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THE OFFICIAL
JOURNAL OF
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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March 2016



The Battle of the St. Lawrence.

Because of the importance of the port of Halifax, U-boats roamed the waters off Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, the starting-point for any convoys destined for Britain. Since they were already so close to Canada's coastline, it would be but a small step for German submarines to infiltrate the St. Lawrence, the huge river leading into the country. In point of fact, however, the German navy had prepared no plans regarding the St. Lawrence, and any U-boats that entered the river did so of their own accord or by accident, as evidenced by their first attacks.

The Battle of the St. Lawrence was touched off by the U-553, a U-boat which had first scoured the eastern coastline of the United States in search of convoys on the Boston-Halifax run. Engine trouble caused it to change course toward the St. Law-

rence, deemed to be a calmer sector, where it could carry out repairs and then pick off easy targets. On May 12, 1942, the night-time silence was broken by the U-553's torpedoes, which ripped through the British freighter *Nicoya* a few kilometres off Anticosti Island. Less than two hours later, the U-boat hunted down and torpedoed the Dutch freighter *Leto*, which went down in a fiery explosion. Having brought the war to less than 60 km from Quebec City, the U-553 left the St. Lawrence estuary and returned to the Atlantic

In the summer of 1942, the St. Lawrence was guarded by only one Bangor class minesweeper, two Motor launches, and one armed yacht. This naval force was clearly not up to the task of patrolling the 575 km long, 110 km wide St. Lawrence water route between Sept-Îles and the Gaspé coast. Even though it was reinforced by five Flower class corvettes after the U-boat attacks, it was still woefully inadequate. The incident revealed that the RCN simply did not have the resources to deal with the situation. The convoys from Canada and the U.S. that it escorted had to reach not only Britain, but also the Soviet Union. Allied strategists had to set priorities: like the St. Lawrence, the Norfolk-Boston run and numerous routes in the West Indies and the Gulf of Mexico also lacked adequate protection. The St. Lawrence was considered to be a secondary objective by both the Germans and the Allies themselves. But regardless of whether it was seen as a second front, feelings ran high once again in Canada when the U-132 sank three freighters off the Gaspé coast on July 6 and damaged another on July 20. In both cases, the U-boat was able to escape attack by the corvette HMCS Drummondville

Following attacks in August on harbours in Labrador and Newfoundland and on a convoy in the Strait of Belle Isle, the U-513, 517 and 165 set their sights on the St. Lawrence. In September, even after being detected and machine-gunned by an air patrol, the U-517 entered the St. Lawrence estuary, where it sank nine vessels and damaged another over a two-week period. Each time, it managed to escape pursuing escort vessels. The U-165 managed to sink the armed yacht HMCS Raccoon, but was continually attacked by the RCAF.

The consequences of the German's success The Canadian government under Prime minister King, ordered the St. Lawrence closed to transatlantic traffic on September 9, 1942. This decision, which was more political than military, was very controversial and was viewed as acknowledgement of Canada's seeming inability to protect its territorial waters. Some critics felt that the Canadian military was seeking to honour its commitments to the Royal Navy no matter what the cost, to the detriment of Canada's own territorial waters. They pointed to the decision by Admiral Percy Nelles, who deployed 20 corvettes needed to protect the St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico and the Mediterranean, in support of "Operation Torch." Others saw the closing of the St. Lawrence as a wise decision, designed to reduce loss of lives, time and equipment. Freight that was normally shipped to the ports of Montreal and Quebec City was sent instead to Halifax, by rail. While this placed considerable strain on the rail system, it meant that all convoys now left from the same port, with the advantage that convoys from Halifax and New York would no longer have to wait for convoys from Quebec before setting out for Britain. The closure in no way damaged the Allied operations, nor was it a strategic advantage for the Germans.



HMCS Raccoon

CMHS Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on
**Tuesday,
March 15th,
2016
7:00 pm**
At the
Petty Officers' Mess
HCMS Tecumseh

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE
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, March 15th, 2016

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.

With tensions already running high, more bad news came in October, when the ferry SS Caribou was torpedoed by the U-69, during a chance encounter in Cabot Strait, between Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. Of the 237 passengers, 131 perished. The U-boat managed to escape the attacks of the minesweeper HMCS Grandmère. In November, the U-518 sank two freighters and damaged another in Conception Bay, Newfoundland.

