Our Navy
Our Memories

By Natalie Anderson and Madelaine Johnson

The County, because of its geography, has always been a maritime community - the schooners built here during the 'Barley Days', the Hepburn fleet, the excursion steamers, the commercial fishermen from Long Point and Salmon Point, commercial wharves, and private docks are a testimony to our heritage.

People from the County have always been drawn to the water, whether for swimming, boating, fishing or other recreational activities, or for careers that enable them to traverse the rivers, bays, lakes, and oceans of Canada and the world, in the merchant marine and the navy.

County residents have pursued careers in the Canadian Navy since its inception in 1910. The Picton Collegiate Institute Honor Role of 1917 lists a number of alumni who served in the Royal Navy (RN) and Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) during the Great War of 1914-18. Honours student and future proprietor of The Picton Gazette Lindley Calnan was in his second year at the University of Toronto when he enlisted in the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS).

Willet Hubbs, one of Picton's star hockey players of the time, served in the navy as a lieutenant in the North Sea and later joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserves (RNVR), while his brother Walter swept the English Channel for German mines.

During the Second World War, the County was again well-represented in the RCN. To Harry Walmsley, a linotype operator for the Gazette who served on a minesweeper and was present at the Normandy invasions, the navy was "just another job."

Vernon 'Beef' MacDonald of Wellington was a motor torpedo boat gunner, sustaining life-threatening injuries after his side of the boat was hit in the midst of a convoy raid.

Over the century, County residents, both those who were born here and those who moved here, continued to serve proudly and prolifically in Canada's Navy.

In the summer of 2010, the Archives and Collections Society (ACS) held 100 Years of Our Navy to commemorate the Canadian Navy centennial. The exhibition included photographs and other memorabilia from people from the Quinte area who served in the RCN, the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (WRCNS, better known as the Wrens), the Royal Canadian Naval Reserves (RCNR), the Sea Cadets, and the Maritime Command - the current Navy of the Canadian Forces.

To complement the exhibit, the contributors from Prince Edward County, Belleville, Kingston, and the surrounding region shared their experiences with ACS summer students Natalie Anderson and Madelaine Johnson in videotaped interviews for a forthcoming documentary about local perspectives of the Canadian Navy.

Our Navy, Our Memories is an ACS project supervised by Paul Adamthwaite and Betty Ann Anderson and supported in part by Service Canada and Young

Looking for fun:
George Devonshire

George Devonshire's love of the water began when he joined the Sea Cadets as a young boy in Toronto. After leaving home without his parents' permission to satisfy his teenage need for excitement and adventure, George took up an offer to be a galley boy in the merchant navy, serving on the Danish ship, MV Asbjorn.

At this time, the Germans occupied Denmark, and the Asbjorn was under charter to the Canadian government. One night, while George was in a convoy headed to Londonderry carrying 500 tons of TNT and 250 tons of picrate, three of the other merchant ships were torpedoed.

George wrote about the attack in his diary the next morning, Monday, Aug. 3, 1942:

When I stepped out on deck I was amazed at the sight. It looked like a real expensive 24th of May exhibition. Snowflake and star shells littered the sky. The convoy was already under attack. It was an eerie sight to see the black forms of ships when there was a rocket in the sky.

George then joined the RCNR, believing it to be safer than the merchant navy, and began active service with the RCN in January of 1943.

He eventually became a Seaman Torpedoman, because he "wanted to be more than just a sailor," on board HMCS Waskesiu, the first Canadian designed frigate.

As a Torpedoman, George began working on depth charges, where, in preparation for an attack, he would receive orders to set the hydrostatic pistols for the charges to explode at different depths. George recalls in his memoirs, "I liked the job because it was exciting to be actually making the underwater booming noises, instead of just listening, as was the case in Asbjorn the previous year."

Later George was assigned No.1 on the Hedgehog, a spigot mortar with projectiles that were fired all at once, hitting the water ahead of the ship in a wide pattern. During late 1943 and early 1944, while Waskesiu was part of a blockade-runner patrol northwest of Spain, George watched in horror as a torpedo struck HMS Tweed, a river class frigate:

She sank in a few minutes. There was no warning and we were not at action stations. A little later, the submarine periscope was

Canada Works. The following stories from seven naval veterans represent some of the varied and far-reaching contributions of County residents to Canada's Navy over the past century.
Above: George Devonshire, left, receives a medal for his service; Above, right: proudly displaying a Waskesiu T-shirt; Right: At The Victory in Picton. Below: After the war, George became friends with Waldemar Nickel, one of the German lieutenants captured from a German U-boat.

