Cdr., McConnell, W. L./Sea., Anthony, B. L./Sgt., Moynihan, V. Sgt., Farrell, J. L./Sea., McInyre, C. A.R., Mayer, E. L./Ck., Kennedy, J. A./Ta. A., Solkoob, S.R.A., Dawling, H. S.P.O., Cox, C. O./Sea., Sutherland, B. A.R., Sutherland, H. A.R.,  
Glezer, R. Td., Wilmet, J. Sgt., Fitzgerald, F. L./Sea., Madigan, F. Cdr., Bain, D. Cdr., Quinn, E. Sqn., Neilson, W. Sqn., Little, W. Sqn., Boyd, F. Sqn., Harty, S. A.R., Shackwood, M. E.R.A., Whitfield, S. L./Sea., Kilington, C. L./Sea., Einerson, V. Sto. I., Balda, G. L./Tel., Warren, J. O./Sea., Laurin, W. Sto. I.,  
Hinchoy, D. A.R., Upton, C. W. C.E.R.A., LeBlanc, J. S.P.O., Wagg, F. C.P.O., Dussessau, J. D. Lieut., Howard, J. E. Lieut., MacLachlan, H. D. Lieut., Tisher, H. O. Lieut., Einerson, V. Sto. I., Graham, A. H. Lieut., Chandler, M. Cdr.,  
Thomas, G. A.R., Carrall, F. Sgt., Mills, W. Td., Eubell, J. Stwd., Brooks, S. A.R., Mann, R. L./Sea., Crawford, B. O./Sea., Johnson, S. A.R.

Picture from Prosperity's Sake – HMCS MEDICINE HAT J256, 15 Jul 1944, Halifax, NS. From the collection of John Edisforth Heward, Courtesy of Roger Heward, Uncle Frank is in the second row 4<sup>th</sup> from the left (note blue dot above head).

The summer of 1942 was a case in point. Much transpired. Twenty three ships were torpedoed with 22 lost in the Gulf of St Lawrence.<sup>4</sup> Canadian littoral waters suddenly became a battleground. German U-boats had entered there and now posed an imminent threat by pointing a dagger at the Canadian heartland.

U-boats operated from Newfoundland in the north, up the St Lawrence estuary, and over as far south below Halifax. In fact, if you look at the area with a discerning eye, it was a significant operational theatre of maritime warfare. Medicine Hat took part in the Battle but did so before Uncle Frank arrived.

<sup>4</sup> Colonel C.P. Stacey, O.B.E., C.D., A.M., Ph.D., F.R.S.C., Director, Historical Section, General Staff, Official History of the Canadian Army - In the Second World War Volume I, SIX YEARS OF WAR, The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific, Published by Authority of the Minister of National Defence, First Published 1948, pg. 175

Regardless, he was about to face a relentless and implacable enemy in the North Atlantic. Medicine Hat would have a part in operations there as a unit of the WLEF.

In the last six months of 1942, the Germans sank an additional 575 ships bringing their total to 1160 ships sunk for 1942. That alone represented over 6 million tons of Allied shipping resting uselessly on the ocean's floor. A further 1.5 million tons was sunk by other German Forces. All this was more than what was sunk in 1939, 1940 and 1941 combined! The Allies had lost over 14 million tons of shipping from all causes while replacing only half of it. They were in danger of losing the battle.<sup>5</sup> It was likely the reason why Uncle Frank and others were so urgently required!

Hitler said to his commanders;

“If Holland and France are successfully occupied and if France is also defeated, the fundamental conditions for successful war against England (sic) will have been secured.

England can then be blockaded from Western France at close quarters by the air force, while the Navy with its U-boats can extend the range of the blockade.

When that is done, England will not be able to fight on the Continent, and daily attacks by the Air Force and Navy will cut her lifelines.

The moment England's supply routes are severed, she will be forced to capitulate.”<sup>6</sup>

And that is how things pretty much unfolded had they not been checked by the RN, RCN, Coastal Command, Eastern Air Command, and other allied naval and air forces. The U-boat issue was so pressing that it remained Churchill's most dreaded fear. He resolved the issue by declaring the Battle of the Atlantic.<sup>7</sup> Churchill was concerned with the tempo and devastation of the destruction. In his estimate, huge

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Middlebrook, **Convoy SC122 & HX229 – Climax of the Battle of the Atlantic March 1943**, Pen and Sword Maritime, 2011 (first published in Great Britain by Alan Lane 1976), pg. 25

<sup>6</sup> pg. 18 reference: Nuremburg Trials Doc. L79, quoted in Wilmot, **The Struggle for Europe**, found in Richard Doherty, **Churchill's Greatest Fear - The Battle of The Atlantic, 3 September 1939 to 7 May 1945**, Pen and Sword Military Books Ltd., 2015, pg. 21

<sup>7</sup> Winston S Churchill, **The Grand Alliance**, Houghton Mifflin Company Boston, The Riverside Press Cambridge, 1950, pg. 122-123

convoy losses were generated by no more than 12-15 U-Boats on patrol at any one time up until 1942.<sup>8</sup>

Churchill was not just concerned with the number of ships lost, but also with the tonnage of cargo that failed to reach its final destination. Thus, his thinking led to the concentration of his forces that drew his staff's attention to the vital task at hand. He did so through his declaration of the Battle of the Atlantic. It was a siren call to arms much similar to his declaration of the Battle of Britain.<sup>9</sup>

On the other side the Germans had lost 66 boats for the effort in the last six months of 1942. It turned out to be a dirty and bloody battle. We only have to look at an example within the battle early on in 1940 to see how it would eventually develop though.

One U-Boat attack was made on an out-bound convoy, SC2 from Sydney NS. It was innovative because the enemy use radio detection and interception between 6-10 Sep 1940. The enemy prepositioned its resources. The convoy was attacked by U65, U-47, U-99 on separate dates, by what was the first wolf pack of the many assembled to do so.

The Germans were able to break RN/RCN Naval codes. Like Bletchley they homed in on key words repeated in a message. Three key words used by the RCN out of Halifax; "Addressee, situation, date", proved to be the key to cracking the daily codes!<sup>10</sup>

Another wolfpack attack was assembled to prosecute and destroy homebound Sc-7 as well as Hx79 in Oct 1940 on the heel of this initial success. This was followed by another separate wolfpack assembled on 16-18 Oct, formed off Sydney Cape Breton. All these wolfpacks met with considerable success, for between 19-20 Oct; Sc-7, Hx 79 and Hx79a were harassed and attacked continually.

The U-boat results:

1. Three convoys attacked,
2. 45 ships sunk – 38 ships in Sc7 -Hx79, and 7 ships lost in Hx79a,
3. All for no U-boats lost on the enemy's account.

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<sup>8</sup> Winston S Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate*, Houghton Mifflin Company Boston, The Riverside Press Cambridge, 1950, pg. 110 -111

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid* Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, pg. 122-123

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* Martin Middlebrook, 2011 pg. 75

By the end of Oct 1940, 63 merchant ships were lost because of this effort.<sup>11</sup>

And the struggle in the Atlantic took its toll on the men and equipment who fought and endured in all kinds of weather.



