



# Sabretache

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THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

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## A VERY BRAVE MAN

**Lieutenant Commander David Balme** led a boarding party which captured the secrets of Enigma from a German U-boat during the Battle of Convoy OB138 in May 1941, a turning point in the Battle of the Atlantic.

On May 9 1941 Commander Joe Baker-Cresswell, captain of the destroyer Bulldog, was about to order the ships of the 3rd Escort Group to leave a west-bound trans-Atlantic Convoy in order to refuel at Iceland. Suddenly two merchant ships were torpedoed in quick succession.

The torpedoes were fired from U-110, commanded by the U-boat ace Fritz-Julius Lemp. Lemp however had failed to notice the proximity of the corvette Aubretia. Before his second salvo of torpedoes struck, Aubretia's Lieutenant Commander Vivian Smith commenced a counter-attack with depth charges which blew U-110 to the surface.

The destroyer Broadway attempted to ram the surfaced U-boat and all three British ships opened fire with their guns. There was panic in U-110 and the crew abandoned ship: 15 men were killed or drowned including Lemp, and 32 survivors were picked up and hurried below deck in Aubretia. The action was over in minutes, and when Baker-Cresswell stopped Bulldog alongside the U-boat he found it wallowing stern-down in the Atlantic rollers.

**Balme** was ordered to row across in Bulldog's whaler to "get whatever you can out of her – documents, books, charts, and get the wireless settings, anything like that". Jumping on to the U-boat's outer hull he walked, revolver in hand, to the conning tower, at which point he had to holster his pistol in order to climb three ladders to the top of the tower and down again inside the U-boat to the control room. It was, he later recalled, "a very nasty moment because both my hands were occupied and I was a sitting target to anyone down below".

**Balme** was very frightened; he expected the boat to sink, or scuttling charges to blow up at any moment, or to be overcome by chlorine from damaged batteries. The inside of the boat was dimly lit, there was a "nasty" hissing noise, and he could hear water slopping in the bilges. "I immediately went right forward and right aft with my revolver in my hand to see if there was anybody about," he said later. Noting that despite damage the U-boat was clean and well-kept and there was food on the table, but finding no Germans aboard, Balme called down the boarding party and "started ransacking all the treasures of the U-boat".

In the wireless office, telegraphist Alan Long found "a funny sort of instrument, Sir, it looks like a typewriter but when you press the keys something else comes up on it". Balme recognised this as "some sort of coding machine", which he ordered to be unscrewed, and he organised a human chain to carry the machine and other equipment, charts and documents up the ladders and into the whaler.

Balme and Long had found an **Enigma machine**, the cipher device which the German U-boat service used to communicate to its fleet in, as the Germans thought, an unbreakable code. Besides that day's settings they also recovered the daily settings until the end of June, which, when delivered later to Bletchley Park, enabled Alan Turing and his team to read the German naval "Hydra" code, the officer-only code, and, with the knowledge and experience gained, to go on to crack several other codes.



### CMHS Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on

**Tuesday,  
October 18th  
2016**

**7:00 pm**

At the  
Petty Officers' Mess  
HCMS Tecumseh

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE  
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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, October 18, 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.

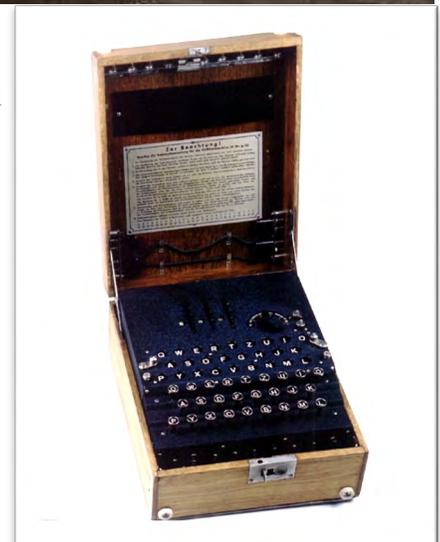


A party from the Destroyer Bulldog prepares to board the U-boat

Balme and his men spent six hours inside U-110, where for some time they were left alone in the Atlantic, listening to the distant sound of depth charges while the 3rd Escort Group hunted another U-boat. When Bulldog returned, Balme passed a towline, and for a day U-110 was pulled towards Iceland, until about 11.00 on May 10 1941 when the German vessel reared its bows in the air and sank stern-first.

