



# Sabretache

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THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## THE TRAINBUSTERS CLUB



USS Orleck

Of the various clubs formed by the naval forces during the Korean war, one of the most interesting was that of an group that focused on the destruction of trains which ran the deadly gauntlet in the Taebak Mountain range. The Trainbusters Club (TBC) saw its beginnings in July 1952 when the American destroyer Orleck destroyed two trains during a two week period. The commander of Task Force 95, recognizing a morale booster when he saw one, declared Orleck the trainbusting champion and issued a challenge to the rest of the American task group to beat that score.

The TBC was initially considered to be a United States Navy project. In the spirit of fairness and competition, the challenge to destroy trains was eventually extended to ships from other navies. Had the idea of the TBC been formed sooner, many more ships would have

qualified for membership and the official count of 28 trains destroyed would have been much greater. The first rule for admittance to the 'club' and the membership fee, required that the train's engine be destroyed. After that, any damage inflicted to a train would be counted as a kill regardless of the fate of the engine. Rules were so strictly enforced that all kills recorded were legitimate. Membership, however, was difficult because of the engine clause. Trains that were southbound and laden with war material were considered much more valuable targets than northbound trains which were essentially empty. Korean train engineers soon learned what 'hell on earth' meant. They too, were brave men. They found themselves dodging shell explosions just a few feet ahead of their travel. They took their trains across damaged tracks and trestles which swayed precariously. They did their utmost to save the trains by attempting repairs. During daylight, they hid in tunnels hoping that the entrances and exits did not get blocked by the persistent and accurate shelling of the naval guns.

Out of the twenty-eight kills officially tallied by the TBC, the **Royal Canadian Navy** accounted for eight. CRUSADER, HAIDA, and ATHABASKAN were collectively credited with that number. That gave the **RCN** the proportional record which was a significant feat in itself.

The main achievement, however, was the winning of the championship by **HMCS CRUSADER**, who bagged four trains, three of them in a single twenty four hour period. The business of trainbusting was based on extreme patience, a degree of luck and superb gunnery. Often the Korean weather kept ships far out at sea so the guns were operating at maximum range and had to be able to hit a speeding target. Poor weather also made verification of damage very

difficult.



HMCS CRUSADER

### CMHS Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on

**Tuesday,  
December 15th  
2015**

**7:00 pm**

At the  
Petty Officers' Mess  
HCMS Tecumseh

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CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The  
CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
is a non-profit registered society  
which fosters the study of the

military and the police, and the heritage of  
Canada, the British Empire, and the world  
as well as the preservation of military  
artifacts and records.

The CMHS meets once every calendar month  
at: Petty Officers' Mess  
HMCS Tecumseh  
1820 - 24th Street SW  
Calgary AB T2T 0G6

## Notice of Next Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on  
**Tuesday, December 15th, 2015,**  
**19:00 (7:00 pm)**

At the Petty Officers' Mess, HMCS Tecumseh.

Members are reminded that an offering of foodstuffs for the Legion Food Bank is considered your unofficial entrance fee to our regular scheduled meetings.

The unofficial agenda of this meeting will be:

Introduction of guests, Minutes of last meeting Correspondence, Membership report Treasurer's report, Old business / New business Break, Show & Tell  
The President, **Kevin Roberts** would like to invite everyone to remain after the meeting for an informal time of fellowship.

During the 37 months of the Korean War, Canada's ships proved themselves to be at the top of any list of outstanding accomplishments. The spirit of the Battle of the Atlantic shone through in Korea, slightly more than five years after the end of that great ocean epic.

While the two wars were similar in that Canada's navy was front and centre, the manner in which the battles were fought was different. No longer were ships required to shepherd merchant vessels across long stretches of submarine-infested water. Gone also, were the ship-to-ship engagements that were common in the English Channel [one such engagement brought glory to HMCS Haida and its commanding officer, Harry de Wolfe] as were the long, dark, death-defying runs to Murmansk in Russia.