For Prosperity's Sake - HMCS Medicine Hat J256 iced up - either winter 43/44 or 44/45 - From the collection of William Glover

The war at times became a personal battle for survival. Ice had to be chipped away lest it gain weight and capsize the ship. It was cold and cruel work.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, Richard Doherty, **Churchill's Greatest Fear - The Battle of The Atlantic**, 2015 pg.39-43

Medicine Hat was in the thick of the war and Uncle Frank endured most of that with her.

### **The Immediacy of the U-Boat Threat – Sydney NS**

Uncle Frank had no idea what was in store for him when he arrived at Sydney on Christmas Eve 1943 to 1945 on the Medicine Hat. He was on his way to sea, on convoy duty, on active service, soon after his arrival.

There might have been some trepidation with such a posting. Merchant ships were being sunk routinely. HMCS ships also had their share of these misfortunes. On 24 November 1944, HMCS SHAWINIGAN, a much larger ship than Medicine Hat, a Flower class corvette, was torpedoed and sunk by U1228. HMCS SHAWINIGAN was somewhere off Cape Breton, NS when she was sunk. There were no survivors amongst her crew of seven officers and eighty-four ratings.<sup>12</sup>

There were local dangers but there were also hazards aboard ship. Uncle Frank described his service on convoy duty as; weather bleak, overcast, and never seeing the sun. The ships were often covered in ice. It was cold all the time. Personal protection was minimal.

Duty in winter was particularly miserable as the ships often became caked in ice and were in constant danger of capsizing from the weight of the ice on the super structure. All the crew as well as its officers were on constant call to chip the ice off the super structure. It was time consuming and tedious, but it had to be done for their very lives were in peril. The ship was usually caked on one side, making it all the more dangerous. It took a couple of hours to clear but clear it they did.

At sea all they had to protect their feet were rubber boots and they always slept with their clothes on. You never knew when you were going to be called to action stations and when called, you went with what you had on! You didn't have the luxury of time to dress if you stripped down for a nap. There was a survival aspect

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<sup>12</sup> Roger Litwiller, [Home / Battle of The Atlantic / HMCS SHAWINIGAN](#), 1 May 2015

Source: <http://www.rogerlitwiller.com/2015/05/01/hmcs-shawinigan-3/>

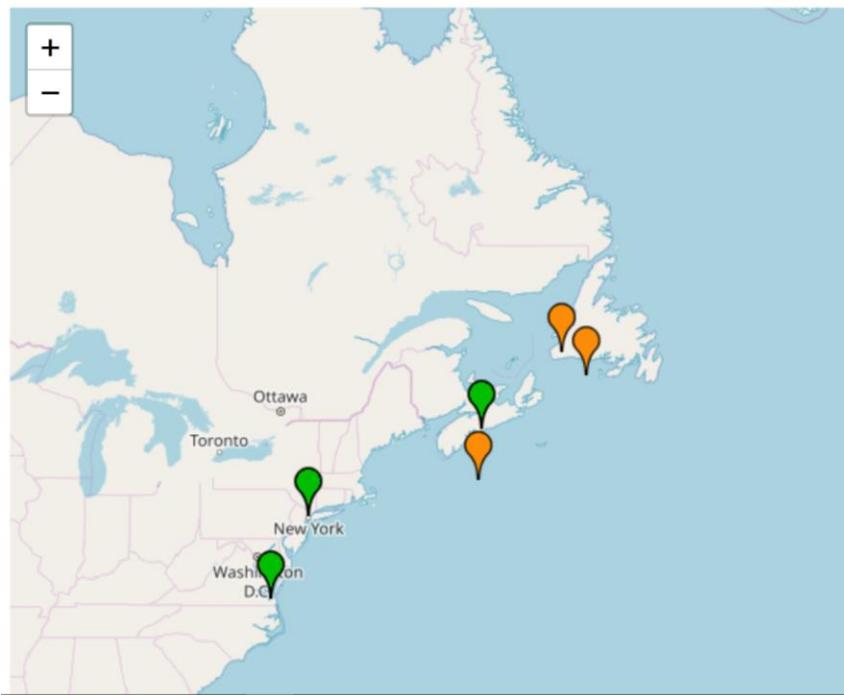
Accessed: 24 Nov 2018

to it as well; if your ship was hit, your clothing would give you a few vital minutes of survival time in the water if lucky enough to be rescued.<sup>13</sup>

The crew of HMCS SHAWINIGAN did not have that luxury. Their fate was reported by the Commanding Officer of U-1228 after the war. He reported SHAWINIGAN was sunk with a single T-5 GNAT (homing) torpedo, when it struck HMCS SHAWINIGAN in the stern. SHAWINIGAN was to rendezvous with and escort the ferry Burgeo on her voyage from Port Aux Basques Newfoundland to Sydney NS. Burgeo never contacted SHAWINIGAN and reported that failure on arrival to authorities at Sydney.<sup>14</sup>

Uncle Frank's patch was a rat's nest and the hive of U-boat activity then prevalent in the Gulf of St Lawrence and off Nova Scotia. Their number amounted to no more than a total of three Type IXc U-boats. These U-boats were U-1228, U-1230, and U-1231. Figure 1 portrays their dispositions on 24 Nov 1944

Figure 1 - U-boat Dispositions 24 Nov 1944



Source: U-boat. Net 24 Nov 2018 – U-1228 off port Aux Basques, U-1231 just south- off Nfld, U-1230 patrolling off Nova Scotia and Halifax

<sup>13</sup> Frank Madigan (Uncle)/Gerry Madigan (Nephew), **Telephone Interview**, 22 Nov 2018, time: 1400-1435hrs local

<sup>14</sup> Ibid Roger Litwiller, 1 May 2015

The positions of these three boats on 24 Nov 1944, indicates a “clear and present” danger in our waters. It was also indicative of the return of the U-boats to deep penetration of inland Canadian waters. Schnorchel may have been the technical element that allowed that return in 1944.

A quick survey of U-1230 and U-1231 patrols indicate that these two boats did little damage. There were no recorded victories on their separate patrols in Nov 1944. They appeared to have been recently commissioned with low patrol numbers with new and inexperienced crew and commanding officers. The Type IX U-boat was a formidable weapon of great endurance, but it was ineffective if improperly or not aggressively employed or was successfully harried. An inexperienced crew did not help improve their efficiency as well.

By this stage of the war the RCN and RCAF had developed techniques that limited and curtailed U-boat activities. It was a matter of patrolling that kept the U-boats down and that rendered them ineffective, that limited the damage to a degree.

But where the U-boats lay in wait, was a factor as well. The U-boats were harried in the confines of narrow waters. The Gulf of St Lawrence and Cabot Strait were such waters where aircraft and ships could be concentrated to great effect. So, sometimes it was simply a matter of luck and opportunity, in which a skillful or daring U-boat Captain took advantage of an opportunity in such confines when his prey was caught unawares.