24, 1944 when *Waskesiu* destroyed *U-257*. The German submarine was about to attack a convoy when *Waskesiu* gained ASDIC contact. *Waskesiu* attacked with the Hedgehog first, which proved to be ineffective, so the crew proceeded with two attacks using depth charges. The depth charges damaged the submarine, forcing it to the surface before it sank under the Atlantic waves for the last time. *Waskesiu* picked up four survivors from *U-257* and *Nene* rescued another ten. The German prisoners were given blankets and warm food, in a manner that one lieutenant described as "nearly comradely," before being taken to Londonderry, Ireland.

After the war, George came into contact with Waldemar Nickel, one of the German lieutenants captured from *U-257*. The correspondence between them over the events of that night grew into a lasting friendship that George feels is illustrative of the "stupidity of war."

Continued on Page 50
Above: Sheila Gribble joined the Wrens at the age of 18.

Above, right: Sheila in uniform c.1944.

Right: She was on duty in the ‘Action Room’ at the time of the devastating Halifax Explosion, which levelled the Nova Scotian town.

good”: there were always new things to learn, the work was exciting, and the base was fully equipped with amenities. In addition, Wrens constantly received positive reinforcement from their superiors and were reminded of how important their work was to the War effort.

But being in the Wrens was not all fun and games, even after the war in Europe had ended. On the seemingly ordinary night of July 18, 1945, over two months after V-E Day, Sheila was alone on duty watch in the Action Room when she heard a tremendous boom and instinctively dove under her desk. When she emerged from her makeshift shelter, she looked out the window onto Bedford Basin.

There was a great black cloud rising, in the shape of a great full-leaved tree. Bright flashes of colour came from the foliage making it into an elaborate fireworks display. The expression ‘mushroom cloud’ arrived in the vocabulary three weeks later when the first atom bomb was dropped, and that fit as well.

“A great adventure”: Ken Koyama, C.D.

On Sept. 14, 1949, Ken Koyama was one of the first Canadians of Japanese descent to enlist in the RCN. Ken joined the navy because he “thought it would be a great adventure.” After facing a great deal of racism as a civilian, he found that the RCN was virtually free of prejudice, commenting that people in the navy were “very, very nice.” Starting as an Ordinary Seaman, Ken worked through the ranks to become a Petty Officer 1st Class.

Ken underwent new entry training in Cornwallis, Nova Scotia, where he endured snowstorms and bad weather before being sent to the West Coast as a part of the medical branch on HMCS Naden, a west coast land base. While there, Ken received training in ward protocol, diagnostic treatment, and lab, pharmacy, emergency, and x-ray procedures. He explains that witnessing his first surgery was quite surprising and made him a little queasy. Ken also performed minor surgeries which he describes as both “scary and exciting.”

For Ken, the medical branch was challenging because he was constantly on duty; crew often woke him up in the middle of the night, and he found it difficult to count blood cells through a microscope when the sample swayed with the motion of the ship.

On one occasion, while in the middle of the Pacific ocean, Ken had to keep a crew member on antibiotics for appendicitis for three days until a helicopter could take him to a land-based hospital.

Ken enjoyed the camaraderie of the navy and explains how one officer liked him so much that he brought his whole family onto the ship to be medically-treated. Ken eventually became a Staff Officer Hygiene for the west coast, inspecting pools, food and dairies.

Ken left the RCN in order to go to university where he pursued theology, and later joined the RCNR. After four years, he was commissioned officer for two years, and then received his second ring and became Lieutenant. Ken also received a Canadian Forces Decoration medal (CD) for 13 years of good service.

Continued on Page 51
Ken admires the discipline he was subject to while in the navy, and hopes that the same level of discipline exists in the Maritime Command today. According to Ken, naval discipline encourages respect for higher ranking officers for the sake of “good order.”

In 1980, Ken came across Picton as he was “looking for a place between Montreal and Toronto” today, Ken considers Picton to be home, and is active in the community as a proud member of the Picton Rotary Club.

*It started with a raincoat:*

**Mary (Minnikin) Wellein**

Mary Minnikin never expected to join the Wrens, but in 1959, as she was waiting for a streetcar in the rain, she saw a woman wearing a raincoat issued by the Wrens and did what she had to do to get one for herself.