The loss of U-110 enabled the British to throw a cloak of secrecy over the whole affair, a cloak so dark that even when Captain Stephen Roskill, the official historian of the Royal Navy, wrote about the capture in 1959, only those already in the know were able to read between the lines and would have realised that the secret of the capture was not the U-boat but the Enigma material which was salvaged from it. **Balme** had been told that the truth of his secret capture would be kept forever, and was surprised when in the 1970s its secrets began to leak out.

**Commander Joe Baker-Cresswell** was awarded the DSO, **Sub-Lieutenant David Balme** the DSC, and **telegraphist Allan Long** the DSM, for enterprise and skill in action against enemy submarines.



Enigma Machine

## Minutes of the last meeting

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

Meeting held on September 20, 2016 at the Petty Officer's Mess, HMCS Tecumseh

1. Meeting called to order by President Kevin R. at 7:10 PM. 21 members in attendance.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting.** No issues. Correction under Show & Tell, correct spelling Garrett Lapp. Member Barry E. moves that the Previous Meeting Minutes be accepted.

Seconded by Indra R. Approved, Unanimous.

3. **Newsletter.** No omissions or corrections.

4. **Treasures Report.**

Report by Susan E. Lists of monies collected from book auctions, donations etc. Listing of expenditures. Member Barry E. moves that the Treasures report be accepted as reported.

Seconded by Don S. Approved.

5. **Membership Report.**

Report by Susan E. Total 49 members (2 Life, 1 Hon., 46 regular). Member David G. moves that the Membership report be accepted as reported. Seconded by Member Bob M. Approved.

6. **Correspondence:** None

7. **Announcements:** None

8. **Old Business.**

- Dave G to book Victor Taboika tour for November meeting, e-mail Marty with confirmation.

9. **New Business:**

- Junior Membership discussed

- Martin U. tabled a motion to establish a Junior Membership category for applicants under 18 years of age with annual dues set at \$15.00. Seconded by Bob M. Motion approved.

- Indra R. raises issues with Societies Executive election format. She will table a motion to establish an executive election nomination and ballot format including applicable By-Law Amendment for approval at the AGM.

- David G. tables a motion "That the Society pay Susan E. \$20.00, reimbursing her cost for the Societies display table at the Sept. 17, 2016 Thorncliff AACCA Firearms Show. Seconded by David S. Motion approved.

- Darryl K. discusses the Military Museums of Calgary's decommissioning and sale of uniform items. Contact museums for information.

10. **Auction** Martin U. donated "Canadian War Posters by Marc H Choko. Auctioned off for \$5.00.

11. **Break**

12. **Show and Tell:**

John E. - WWII Cdn Army personal & uniform maintenance kit with a large selection of items.

Daryl K. - Cdn Army items - helmet CG634 (US pattern M1) c/w cover; CFA metal stirrups; Enfield #7 bayonet; 1945 canvas duffle bag; Uranium mine's KC cap badge

James B. - Thorcliff find, WWII McLean's magazine. Discusses stereotypes in ads.

Rob. - Napoleon Bonaparte 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ceramic decanter in presentation box.

Bob M. - Swedish copper plate money marked (2 Daller 1716 and 3 Daller 1718); Finish Order of the Cross of Liberty; Moroccan 1910 Order of Ouissam Alrouite.

Dave G. - CEF cap & collar Insignia displays, Railway Corp & Troop, Construction & Pioneer Batt attalions and the 127<sup>th</sup> Battallion - 12<sup>th</sup> York Rangers who were assigned to Cdn Railway troops in Europe.

Susan E. - Collection of WWI mailed post cards including studio photo, silk embroidery etc.

Barry E. - Shoulder titles Cir. 1908 early type CAMC & RCHA.

Garrett L. - WWI medals to 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Caster Alberta soldier, Book of Caster Alberta WWI veterans.

Dave S. - Discusses Globe & Mail currently running WWI Obituaries That coincide with daily publication date.

Indra R. - Display, compilation of pins & badges, various themes, Cdn/US military, aircraft, sweetheart pins & Lucite Pendants etc.

Alan R. - WWII German (Kriegsmarine) medal display, notes as war progressed shortages of medal coincided with decline in medal quality.