The U-boat war at this time was largely a technological war. The Allies were gaining in technique and technology. But they had great difficulty in surmounting one object; the mixing of saline and fresh waters in the Gulf Estuary. Such mixing essentially cloaked a U-boat when conditions were right rendering a ship’s ASDIC useless.

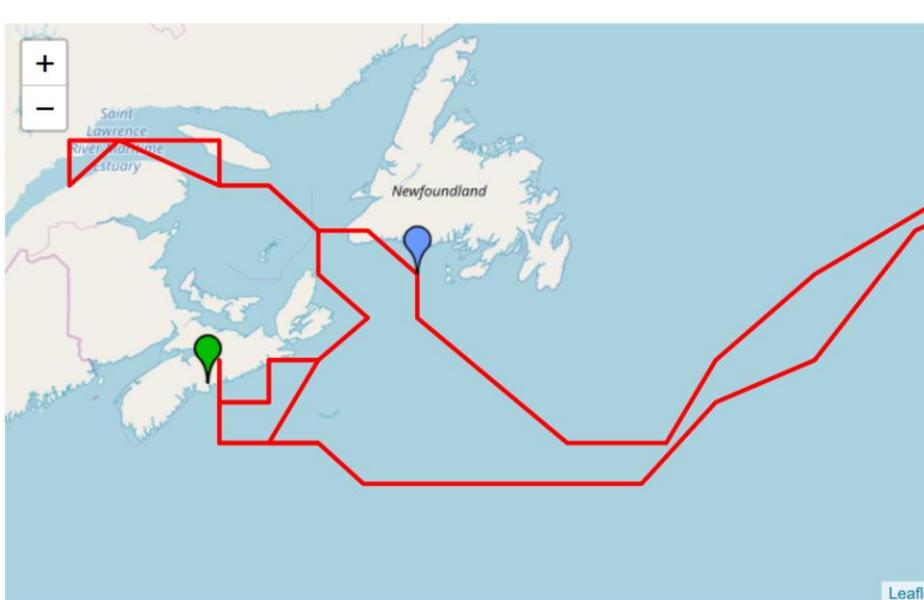
The length of the German patrols at this time in the Type IXc boat were in excess of 120 days. They had recently started their new patrols. Uncle Frank was in the very thick of this new U-boat assault in Canadian waters, Dec 1944. His ship, HMCS Medicine Hat, might even have crossed paths with U-1228 on its outbound journey to its home port in France (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – U-1228 Patrol Path



Source U-Boat Net – U1228 patrol from 12 Oct to 29 Dec 1944

Perhaps a little more concerning were the activities of U-1231. It lay nearby U-1228 south of Newfoundland before entering the Cabot Strait, on 24 Nov 1944.



Source U-Boat Net – U1231 patrol from 18 Oct 1944 to 31 Jan 1945

A snapshot of U-1231's patrol line taken 24 Nov 1944 indicates how far up the St Lawrence estuary U-1231 approached, and how deeply it entered Canada's

heartland. Their patrol penetrated very far inland on a line from Matane on the south shore of Quebec, to Sept Iles in the North and toward Anticosti Island deep inside the estuary. U-1231 was just off Nfld on the day HMCS Shawinigan was sunk by U-1228.

U-1231's patrol line into the Gulf is interesting. There is an anecdotal story of a U-boat surfacing in the bay one night at Sept Iles, Qc at some point in the war. Its presence greatly disturbed sea gulls resting on the surface. They alighted and raised such a hue and cry that they alerted the village's residents to the U-boats presence and danger. It is said that this is the reason that sea gulls were protected at Sept Iles long before the conservation movement took hold. True or not, U-1231 was in the immediate area in 1944.

Canada's naval resources in the early days and the summer of 1942 protecting the Gulf of St. Lawrence amounted to very little. In 1942 that force amounted to one Bangor class minesweeper, two Fairmilies class motor launches, and an armed yacht. This naval task force was never sufficient for patrolling much less protecting a water course 575 km long and 110 km wide at some points. That small force would grow, but it took time to do so.<sup>15</sup>

Still the operational area in the Gulf roughly bounded an area; from Sept-Îles, Quebec to the Strait of Belle Isles on the North Shore of Quebec and Labrador, and on the South Shore from Rivière du Loup to the Gaspé Peninsula, thence to New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island with the Island of Newfoundland as the cork in the bottle to the east.<sup>16</sup>

It was a great responsibility thrust upon the shoulders of Canada's nascent navy and its young officers and sailors. This was indicative of the operational situation that faced Uncle Frank and his peers in 1944 and well into 1945.

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<sup>15</sup> Gerry Madigan, **Operational Training and Antisubmarine Air Warfare on Canada's East Coast - The Second World War, Collected Papers**, 23 March 2018, pg. 13 (self-published madiganstories.com)

<sup>16</sup> Fabrice Mosseray, **The Battle of the St. Lawrence -A Little-Known Episode in the Battle of the Atlantic**, UBoat.Net 1995-2010, 29 Mar 2002.

Source: <http://uboat.net/articles/?article=29>

Accessed: 30 November 2010; and  
Ibid Madigan, 23 March 2018, pg. 94

## **A Change of Circumstances**

A change of circumstance was about to happen for Uncle Frank in 1945. Near the end of the war, Frank was posted to HMCS Dundas. It happened that Dundas was out at sea at the cessation of hostilities. The end of the war finally happened and with it came, a terrible, notorious, and deplorable incident, the Halifax riots. In short, the riots occurred because of pent-up frustration of sailors who had endured, in their minds at least, a very poor reception and lack of hospitality in Halifax over the course of the war.

It was obvious that the war was drawing to a conclusion. But there was little preparation or plans for any pending celebrations for that eventuality. It was likely the lack of preparation for celebrations, for not quarantining Canada's sailor's in garrison under controlled conditions, to blow a little steam that was at issue. As it was, they ran out of booze wherever they were, and took matters in to their own hands. It quickly got out of control and soon descended into a debacle.

Dundas was at sea and on return to Halifax when it received a signal to reverse course and head to St John's NB through the Bay of Fundy at high speed. On approach to St John, NB, Dundas received another signal to return to Halifax, but this time at slow speed.



Prosperity's Sake – HMCS Dundas K229 Flickr photo collection of Ron Bell

Dundas and other ships at sea were kept on station until the riots were over. They weren't allowed on shore when they returned to Halifax. They were finally allowed off ship and taken by bus through the city to a place outside Halifax where they could have a beer and relax. This was the same for the other ships at sea. They

were then brought back to their ship and remained aboard and under quarantine for a time until things finally settled down.<sup>17</sup>

But this wasn't Uncle Frank's only brush with history. One month earlier he had what turned out to be a tragic encounter. He was a witness to the events of the last sinking of a Canadian Naval Ship, HMCS Esquimalt.

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.