Mary had moved to Toronto from Barrie with hopes to work at the Alcoholism and Drug Addiction Research Foundation. She started to attend monthly Wrens meetings at HMCS York and obtained a position in the medical branch there instead.

After a two-week course in Halifax, Mary practised nursing in a naval hospital at HMCS Naden in Esquimalt, BC.

Back in Toronto at HMCS York, Mary assisted patients in the wards and helped with eye exams, x-rays and other medical procedures. After only six weeks in the service, Mary was among the naval personnel who lined the red carpet at the Royal York Hotel for the visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Children behind her were eagerly poking their heads between the line to catch a glimpse of the Queen, but were repeatedly pushed back by naval officials.

Mary advised the children to wait until they could see the Queen before they nudged their way through the row, and that is exactly what they did.

This charming contrast between naval formality and childish rapture led the *Toronto Daily Star* to feature a photograph of the Queen, Mary, and the children on the front page of the June 30, 1959 issue.

On certain Sundays, Mary took part in the Church Parade where Wrens marched down Avenue Road. Although her parents’ declining health forced her to move back to Barrie and work at Camp Borden, she would not give up being a Wren, and her new boss provided the transportation enabling her to attend the monthly meetings in Toronto.

Mary left the Wrens after seven years of service to marry to Sid Wellein. With Sid, who served in the army, Mary moved to Ottawa. For his last two years of service,
Sid was able to live in a place of his choice.

When they found Picton, Mary thought, “how could we go anywhere else? It was nice here.” Mary fondly remembers her time with the Wrens and continues to keep in touch with friends she met there.

**Daring to be different: Mark Aulthouse**

Mark Aulthouse of Picton joined the Canadian Navy in 1983, motivated by a desire to be different. Influenced by the stories his uncle and cousins told him about their time in the army, Mark decided he would have his own unique and exciting tales to tell from his experiences at sea.

Although Mark found it difficult to adjust to naval life after being surrounded by a close-knit family in the County, he was not discouraged and devoted himself to his naval career. After training for six months in Halifax, he was shipped to western Canada, to teach navigation and sailing at a fleet school for one and a half years in Victoria. He recalls, “I loved that, I love being on the water.”

**For love of the water: Hugh Charlebois**

Hugh Charlebois of Demorestville served with the RCNR for eight years (1964-1972). A highly successful commercial artist by trade, Hugh participated in the RCNR on a part-time basis, embarking on two- to three-week long training cruises during the summer.

Hugh joined the reserve because of his interest in ships and his love of the water. When he was in high school, he had a summer job working on the Great Lakes in such locations as the Welland Canal and the north shore of Lake Superior.

Although he enjoyed his summers of training in the reserves, Hugh found one of the toughest aspects of adjusting to naval life to be the sleeping arrangements, which were tight and cramped, and involved shared hammocks. On the cruises, Hugh learned seamanship and engaged in ship maintenance, deck painting, gunnery practice, and anti-submarine training on such vessels as HMCS Porte St. Jean 180.

Hugh’s favourite aspect of the RCNR was the travelling opportunities. He particularly enjoyed a cruise to Cobourg when he had time to spend considerable time onshore and enjoy the amenities of the town itself.

Hugh’s eight years in the RCNR instilled in him a strong sense of discipline and taught him how to deal with other young people in close quarters for long stretches of time. In response to the centennial of the RCN, Hugh reflects fondly upon his “eight good years” in the reserves.

Hugh’s model HMCS Demorestville, a combination of the two variants of the Flower-class corvettes used in the RCN, is on permanent display at the Archives and Collections Society.

**Continued on Page 52**

Plus Tyler Atherton’s story

Above: Hugh Charlebois at the Archives and Collections Society.

Young Hugh aboard the Donnacona.

Above: Mark Aulthouse; Middle: Christmas on the ship; Below: Providing aid to the people of East Timor.
every stitch, and don’t ask me how many there were!” She laughs and shudders. “I didn’t count. But I picked them all up and made up my own border design with holes similar to the body.” It’s terrific.

We had laughed about my asking to see her studio or workshop, which turned out to be her kitchen and her living room couch and the homes of her fellow Thursday night River Rats. Lisa laughed again when she told me about the final step in making her large shawls.

“You have to wash the finished piece, then block it - gently spread it out to its full size and pin it. We’ve got a king-sized bed which is handy, with a nice plump comforter. I lay out the piece and pin it right to the bed.” She gave me a big smile. “It’s my finishing room.”

As I left she slipped me a greeting card with a piece of hand-weaving decorating the front.