In Korea, the Canadian Navy's tasks were divided between escorting aircraft carriers and inshore bombardment. The carrier routine was for both coasts of the Korean Peninsula; the smaller Royal Navy and Royal Australian Navy carriers along with the United States Navy's converted merchant-ships-to-carriers on the West Coast and the USN's Seventh Fleet fast carriers on the East Coast. Both coasts presented obstacles; on the West side of the Peninsula, the greatest threat was mines whereas on the East Coast it was the difficulty in knocking off the Communist supply line without becoming a victim of good Communist shooting. HMCS Iroquois, out of Halifax, felt the accuracy of the Communist gunners as she was hit with loss of life.



Painting of Crusader firing on the North Korean coastline.

Whether on the East or West coast, the Royal Canadian Navy excelled. HMCS Crusader, homeport Esquimalt, BC, was the UN Force's top train buster with five to her credit. Stopping a Communist supply train was no easy feat. The railway hugged the east side of the Peninsula; the tracks were laid inside mountain tunnels with open space between them. The trick was to fire at the precise time a train came hurtling out of a tunnel as it sped across the gap before entering the next tunnel. The train engineers would stop their trains inside the tunnels, build up a head of steam, release the brakes and go hell-bent-for-leather across the gap. The gaps were mostly rather short and the time to nail one of the supply trains was limited. In all, Canada's navy led the way among the UN Force with Crusader top gun.

## Minutes of the last meeting

### Minutes of the meeting of the **Calgary Military Historical Society**

#### Meeting held on November 17, 2015 at the Petty Officer's Mess, HMCS Tecumseh

1. **Meeting called to order** by President Kevin R. at 7:10 PM. 18 members in attendance. No guests present.
2. **Minutes** of previous meeting. Discussed and call for approval by Bob M. Seconded by Barry E. Approved Unanimous.
3. **Newsletter.** No omissions or corrections. Discussion of story
4. **Treasures Report.**  
Report by Floyd S. Lists of monies collected from book auctions, donations etc. Listing of expenditures. Barry E. moves that the Treasures report be accepted as reported. Seconded by Brian H. Accepted, Unanimous.
5. **Membership Report.**  
Report by Floyd S. Membership Total 35 members (2 Life, 2 Hon., 31 Regular).  
Member Barry E. moves that the Membership report be accepted as reported. Seconded by Member Susan E. Accepted, Unanimous.
6. **Newsletter.** Discussion of story if necessary
7. **Old Business.** None
- 7a. **Announcements:** None
8. **Correspondence:** None
9. **New Business:**
  - Christmas Holiday Soirée - Friday January 15, 2016 at the Horton Road Legion with meet and greet/cocktails at 18:00.
  - Daryl K. discussed Stewart Russel - Russel Militaria in Pincher Creek, Alberta.
  - Kevin R. request of the membership, that all members attending the next (December) meeting bring at least 1 idea to aid in increasing the CMHS's membership.
10. **Break** - no auction by Ticketmaster Neil.
11. **Show and Tell:**
  - Brian H. - Officers cap badge, South Saskatchewan Regiment.
  - Allan R. - UK Natal Native Rebellion 1906 Medal in silver without 1906 clasp, UK Tibet Gyantse Campaign 1903-04 Medal in bronze for camp followers.
  - Indra R. - Collection of Naval embroidered patches, flashes and cap tallies.
  - James B. - 1961 Canadian cold war booklet "If War Should Come" - published by Calgary Target Area Civil Defence, Calgary, Alberta.
    - Ray Gilbert, Calgary Tanks Dieppe POW survivor, passed away in Calgary, Friday, November 6, 2015 at the age of 93 years.
  - Bob M. - Various medals, including a Luftwaffe 4 years of service, 2<sup>nd</sup> class Volunteer Spanish War, Japanese WW1 Service, US Civil War (unissued).
  - Gary M. - Discusses documents from ancestors, including 3 Commission Certificates, 2 co-signed by Henry John Temple, 3<sup>rd</sup> Viscount Palmerston - twice British Prime Minister (1855-58 & 1859-65).
    - Discusses club membership interest in Family ancestral history.
  - John E. - Grandfather's WW1 service records (CEF 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion), photos and trench cap, discussed.
  - Daryl K. - Korean War marching compass, Cdn. Seaforth Highlanders Officers (Capt.) Tunic, 3 cap badges New Brunswick Dragoons (1926, 1920's variant and 1933)
12. **Adjournment:** Member Susan E. calls for motion to adjourn. Seconded by Allan R. Meeting Adjourned. Time 20:25