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 HMCS Dundas tied up in Halifax 15-16 April 1945. His ship was berthed right next to HMCS Esquimalt.<sup>18</sup> Frank was one of Dundas' signallers.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid interview 4 Jan 2017

<sup>18</sup> Telephone Interview Frank Madigan, Uncle with GD Madigan, 4 Jan 2017 @1100 hrs



*Photo courtesy of 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, cross posted from Dundas 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 importantly to his recollection was the fact that the signaller could not swim.<sup>19</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>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Globe and Mail, **Navy Casualties**, 25 May 1945

Source: <https://collections.museedelhistoire.ca/warclip/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=5056525>

Accessed: 12 Nov 2018

<sup>20</sup> Ibid Globe and Mail, 25 May 1945

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 Esquimalt offered a unique opportunity. 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 was the last remaining opportunity to visit there before the war ended. But the war was far from over at that point.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Hal Lawrence, **A Bloody War— One Man's Memories of the Canadian Navy 1939-45**, MacMillan of Canada, Toronto, 1979, Pg. 186

## **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 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>22</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>23</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 with those serving on it to parts near and far and wide across Canada. After all a ship 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!

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.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid Lawrence, 1979, pg. 189

<sup>23</sup> Ibid Lawrence, 1979, pg. 188-189

Communications were the ship's lifeblood.<sup>24</sup> That was to be the 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>25</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 the 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."

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>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid Lawrence, 1979, pg. 189

<sup>25</sup> Ibid Lawrence, 1979, pg. 189

<sup>26</sup> The Canadian Encyclopedia, **Sinking of HMCS Esquimalt**,

Source: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sinking-of-hmcs-esquimalt/>

Accessed: 9 Jan 2017

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>27</sup>

Such were the dangers faced by Uncle Frank and his peers every day, even unto the end of the war. Death lurked everywhere and tugged gently at their elbows. Fate had as much to do with any beginning or end as much as anything else.

### **Uncle Jim**

Uncle Jim's story is a little more difficult to relate. We never really spoke about his war experience nor did Aunt Dot reveal much as well.

Our families spent considerable time together in the 60s. My Dad, Vince – the youngest brother, took an opportunity and we moved to Sept Iles, on the north shore of Quebec where he managed, and eventually came to own Industrial Sales Ltd.

Our summers were spent in the Laurentians where we had a summer cottage but not before I spent some time with Jim and Dot each summer. It was a glorious time where Dan and I would waste away our summer afternoon watching movies on CFCF 12. It was the same movie program every summer; It's a wonderful life, Captains of the Clouds, Casablanca, African Queen, etc. which we watch in the weeks before we headed up to the cottage with Dan.

I remember one particular summer when Dot and Jim bought a new banquet for the kitchen. Dot always served a wonderful meal and would call us to the table, which we never hesitated to attend. She wanted Jim to sit at the head of the table, on a special chair in the corner, which he refused to do. He always stood behind the chair, while Dot admonished him and encouraged him to sit with some difficulty. Uncle Jim reluctantly sat down.

I ran this reminiscence by Sharryn and she does not recall that ever happening. Be that as it may, this personal recollection, perhaps inaccurately remembered, may provide some insight into Uncle Jim's war later in this account.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid Globe and Mail, 25 May 1945

Uncle Jim joined the RCN along with his brother Frank. Why the two Madigan boys decided to join the RCN is unknown to me, but they did.

Uncle Jim was posted like many other boys to Halifax. He got sick there while under training and was hospitalized for a pulmonary chest infection. He eventually recovered and was assigned to the tender boat responsible for opening and closing the submarine nets at the mouth of Halifax Harbour.

The comings and goings of the convoys must have frustrated him greatly as he took a posting to what was a new type of warfare, motor torpedo boats, patrolling in the English Channel and parts of the North Sea, in Europe.

The motor torpedo boats were also a part of the RCN's expansion of 300 vessels that had to be manned and crewed. There were two Canadian Flotillas; D Class Motor Torpedo Boats - 65th Canadian Motor Torpedo Boat Flotilla, and G Class Motor Torpedo Boats - 29th Canadian Motor Torpedo Boat Flotilla. The 65<sup>th</sup> had a complement of 10 boats while the 29<sup>th</sup>, eleven. A "G" Type MTB; displaced 44 tons, had a length of 71.75 ft, a beam of 20.6 ft, and a draught of 5.6 ft. It had a top speed of 39kts with a complement of 3 officers, 14 men. It was well armed with: 1-6pdr, 2-20mm (1xII) and four 18in torpedo tubes.<sup>28</sup>

Uncle Jim was posted to MTB 735 that was a "D" Type MTB. MTB 735 displaced 102 tons, had a length of 115 ft, with a beam of 21.25 ft, and a draught of 5.25 ft. It was slightly slower than the D Class boats with a top speed of 29 kts. MTB 735 had a complement of 4 officers, 28 men. It too was heavily armed with 2-6pdrs, 2-20mm(1xII), 2-18in Torpedo Tubes.

MTB 735 was listed in Feb 1944 as part of the 65th MTB Flotilla and flew the White Ensign. Regardless, MTB 735 was not commissioned into the RCN but instead was listed as a tender to HMCS Stadacona (tenders were not commissioned vessels).

Notably, MTB 735 took part in the D-Day landings on 06 Jun 1944. She was removed from service and returned to the RN on 21 Jun 1945.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For Prosperity's Sake - MTB 460 (author counted 10 but other accounts used here say the 65<sup>th</sup> had 11 boats in its flotilla. I used the number appropriate to the citation – a deviation of 1)

Source: <http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/MTB460.htm>

Accessed: 4 Nov 2018

<sup>29</sup> For Prosperity's Sake - MTB 735



Courtesy of For Prosperity's Sake – from the collection of Naval Museum of Manitoba

You can see clearly from the picture above how tight quarters were for the crew. They stood behind various parts of the ship that appears to offer some form of protection. That view is very deceptive. These ships were constructed out of wood. Wood offered little protection in a fire fight especially in the various cubby holes and nooks and crannies found within the ship, much like a banquet found in a home.

The Naval Museum of Manitoba provides this description; “The 65th Canadian Motor Torpedo Boat Flotilla (Fairmile Type “D”) 115 ft. Hard-chine pre-fabricated double mahogany, the hull being sub-divided into nine watertight compartments. Driven by Four Packard 12 cylinder 1250 horsepower supercharged petrol engines two underslung rudders carried 5200 gallons of 100% octane gas, range at maximum continuous speed 506 NAUTICAL miles. Two Ford V-8 auxiliary engines to provide electric power.”<sup>30</sup> One round through the fuel tanks could easily turn the ship into a blazing inferno!