The year 1943 was a turning point in the Battle of the Atlantic. The U-boats continued to ravage the convoys, but they now had to deal with a different type of adversary, in the form of a much-improved Royal Canadian Navy. The RCN's ranks had swollen fifty-fold, and this had posed considerable challenges. Training for officers and ratings was rough and ready, aboard hastily built vessels. But new leaders such as Rear-Admiral Leonard Murray saw to it that crews finally received better training, and that ships were equipped with better weapons and detection systems. The better trained and better equipped Canadian crews, who made up 48% of the Atlantic convoy escorts, were much more effective allies, and were more than a match for the U-boats.



SS Caribou

The U-boats did not return to Canadian waters until 1944, when the Allied armies were poised to invade Germany itself. The average life of a U-boat was only three missions, so the crews were always eager to find easy targets. The submarines were now equipped with a snorkel, a telescopic system allowing them to provision themselves at sea and recharge their batteries without having to surface. Using this system, the U-1223 entered the St. Lawrence undetected, seriously damaged the frigate HMCS Magog on October 14 and damaged the Canadian freighter SS Fort Thompson on November 2. Three weeks later, in Cabot Strait, the U-1228 torpedoed the corvette HMCS Shawinigan, making it the last victim of the Battle of the St. Lawrence.

These German attacks, though very limited, momentarily reawakened the fears experienced two years before. In May 1945, the U-boat menace finally came to an end when the U-889 and U-190 surrendered to the Canadian Navy, at Shelburne, Nova Scotia and Bay Bulls, Newfoundland.

Although the St. Lawrence River was never a major target for German strategists, the Germans knew that convoys were inadequately protected and that the RCN was short of ships. Neither the number of ships sunk nor the closure of the St. Lawrence provided any strategic gain to the Third Reich. Of the 2,500 vessels sunk during the Battle of the Atlantic, only 23 (including three warships) were sunk by half a dozen U-boats in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The Battle of the St. Lawrence was ultimately won in the Atlantic, where Canadian crews distinguished themselves. The RCN won increasing success as it gained more experience and better equipment. It made 25,343 crossings, delivered 165 million tonnes of provisions and equipment, and destroyed 33 German and Italian submarines. At war's end, the Royal Canadian Navy was the third largest naval power in the world, with 90,000 men and 400 vessels.



U-190 after its surrender in
Canada

Minutes of the meeting of the Calgary Military Historical Society**Meeting held on February 16th, 2016 at the Petty Officer's Mess, HMCS Tecumseh**

Meeting called to order by President Kevin R. at 7:10 PM 25 members in attendance. And 1 Guests present.

Minutes of previous meeting. Discussed and call for approval by Barry E.. Seconded by Bob McP.

Newsletter. Discussion of story

Membership and Treasures Report; not available due to vacationing Treasurer. Tabled till next meeting.

Correspondence. Email questions about emblems on gravestone. Answered by Member D Love.

Old Business

Dave L. gave a talk to Alberta Family History Group. Describes meeting that he and Member Mike C. attended. Both took questions from group and have had email discussions with members since.

President Kevin R. discusses upcoming Facebook page. Has delayed putting it up and wants to wait awhile.

The Facebook company has closed a number of sites due to be associated with gun sales. Does not want that to happen to our site. Discussion of what Facebook is and what it does.

New Business

Member Roy A. from Edmonton passed a comment and question to Member Brian H. Would like to know if proxy votes on important questions could be held on matters by out of town or members that could not attend meetings. Discussion follows by a number of members. Observations include whether it could be done informally, advance notice would have to be given, whether a change in the Constitution would be needed. Information would be studied and members would get back to this subject in the upcoming meetings.

Member Lindra R. mentions attending Family Day at Military Museum and if notice could be posted about upcoming events.

President Kevin R. takes opportunity to present the Maurice Harvey Award for the fine work that has been done by Member Brian H. Mentions his long involvement with the society.

Member Brian H. accepts the award and thanks everyone. Mentions quote that his Grandmother said. "Your horn always sounds better when its blown by someone else"

Break.

Show and Tell

David G.- Binder with various badges collar dogs from the Canadian Machine Gun Corps.

Barry E.- Canadian issue, Korean War hat, Food bag 1911. Prior to WW1 soldiers carried a bread bag in haversack. Poster of enamel badges of Canadian military. Passes it on to Member Lindra.

Al Mc. - Boer War and WW1 medals of Capt. H Wilkins, who was with the Strathcona's. Had lost medal and received duplicate and now Al has found original.. Shows comparison between the two.