**HMCS HAIDA**

**HMCS Haida** is the last remaining example of the British Tribal Class destroyers. There were 27 built between 1937 and 1948. The Tribals were considered by some to be "magnificent in appearance, majestic in movement and menacing in disposition". They were the most advanced in naval architecture, marine propulsion and weaponry of their time

During World War II, the Tribals saw considerable action in every theatre of war from the Arctic to Okinawa and their exploits are legend in naval history. In the fall of 1943, **HAIDA** operated out of Scapa Flow with the Royal Navy to assist with convoy escorting duties to North Russia on the Murmansk run. On Dec 26, 1943 she was present at the Battle of North Cape, when the Ger-

man battlecruiser **SCHARNHORST** was sunk by the British Home Fleet. Early in 1944, **HAIDA** joined the Tenth Destroyer Flotilla operating out of Plymouth England. This mixed force of British, Canadian and Polish warships was to clear enemy shipping off the coast of France in anticipation of the D-Day landings. During this period, **HAIDA** achieved great fame by destroying more enemy vessels than any other ship in the RCN. Following a refit in Halifax in late 1944, **HAIDA** rejoined the Fleet in Scapa Flow in early 1945 and spent the rest of the war operating in the Arctic and on the coast of Norway. After the surrender of Germany, the ship was overhauled to operate in the Pacific, but the war ended before her conversion was completed.

In 1947, **HAIDA** was recommissioned into the Royal Canadian Navy and worked on the East Coast and in the Arctic. The ship operated with the Atlantic Fleet in the post-war years and in 1950 she was taken out of service for modernization and conversion to an Anti-Submarine escort with Squid mountings on her quarterdeck and improved ASDIC (sonar). **HAIDA** was recommissioned in March 1952. At that time, **HAIDA** became the first Canadian ship to be commissioned under a Queen instead of a King, thus she became known as "**Her Majesty's Canadian Ship**". After trials and workups were completed, she sailed almost immediately for Korea.

**TRAINBUSTING** **HMCS HAIDA** arrived in Korea on November 6, 1952 when action was already waning. Her crew were well aware of their ship's history and they were determined to make Korea a prominent page of that book. It was imperative that **HAIDA** join the TBC if only to add one more item to her list of accomplishments. The opportunity came at 0300 hours on December 19 near Sonjin but was lost when the engine escaped. Her gunners pounded the rest of the train but their hearts were not in it. They left most of the cars standing as a 'gift' to **USS THE SULLIVANS** when that ship came on the scene at 0516 hours. **HAIDA'S** crew reasoned that their chances of joining the TBC had slipped because of the escaped engine and their orders to proceed to Sasebo Japan within a few hours. **HAIDA** returned the following March for a two week patrol. During that time, only one engine was seen and fired on. The range was too great and once again the ship went away empty handed.

On May 26, at 2215 hours, **HAIDA** was anchored near Tanch'on. The night was bright under clear skies and the sea was calm. Both 'A' and 'B' guns were closed up to action stations and now it was a case of waiting. At 2320, a train was spotted. Carefully, the guns were swung to lead the engine and fired. Seconds later, the shells found their mark. The engine, hit dead center, exploded and toppled onto its side while the trailing cars spilled along the track. **HAIDA** had finally joined the 'club'. For the next three hours, her guns hammered the remainder of the train. Three days later, **HAIDA** was back, this time several kilometers south of Sonjin. At 2200, a train was sighted, heading north. All guns opened fire and forced the train to come to a standstill. A starshell revealed that the engine was yards short of the safety afforded by a tunnel. Scant seconds gave the trainmen the time they needed to uncouple the engine and move it into the tunnel but it was too late for the rest of the train.

During her first tour of duty in Korea, Canada's most celebrated warship ran up a total of six east coast and three west coast patrols. **HAIDA** spent more than half of her 217 days in Korea on active patrol, was fired on twice by shore batteries and both times destroyed her assailants. Two of her ship's company earned honours for their service. The Distinguished Service Cross went to her Commanding Officer, Cdr. Dunn Lantier, RCN while PO Ralph Smith earned a Mention-in-Dispatches for some superb gun-laying while downing a bridge. Officially, **HAIDA** was credited for the destruction of 2.5 trains in Korea.