The war of the Canadian Motor Torpedo boat was documented by C. Anthony Law, RCN in his book (1989) “White Plumes Astern – The Short, Daring Life of Canada’s MTB Flotilla”. Law wrote “THE MOST CLOSELY FOUGHT

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Source: <http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/MTB460.htm>

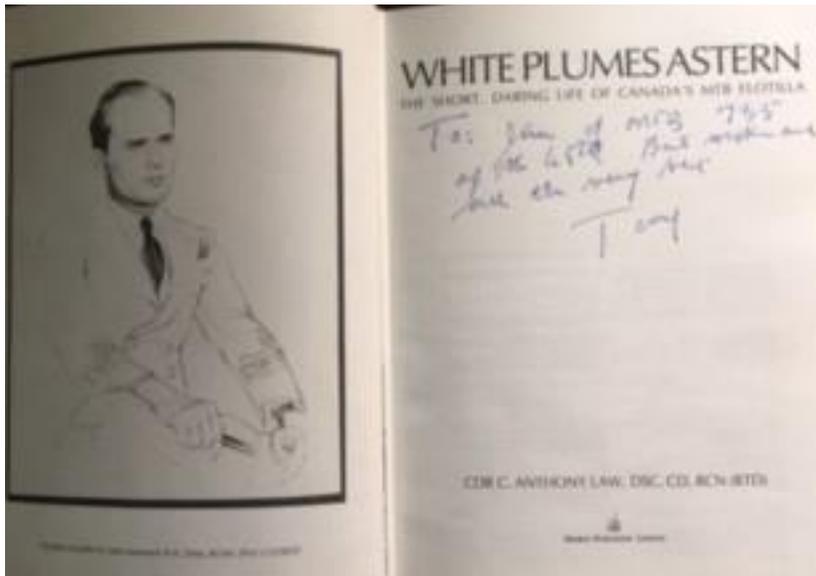
Accessed: 4 Nov 2018

<sup>30</sup> Naval Museum of Manitoba, 65th MTB Flotilla, MTB 735,

Source: <http://naval-museum.mb.ca/mtbs/65th-mtb-flotilla/>

Accessed: 11 Oct 2018

ENGAGEMENTS (Law's emphasis) of the Second World War included the small, highly maneuverable Motor Torpedo Boats (MTBs) of the Royal Navy's Coastal Force. Vulnerable to air attack by day, the MTBs normally operated at night, moving through minefields into harbour defences and taking the war closer to the enemy coast."<sup>31</sup>



White Plumes Astern – The Short, Daring Life of Canada's MTB Flotilla, facing pages, author's inscribed greeting to Uncle Jim

Uncle Jim had a personal copy of LCdr Law's work that Aunt Dot gave to me after Jim's passing.

Law's account and that of others describes a very intense war fought between the German equivalent, E-Boats and R-boats against the English MTBs. They were almost evenly matched, the R-Boats having the slight edge. But evolving RN and RCN tactics saved the day and the balance swung in their favour. But the lessons were learnt the hard way, and indeed were very costly.

We can learn more from the history too by asking one question. How did Uncle Jim end up in Great Britain? That answer can be found in a British proposal to the Canadian Navy that the RCN form a part of its MTB fleet in 1942. That initial proposal was rejected as the RCN had no inventory of boats themselves. But a

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<sup>31</sup> C. Anthony Law, RCN, **White Plumes Astern – The Short, Daring Life of Canada's MTB Flotilla**, Nimbus Publishing Ltd., pg. 5

counter proposal was received, accepted, and acted upon in 1943. The RCN agreed to man RN vessels and that offer was accepted.<sup>32</sup>

Two flotillas were formed; the 29<sup>th</sup> and 65<sup>th</sup> MTB. The sad part is, the service of these flotillas is often overlooked; although solely manned by Canadian personnel, they were considered a part of the RN. As a consequence, their service, sacrifice and efforts in the Canadian records and their history remains unknown to many Canadians.<sup>33</sup>

Most importantly, all Coastal Forces were volunteers! Uncle Jim went there of his own free will and accepted the risks attended thereto. He and his peers were required to undergo special training. There was an abundance of personnel and a bit of an overflow. Each boat had a number of spare officers and ratings. Regardless no one was left ashore. The spares were often carried on missions as well.<sup>34</sup>

The first mission of the Canadianized flotillas occurred in May 1944. I'm going to highlight the missions of 29<sup>th</sup> MTB Flotilla that will give the reader an idea of the extreme danger both flotillas faced. "The first mission of the 29th Flotilla occurred on May 16, 1944. An operation was assigned to boats 460, 462, 464 and 465, to escort a mine gathering expedition to the coast of France. They proceeded to the designated D-Day beaches in company with two British MTBs that protected them while volunteers were landed to lift sample mines from the beach defences."<sup>35</sup>

I know that I'm reaching for the moon here and I've no proof to suggest that this is fact, but I wonder if this was the origin of Uncle Jim's Mauser. Family legend has it that he was on a beach on some mission at some point during the war. He had to impersonate a German soldier and was challenged by a German senior NCO at one point, which he got away with. We'll never know unless it can be corroborated, but the fact remains, that the pairs and spares were taken on missions. In this case, one wonders if Uncle Jim was one of those pairs and spare used by 29<sup>th</sup> MTB Flotilla on the day? We'll never know but we had his Mauser in hand!

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<sup>32</sup> Capt. (N) (Ret'd) Michael Braham and Lt. (N) (Ret'd) Hugh J.M. Spence (ed), **Canadians and Coastal Forces During World War II**, Fact Sheet # 34 Published by: The Friends of the Canadian War Museum; Written to commemorate the Centennial of the birth of the Canadian Navy on May 4, 1910, circa 2010, pg. 1-6

<sup>33</sup> Ibid Capt. (N) (Ret'd) Michael Braham and Lt. (N) (Ret'd) Hugh J.M. Spence (ed), circa 2010, pg. 1-6

<sup>34</sup> Ibid Capt. (N) (Ret'd) Michael Braham and Lt. (N) (Ret'd) Hugh J.M. Spence (ed), circa 2010, pg. 1-6

<sup>35</sup> Ibid Capt. (N) (Ret'd) Michael Braham and Lt. (N) (Ret'd) Hugh J.M. Spence (ed), circa 2010, pg. 2-6

The rest of May 1944 was very active for the 65<sup>th</sup> MTB Flotilla. They were heavily engaged in battle in company with the 29th MTB Flotilla and Canadian Tribal Class Destroyers. The 65<sup>th</sup> MTB Flotilla was the decoy and bait used to attract German naval and coastal shipping. Canadian units were “marauding up and down the English Channel, intercepting enemy coastal convoys, duelling with German E-boats, luring German destroyers within gun range of the Tribals, shooting up escort ships, and torpedoing merchant vessels.”<sup>36</sup>

D-Day finally arrived. The primary duty for the 29<sup>th</sup> Flotilla, and others from the afternoon onward, was the close-in protection of the eastern side of the assault lines and anchorages. It was a dangerous task, for the German Navy finally put in a determine appearance during the early hours of June 7.

The MTBs of the 29<sup>th</sup> Flotilla clashed with German E-boats who were out in strength. They had no less than seven encounters during that night alone. They fought with the Royal Navy 55th Flotilla, under command of LCdr D.G. Bradford, DSC, RNR. The Canadian 29th Flotilla was under command of LCdr C.A. Law, DSC. The 29th Flotilla bore the brunt of the fighting.