Dave S.- show 18th Cdn. Light Horse cap badge. Discusses conservator wax now available to preserve medals and badges. Available at Lee Valley.

Allan R.- Military button display

Gary R. - Discusses Civil War enactment at Gettysburg that he attended. Photos and stories of filming of Pickets Charge.

Mike. C.- Naval sword, various souvenir ribbons from Boer war coming and going. Original Imperial Yeomanry Hat Badge, Welcome home ribbons, and Canadian Artillery 1901 badge for best shot during competition.

Al D.- 97 year-old Mother has given him scrapbook on family history. Includes 1911 songs and WW1 information. Will give more details in coming meetings.

Gary M.- Medal year book, discusses valuable medals. Shows Sultans 1801 gold medal from Egypt, given to his relative. Navy General service Medal.1801

John E.- Special service information and book. All purpose back pack from original member , 1943 in mint condition.

Bob McP.- Shows French St. Helena Medal, Board showing medal bars fro Flight Officer McKnight and Fred McCall. Descriptions and history.

Member Gary R. discusses insurance claims and how to get your collection properly listed and documentation needed. Have evaluations done, photograph everything and give copy to your agent.

President Kevin mentions new website www.thecanadiansoldier.com

Move to adjourn by Allan R. seconded by Mike C.



Lieutenant-Commander Margaret Brooke, was a Canadian naval nurse . She was returning from leave aboard the Caribou, a ferry travelling between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, along with another nurse Agnes Wilkie, when at 3.14am on October 14 1942, the ship was hit by a torpedo from U-69 in the Cabot Strait off Newfoundland. “When the torpedo struck I was thrown across the room right on top of Agnes,” she later wrote in a letter sent home to her brother just after the incident. “I knew what had happened but for a second couldn’t do anything.”

There was “one terrified mob” on deck, and their assigned lifeboat was shattered. The two women, who had managed to retrieve “our Burberrys” did not know that they should jump clear of the vessel. “We were sucked under with her,” she recalled. “How we got away from her, I don’t know but we clung together somehow all the time we were under and, when we finally reached the surface, we managed to grab a piece of wreckage and clung to that.”

A few minutes later a piece of overturned lifeboat floated by and they joined others clinging to ropes. A soldier helped Margaret Brooke up and then they pulled Agnes Wilkie out of the water. Soon, however, the weather and the freezing water brought on hypothermia. Agnes Wilkie lost consciousness and let go but Margaret Brooke hauled her back, holding on to a rope on the lifeboat with one hand and Agnes with the other. “I did manage to hold her until daybreak,” she recalled, “but then a wave pulled her right away from me. She didn’t suffer (because she was unconscious) but it was so terrible to see her go.”

Only Margaret Brooke and two or three other survivors were still clinging to the lifeboat half an hour later when the minesweeper Grandmère picked them up. The naval ship had been escorting the ferry but it left the survivors to chase the German submarine; 136 of the 237 passengers died, many of them civilians, including children.

German U-boats sank 23 ships during the Battle of the St Law-

rence, killing 340 people and Caribou was the largest single loss. Four months after that sinking, U-69 was forced to the surface by depth charges, rammed and sunk by the destroyer Fame. In January 1943 Margaret Brooke was appointed MBE (Military) for her “gallantry and courage whilst in the water in attempting to save the life of another Nursing Sister.”

Margaret Martha Brooke was born on April 15 1915 at Ardath, Saskatchewan, and grew up on a farm there. Her father Herbert ran the farm and her mother Maude was a schoolteacher. When she was 18, Margaret and her brother left the farm for Saskatoon to attend the University of Saskatchewan where Margaret took a degree in Household Science; her brother studied Medicine and served in Skeena, ending the war as a Lieutenant Commander.

After the war she stayed in the Canadian navy, rising to the rank of Lieutenant-Commander before retiring in 1962.

She returned to the University of Saskatchewan and earned a doctorate in Paleontology with a thesis on microfossils of the Jurassic period, the tiny sea creatures that once lived in the sea that covered southern Saskatchewan.

On her 100th birthday the Royal Canadian Navy announced it would be naming one of its new Arctic Patrol Vessels the Margaret Brooke.

Lieutenant-Commander Margaret Brooke, born on April 15 1915, died January 9 2016

REMEMBER THE "CARIBOU" AND HER GALLANT CREW