Martin U. - Discusses WWII Canadian/US joint Operation Eskimo with his original mint sleeve patch.

Kevin R. - WWI 7 button tunic - to Pvt. William Trevil - 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, shoulder flashes, collar insignia WWI medal ribbon trio,

13. **Adjournment:**

President Kevin R. calls for motion to adjourn. Member Barry E. moves for adjournment. Seconded by Susan E. Motion Approved. Meeting Adjourned. 20:25



On the 60th anniversary of the Battle of the Atlantic, David Balme presented the late U-Boat commanders hat and binoculars that he had picked up while aboard the craft. To the Imperial War Museum in London

The machine and documents helped turn looming defeat in the Battle of the Atlantic to victory. For much of the war's first two years, when Britain stood alone, U-boat attacks sank too many ships bringing vital supplies. "The only thing that ever really frightened me during the war was the U-boat peril," Winston Churchill recorded. Baker-Cresswell, years later, wrote to Balme: "The whole beauty of our exploit was the providential timing of it. The situation was just about desperate... If losses in the Atlantic had gone on increasing at the same rate... we would have had to sue for peace."

The discovery allowed Bletchley Park codebreakers to penetrate the German cipher called Hydra. Charts from U-110 showing German minefields and swept channels made possible the successful St Nazaire raid of March 1942.

Balme later joined the Fleet Air Arm as a navigator with No 826 Naval Air Squadron. He was Mentioned in Despatches for dropping flares to guide Wellington bombers before the second battle of El Alamein in October 1942. On promotion he was, for a time, the Royal Navy's youngest Lieutenant-Commander.

His career began on the cruiser HMS London, then the cruiser HMS Shropshire. He served in the minesweeper HMS Sutton, and on war's outbreak was in the destroyer HMS Ivanhoe. He later served in the cruiser HMS Berwick and the battle-cruiser HMS Renown.

The second of five siblings, he had three brothers and a sister. The family's wool broking business was founded by Charles Balme in 1820. He spent his early childhood in Wimbledon, before

going to Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, at 13. In 1947 at Winchester Cathedral, he married Susan im Thurn, a former Wren. He left the Navy in 1949 and joined the family business, becoming chairman of the City of London Wool Brokers in 1970.

The U-110 story emerged only in the 1970s. There was anger in Britain when, in 2000, the American director Jonathan Mostow made a film which renumbered the U-boat "571" and pretended that US sailors had made the find. Balme reflected that before Hollywood made the film, no one had heard of the episode. MPs nevertheless tabled a motion in Parliament regretting that Hollywood had chosen to distort the truth, and on 7 June 2000 the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, agreed with Brian Jenkins, MP for Tamworth, that the film was an affront to the memory of British sailors who had died.

The Royal Navy, unusually, accorded Balme a special tribute on his death in January of this year: "The naval family has lost a quiet hero whose actions helped change the course of the Battle of the Atlantic – and World War II."



Scene from the American made movie

## Attention All Members

October 18th will be our **Annual General Meeting**. Please attend to help elect our executive and directors.

**Some important items were brought up at the last meeting.**

- Changes to how we nominate members for the elections. Possibly ahead of time?
- This would allow members outside of Calgary and those unable to attend to vote by proxy.
- This may require a change to our constitution.

“Note from the editor.”

I ran across this article in the Metro Newspaper the other day. I then remembered that there were only a few food donations at the last meeting. A food donation or a loonie donation It has always been a unofficial entrance fee to the meeting . Maybe we could do better.

### **Calgary Poppy Fund food hamper requests jump nearly 50%**

For first time in over a year, Fund has had to go buy staple items to fill demand



In previous years, Joey Bleviss gave away an average of 80 food hampers to veterans and their dependents. But over the past several months, that amount has increased to more than 110.

According to Bleviss, CAO of the Calgary Poppy Fund, the economic downturn has increased the number of clients coming to the fund looking for help.

In a effort to kick of the main campaigning season, Bleviss mailed 400,060 letters looking for donors.

Bleviss points to wooden pallet half filled with tomato soup cans. A couple of months ago we had pallets full of this stuff.

Each hamper has approximately \$ 400 worth of food in it, coupled with \$ 300 grocery cards for fresh fruits and meat that's estimated to last two months. Other items in the hamper include, soup mixes toiletry items and cleaning supplies, among others.

**By:Josie Lukey For Metro**