It was no picnic for on July 2, 1944, the 29th Flotilla lost its first boat. MTB 460 wandered into a minefield and struck a mine. She was lost along with 10 members of the crew.<sup>37</sup>

There is also what is known as the “fog of war”. Sometime events transpire that have unexpected outcomes or consequences. Such an example occurred July 4, 1944. Three boats of the 29<sup>th</sup> Flotilla engaged a number of E-Boats. Two of the enemy’s boats were damaged. It happened that a second enemy flotilla was on the way to their rescue. These joined the fray and, in the confusion of battle, engaged their own boats! Three and possibly four E-Boats were sunk. It happened that three Canadian boats were also damaged, but these safely made their way home to Portsmouth.<sup>38</sup>

And the action continued fast apace when on 8 Jul MTB 463 of 29 MTB Flotilla struck a mine and was sunk. Four wounded crew were taken off by MTB 466 along with the rest of the ship’s company. The Flotillas were in constant action

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid Capt. (N) (Ret’d) Michael Braham and Lt. (N) (Ret’d) Hugh J.M. Spence (ed), circa 2010, pg. 2-6

<sup>37</sup> Ibid Capt. (N) (Ret’d) Michael Braham and Lt. (N) (Ret’d) Hugh J.M. Spence (ed), circa 2010, pg. 2-6

<sup>38</sup> Ibid Capt. (N) (Ret’d) Michael Braham and Lt. (N) (Ret’d) Hugh J.M. Spence (ed), circa 2010, pg. 2-6

from July 1944 until January 1945 inflicting much damage along the way on enemy convoys and escorts.<sup>39</sup>

Parallel to the 29<sup>th</sup> MTB Flotilla's action, was that of the 65<sup>th</sup> Flotilla. This flotilla consisted of 11 vessels – MTBs 726, 727, 735, 736, 743-748, and 797. They too began their first action in May 1944, when on the evening of 22 May, four of their number engaged a German Convoy, protected by E-Boats in the English Channel. The unit was successful in attacking and sinking two E-boats. But this attack was not without its cost. The 65<sup>th</sup> lost two killed and several wounded.<sup>40</sup>

The 65<sup>th</sup> MTB Flotilla also had a very active month in July 1944. On July 3, three MTBs of the 65<sup>th</sup> attacked a convoy off St Malo. They successfully sunk two enemy ships and possibly a third. They too did not have their effort go unscathed. They received considerable damage to themselves.

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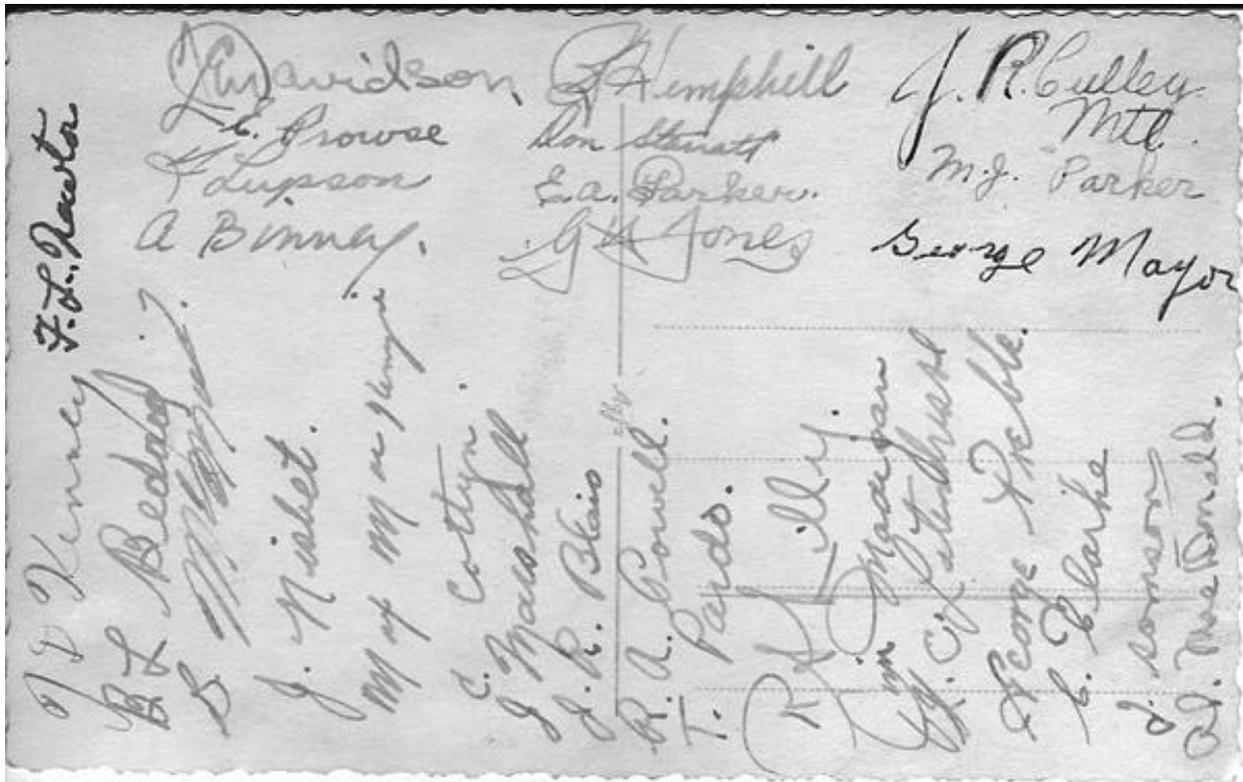
<sup>39</sup> Ibid Capt. (N) (Ret'd) Michael Braham and Lt. (N) (Ret'd) Hugh J.M. Spence (ed), circa 2010, pg. 2-6

<sup>40</sup> Ibid Capt. (N) (Ret'd) Michael Braham and Lt. (N) (Ret'd) Hugh J.M. Spence (ed), circa 2010, pg. 3-6



Prosperity's Sake - Boys of MTB 735- Jones, Newton, Starrett, Trebble, Lasuta?, McDonald, From the collection of Emery Savage, Courtesy of Jessica Santos

However, after more than a year of almost constant action with German E-boats, R-boats and armed trawlers up and down the English Channel from D-Day to the end of the war, the Canadian 65th Motor Torpedo Boat, Flotilla, commanded by Lieutenant-Commander J.R.H. Kirkpatrick, DSC, RCNVR, of Kitchener, Ontario, was finally stood down. The unit was de-commissioned at the end of the war.



from the collection of Naval Museum of Manitoba - Crew List signed on souvenir post card – surprisingly there was no photo available of the Crew of MTB 735

Very briefly what these small naval units achieved was phenomenal. Coastal Forces were involved in about 464 actions in British home waters that included wide ranging areas in the North Sea and English Channel. It was a vast enterprise and area of responsibility. British, light coastal forces, including Canadian sailors and boats, were responsible for the destruction of 40 merchant ships amounting to 59,650 tons of merchant shipping.<sup>41</sup> Not a bad tally.