“Here you go, there’s only one of these left. I use up bits and pieces to make these.” Staring out at me from the front of the card was a tightly woven row of teeny Santa Clauses standing ramrod straight with red suits, white beards and coal black eyes. Neat, tight and clever.

DEVONSHIRE

Continued from Page 24

The crew of Waskesiu felt united by the destruction of U-257 and has had a couple of reunions, one in Waskesiu, Saskatchewan, and another at George’s own house in Prinsey’s Cove, where Waldemar was the guest of honour.

Waskesiu was also part of a convoy travelling to the Soviet Union in 1944 for the Arctic Campaign. During this trip, three merchant vessels were lost and submarines continually harassed Waskesiu as she traveled up the coast of Norway.

George remembers the hostile atmosphere in the Soviet Union when the convoy delivered their supplies. Forty years later, George joined the North Russia Club established for veterans of the Arctic Campaign. Through this association, he was able to revisit Russia in 1995. George recognized some of the locations he traveled to during the war, and this time found the Russian people more welcoming, commenting that they “laid out the whole town for us.”

During the Normandy invasion, Waskesiu was positioned on the western approaches to the English Channel to prevent submarine entry. George remembers, “It was an easy job. We enjoyed the fine weather.”

George left the navy at the end of the war, achieving four medals for his service.

When asked about his best memory of his war years, George jokingly replies “girls!” More earnestly, George goes on to describe the fun he had ashore with his crewmen and friends. He thoroughly enjoyed St.
GRIBBLE
Continued from Page 25

Sheila did not know whether she should stay or flee, but an officer who hurried into the room to use the telephone made the decision for her when he asked, "What the hell are you doing here? Get out of here!" in a tone imbued with anger and surprise.

When Sheila innocently replied that she was on duty for another hour, he retorted impatiently, "This place could go up any minute. Get out - fast! You're relieved!" Sheila was the last person squeezed into a Wren evacuation truck that drove them to a school gymnasium in Citadel Hill. As she lay on the hard floor, uncomfortably trying to sleep, she remembers:

The high windows of the gym glowed red and orange and we heard intermittent explosions. Suddenly I became aware of a roaring. "The city's on fire!" I thought. And that's the only time that I was afraid. I was truly scared.

Sheila learned later that the explosions resulted from the ammunition being hurriedly removed from naval ships as they were refit for the Pacific War.

Sheila's best memory from the Wrens occurred on V-J Day, 1945, which also happened to be her birthday. That day, a party at HMCS Stadacona celebrated the end of the War, and a large crowd joined hands in a snake dance. When the war ended and Sheila was discharged, she was desolate, not knowing what to do next. Navy-subsidized education at Queen's University was the best answer, where she met her husband Bill.

In 1973, Sheila and Bill took early retirement and moved to a house they built themselves in Long Reach. Sheila remembers her Wren days as a "wonderful, stimulating time," during which she
developed lasting friendships and was exposed to new opportunities:

_"I had only been in the Navy for 10 months, but it wrought lifetime changes... it certainly helped me to grow up and realize that there was much more to the world than my own small village. It helped me to realize, too, that going places was easier than one might think. I wouldn't have missed it for the world._

### AULTHOUSE

Continued from Page 27

In 1998, Mark served in the Persian Gulf, searching ships for illegal drugs. Mark was responsible for driving the motorboat that transported the boarding party to the ships under inspection. Mark said that inspecting vessels could be scary because not all crews were cooperative. When the Canadian Navy discovered illegal materials, they were responsible for transporting those involved to a holding area or to the Americans.

In 1999, with the Canadian Navy in union with the Australians, Mark participated in peacekeeping missions in East Timor aiming to lessen the violence resulting from the region's attempt to separate from Indonesia.

Mark describes the city as a "ghost town" - many of the locals were afraid and had fled or were hiding. Aside from supporting the Australian Navy, Mark assisted with placing tarp on schools whose roofs had been blown off, so the children would have somewhere to learn.

He found his time in East Timor most rewarding when he was leaving; fruit and vegetables stands were able to open, and people seemed happy in a country where, when he arrived, no one was to be found. When he was driving away in a military truck, Mark relates how children ran after it waving "like they were saying thanks for being there" and remembers how rewarding it was "just to see a kid smile."

Mark's numerous excursions abroad have given him a sense of patriotism and thankfulness for all he has. Mark was working in the fleet school in Esquimalt on 9/11, and when he heard about it he felt "numb."