### “Why did you join the RCN?”

Uncle Frank was only the tender age of 17 years old when he joined the Royal Canadian Navy like many of his peers who joined the services at the time. They would be considered boy soldiers today, but they took on the great tasks of men. Frank was working for McDougall and McDougall Stock Brokers in Montreal at the time before he joined. Frank recalled that his father William worked for a Mr. Febrick as a telegrapher, who was president of his own brokerage company.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid Capt. (N) (Ret'd) Michael Braham and Lt. (N) (Ret'd) Hugh J.M. Spence (ed), circa 2010, pg. 3-6

Mr. Fecbrick was a naval reserve Captain responsible for Naval recruiting in Montreal. Frank was curious about service in the navy, so William, his father, looked for an opportunity for him there. He said, "I'll tell Mr. Fecbrick about you."

William inquired of Mr. Fecbrick of opportunities for Frank in the RCN to which Fecbrick replied, "Just have him go down to the naval reserve and I'll see him." It didn't quite turn out as a personal interview with Mr. Fecbrick. Uncle Frank was interviewed by a number of naval officers and found to be an acceptable candidate and enrolled in the RCN at the ripe old age of 17 years.<sup>42</sup>

Uncle Frank said that he and Jim joined separately. He does not know why Jim joined. He suspects that Jim had a friend who joined and that he followed him into that branch of the Canadian Armed Forces.<sup>43</sup> The one common element for all though, was the opportunity for a well paying job.

Both Frank and Jim were in their teens when they joined. Most of their peers ranged in age from as young as 16 to as old as 23. This is easily attested by witnessing gravestones of Canadian servicemen buried in wartime cemeteries overseas both in the Great and Second World War.

Uncle Frank was puzzled that boys as young as 16 were allowed to join after years of reflection. He also noted that many westerners joined the RCN. He mentioned that the westerners were tall and quite broad for their age. They looked a lot older than they were and probably fudged their way in. And fudge their way in they did by altering birth certificates and parental approvals.

But likely the main reason why so many young men and women joined was found in the desperation of the Great Depression. Frank reasoned why many joined so willingly was to escape the Great Depression. Many of Canada's young then lacked opportunity. Joining the service provided them with the necessities and

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<sup>42</sup> Frank Madigan (Uncle)/Gerry Madigan (Nephew), **Telephone Interview**, 22 Nov 2018, time: 1400-1435hrs local, note the passage of time often fogs the memory and recollection of names and events. The passages and citations that follow reflect the research of the proper names of people responsible for naval recruiting in Montreal between 1939-1943

<sup>43</sup> Frank Madigan (Uncle)/Gerry Madigan (Nephew), **Telephone Interview**, 22 Nov 2018, time: 1400-1435hrs local

basics of life in food, clothing/uniform and shelter. They were also well paid at the time given \$40/mo. pay as a minimum which provided for their needs while off ship. It was as if dark turned into day as the economic lifeblood of opportunity lifted this nation out of the desperation and despair of that awful period.

His observation about the westerners is not surprising. The West was the dustbowl of the Great Depression where despair was felt the most. It has been long observed anecdotally that many Canadian and United States sailors came far inland and from the prairies. Further evidence of that fact is found in the existence of a naval museum in Winnipeg that commemorates the activities of Canadian sailors during the Second World War. But all this humanity came to join, and they had to be enrolled and filtered into the system somewhere, somehow. That job fell to the Royal Canadian Naval Voluntary Reserves (RCNVR).

The Royal Canadian Navy Voluntary Reserve (RCNVR) was an organization designed to provide a pool of partially-trained personnel for use in an emergency. Its members were not professionals. They were strictly amateurs; however, over the course of the war they evolved into a most professional and proficient group of sailors.<sup>44</sup>

Before the Second World War the RCNVR existed on a hand-to-mouth basis; nothing has changed in that regard, the Canadian Forces financial requirement and needs are always at the bottom of Canada's spending priorities, preferring to be managing risks rather than adequately dealing with them. It was no different before the Second World War, naval appropriations did not allow for the procurement of proper training aids and facilities.<sup>45</sup>

Progress was slowly made. The threat of war improved the flow of appropriations to the RCN, but it was never enough. Significantly, the strength of the RCNVR was increased, new divisions were added, bringing the Volunteer Reserve to 18 Divisions and with nearly 1000 officers and men well before the war. The security threat saw a Supplementary Reserve created in 1937. That Supplementary Reserve consisted largely of a pool of experienced yachtsmen, attached to the RCNVR. Significantly, the West Coast Fishermen's Reserve was also created that same

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<sup>44</sup> Stephen Rybak, **The Canadian Naval Reserve – From War to War**, 2011  
Source: [http://nauticapedia.ca/Articles/Rybak3\\_From\\_War\\_to\\_War.php](http://nauticapedia.ca/Articles/Rybak3_From_War_to_War.php)  
Accessed 23 Nov 2018

<sup>45</sup> Ibid Stephen Rybak, 2011

year. This was the state of affairs and the pool that was at hand when the war began in 1939.<sup>46</sup>

The RCNVR became known as the Wavy Navy, was called to active duty in September 1939, nine days before war was declared. Its members joined Canada's fleet of six destroyers, four minesweepers and a schooner and the 2000 officers and men of the RCN. On September 10, 1939 the RCNVR along with all Canadian servicemen were at war with Germany.<sup>47</sup>

It now came to task to increase those numbers, upon which the 18 Divisions came to play a key role. At some point almost every one of Canada's 77,000 Volunteer Reserves were introduced to the Navy as they crossed the quarterdeck of the Stone Frigates. To add certain authenticity to the experience, these stone Frigates were all commissioned as HMC Ships in 1941.<sup>48</sup>

Initial training often began with volunteers placed on Divisional strength. They were called upon to perform part-time evening drills, before they were actually called to active service. It was here that many future sailors carried out their initial training, full-time, while at the Division. After basic eight-week training, the inductees were given six-week introductory trades training, followed by a draft to the coast for more intensive training. This all cumulated in a fleet posting to a ship.<sup>49</sup>

This meant that there was a certain lack of accommodation as training continued to plague the units throughout the War. The lack of quarters was never substantially improved until 1944 or 1945. Messing was a hit or miss affair. It was particularly hard for the 125 men of the Montreal Division. They were once fed from a single four-burner stove. But worse was to follow. Messing aboard ship was far worse, so this experience at least in part reduced the shock of living aboard a vessel rolling about in the North Atlantic.<sup>50</sup>

Canada threw its Naval Divisions into the War administratively totally unprepared. There was no policy, no supply system, no pay system, and there were constant moves to temporary quarters. It followed pillar to post with no administrative policies, no training equipment and no instructors that something had to be done to resolve this situation. That burden fell on the shoulders of the few left behind and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid Stephen Rybak, 2011

<sup>47</sup> Ibid Stephen Rybak, 2011

<sup>48</sup> Ibid Stephen Rybak, 2011

<sup>49</sup> Ibid Stephen Rybak, 2011

<sup>50</sup> Ibid Stephen Rybak, 2011

civilian volunteers. It often involved considerable innovation and sacrifice. The Commanding Officer of the Montreal Division was said to have covered the expenses and pay for his unit for the first months of the War. He was never reimbursed for these out-of-pocket expenditures made from the goodness of his heart.<sup>51</sup>

Uncle Frank's first encounter with the RCN suggests he met with a man of some distinction and stature. The man he identified as Mr. Fecbrick likely was Paul Whitney Earl who was Commanding Officer of the Montreal Division.<sup>52</sup>



Photograph, Archives, Ibid The Nauticapedia, Biography Earl, Paul Whitney, 29 September 2013

Paul Whitney Earl was a distinguished Canadian. In civil life after the war he was the President of the Navy League of Canada. He had tenure as a Member of the Quebec National Assembly where he served as Quebec's Provincial Minister of Revenue.<sup>53</sup>

These distinctions were pre-dated by his service in the Great War and later in the Second World War. During the Great war he served in the North Sea, Mediterranean, Black Sea and Caspian Sea in motor launches on coastal patrol and

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid Stephen Rybak, 2011

<sup>52</sup> The Nauticapedia, Biographical **data Earl, Paul Whitney, Commanding Officer of the Montreal Division**, 29 September 2013

Source:

<http://www.nauticapedia.ca/dbase/Query/Biolist3.php?name=Earl,%20Paul%20Whitney&id=15633&Page=1&input=Earl,%20Paul%20Whitney>

Accessed: 23 November 2018

<sup>53</sup> Ibid The Nauticapedia, Biography Earl Paul Whitney, 29 September 2013

anti-submarine duties as a Lieutenant RNVR. He was demobilized following the Great War and moved on into civilian life.<sup>54</sup>

Paul Whitney Earl always maintained an interest in naval matters between the war years. He was amongst the many RCNVR officers during those times. He was mobilized during the Second World War in 1940 when he was appointed an A/Lieutenant (Temp.) RCNVR (seniority dated 01 July 1940). He quickly rose in stature and was appointed Lieutenant-Commander (Temp.) RCNVR (seniority dated 01 October 1940) only some three short months later.<sup>55</sup>

He had what is today, is considered as a meteoric rise in rank and prestige. He served in various capacities notably as Director of Reserve Divisions and Chief Recruiting Officer at NDHQ in 1941. Concurrently he served in the Montreal Division RCNVR as Commanding Officer from 1940 to 1942. He was appointed as an A/Commander (Temp.) RCNVR 1942 and served as Staff Officer to the Commanding Officer Reserve Divisions. This was followed by an appointment as a Commander (Temp.) RCNVR (seniority dated 01/January 1943). He then served as Deputy Commanding Officer Reserve Divisions in 1944. He had a strong connection to service in Montreal, Qc where he finally served as Naval Officer-in-Charge Montreal and Commanding Officer HMCS Hochelaga 1944.<sup>56</sup>

Paul Whitney Earl was finally appointed Commodore RCN(R) with a seniority dated 01Feb 1946). Paul Whitney Earl was demobilized 01 Jul 1946. But he continued to serve in the RCN reserve as the Officer-in-Charge Montreal Area and Senior Officer In Command. He finally retired in 1952, a highly decorated officer, CBE. CStJ. and released.<sup>57</sup>

Following the war, the Stone Frigates were used to welcome the naval reservists back from the Navy, to discharge and demobilize them to civilian life. It was for many, the last sight of a Reserve Division and the Navy as they bade the service farewell and happily returned to civvy street. The RCNVR ships designated as demobilization centres were kept busy at this task until late 1946.<sup>58</sup>

Such was the quality and calibre of men that Uncle Frank served with during the Second World War; men who would go out of their way for their comrades, even

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid The Nauticapedia, Biography Earl Paul Whitney, 29 September 2013

<sup>55</sup> Ibid The Nauticapedia, Biography Earl Paul Whitney, 29 September 2013

<sup>56</sup> Ibid The Nauticapedia, Biography Earl Paul Whitney, 29 September 2013

<sup>57</sup> Ibid The Nauticapedia, Biography Earl Paul Whitney, 29 September 2013

<sup>58</sup> Ibid Stephen Rybak, 2011

out of pocket for their care and welfare, men who would have each others backs!  
And maybe that's one reason why they joined too!

### **Concluding Remarks**

Canada was just a small nation whose contributions punched far above its weight over the course of the Second World War. From its small population of 11.2 million, more than 1.1 million Canadians served in the Canadian Army, Royal Canadian Navy, Royal Canadian Air Force, and in forces across the Commonwealth. Approximately 10% of Canada's population was in uniform, meaning that practically every family was touched by the war in one way or another.<sup>59</sup>

The presence of their sons and daughters in uniform was often felt directly by families and the community as more than 44,000 lost their lives and 54,000 were wounded. These casualties and deaths were frequently reported in the press or through telegrams received.<sup>60</sup>

And Canada's investment, that continued even after the war, was great too. The financial cost was \$21.8 billion between 1939 and 1950 well after the war. As a result, Canada's armed forces grew from basically nothing to be by the end of the war; the fourth largest air force, and fifth largest navy. Often overlooked was the Merchant Navy's contribution that saw over 25,000 voyages completed across the dangerous waters of the Atlantic, a deadly battle ground. Some 130,000 Allied pilots and aircrew were trained here in Canada in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. On D-Day, 6 June 1944 the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division landed on "Juno" beach in Normandy, in conjunction with allied forces.<sup>61</sup> Often overlooked was the Canadian Army's role in the liberation of Italy who success was overshadowed by D-Day.

It was all quite the accomplishment, and victory, that was achieved, was directly due to the efforts of young men and women; like Uncle Frank, Jim, and Aunt Dot. Their war wasn't just fought on the battlefield, but on the home front too, in the

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<sup>59</sup> Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, **Military history of Canada during World War II**, 3 November 2018, at 23:40 (UTC)  
Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military\\_history\\_of\\_Canada\\_during\\_World\\_War\\_II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_Canada_during_World_War_II)  
Accessed: 5 Nov 2018

<sup>60</sup> Ibid Wikipedia, Canada's Military History, 3 November 2018, at 23:40 (UTC)

<sup>61</sup> Ibid Wikipedia, Canada's Military History, 3 November 2018, at 23:40 (UTC)

waiting and anticipation of their loved ones' safe return, perhaps humming "'til we meet again".

Many veterans then and now are reluctant to talk about their experience. Jim's niece Mary Ann asked Uncle Jim years ago why vets never talk. He was involved with a military group at the time. He took out a video with an old news reel and it was a burial at sea. He told Mary Ann he was a witness to this and that's why he doesn't talk about it. It was very humbling.<sup>62</sup>

It was my uncle's fervent hope that their children would never have to suffer or endure such a task, as I was often reminded by them "War is a terrible thing, Gerry." It is, but we should also remember that it was their sacrifice and service that paved the way for our generation. It was a high price to pay, but pay it they did, willingly, so we could have the memories of the good times of our youth and the freedom to grow and live productive lives of our choosing. It was the great gift from "The Greatest Generation".

Thanks Uncle Frank and Uncle Jim.

"Lest we forget"

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<sup>62</sup> Mary Ann Miron (nee Madigan), niece personal conversation 6 Nov 2018