He was given ten days notice that he would be going to the Persian Gulf off the coast of Pakistan to fight the War on Terror. For eight months, he assisted in searching for Al-Qaeda and inspecting cargo for bombs and other weapons. Although he never discovered any weapons, he did find other illegal items like drugs and alcohol that caused him to consider whether they were supplies for Al-Qaeda.

Mark comments that 9/11 "changed the world". Americans were not the only ones to be affected since people of many other nationalities died in the attack.

While in the service, Mark spent three Christmases on board ship. Although it was the loneliest time for everybody on board, the holiday also imbued the crew with a sense of community. The senior officers served Christmas dinner to the junior officers, and a tree deco-
rated the mess deck along with stockings and paper snowflakes.

Mark was in HMCS *Ottawa* when she was commissioned in Cornwall. On board the *Ottawa*, they stopped in Quebec City for three days where a convention for retired astronauts was taking place. All the astronauts were invited onto the ship, and Mark was fortunate enough to meet Canadian astronaut legend Steve MacLean.

Mark decided to retire from the navy in 2003 after achieving the Canadian Forces Decoration Medal for 12 years of service, and earning International Force East Timor, General Peace Keeping Service, Special Services, and Afghanistan War on Terror medals.

After reflecting upon how naval values have affected his life, Mark states, "[It] makes me a better person because I've seen a lot throughout the world that a lot of people don't see, don't realize."

The celebrations of the navy centennial in 2010 make Mark nostalgic for his time in the navy.

**A “sense of belonging and direction”:**

**Tyler Atherton**

Following his friends and motivated by a "small passion for life on the water," lifelong County resident **Tyler Atherton** joined the Quinte Sea Cadets in 1998. He eventually became a Supply Petty Officer 2nd Class in 2003, instructing other cadets until 2006.

Tyler's devotion to the cadets and love of the sea earned him a trophy for a "job well done" as a civilian instructor. Aside from filling the only Supply Trade Petty Officer position at the Quinte Sea Cadets, Tyler achieved a high standing with the Canadian Yachting Association.

Tyler explains how being a cadet helped him in many aspects of his life, including summer jobs that involved skills such as ship repair, organization and logic. Sea cadets also inspired his interest in Lord Nelson and the Bluenose - subjects he continues to read up on today.

Tyler reminisces that cadets instilled in him a "sense of belonging and direction," explaining that "what you get from [cadets] is what you give to it."

The values of Canadian citizenship encouraged by the Sea Cadets have motivated Tyler to volunteer within his community as a soccer coach and to lend a hand at the Archives and Collections Society.

Sea cadets has also formed the basis of Tyler's adult life - after being employed as a dock and yard hand at a marina, Tyler currently manages his own business in the marine industry, which was "something that happened because of my involvement with cadets."

The Canadian Navy centennial celebrations reinforce Tyler's
strong sense of patriotism and pride for his time in the cadets and the achievements of the military, especially the navy. "It's a sense of pride," he says.

He strongly believes "any cadet course is worthwhile for most youth ... anybody can find direction and purpose through sailing, regardless if it's in a military form or not." Tyler is an example of the extent to which the Navy and its subsidiary organizations have enriched the lives of Canadians, old and young.

****

This collage of navy memories paints a picture of not only the diverse contributions of County residents to the Canadian Navy, but also the changing function of our navy from its inception to the present.

The stories illustrate how growing up in the County fosters a love for the water that drives some of its inhabitants to devote their lives to the navy; in addition, naval veterans from outside the County have found a peaceful and fulfilling life on this island, surrounded by the water they have grown to love.

The Canadian navy is not just a defining aspect of our nation’s history but an intrinsic facet of County heritage. The County has, after all, proven to be both the inspirational germ and contented epilogue of many naval careers.

Bibliography

Atherton, Tyler. Interview with Natalie Anderson, June 2010.
Aulthouse, Mark. Interview with Madelaine Johnson, July 2010.
Charlebois, Hugh. Interview with Madelaine Johnson, June 2010.
Devonshire, George. Interview with Madelaine Johnson, July 2010.

DANCING IN THE SKY

the Royal Flying Corps in Canada 1917-1919
by C.W. Hunt

A tale of romance, tragedy, high risks
and stunning achievement.

Available at book stores across Canada, and locally at County Magazine & Green Gables, in Bloomfield; Hicks General Store in Milford and Books & Company in Picton

How Canada soared into the Age of Aviation