

ARGONAUTA



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Editorial

by Erika Behrisch



This issue of *Argonauta* is rich with imagery. Of course it has as its usual foundation several wonderful stories of nautical memories, research, diplomacy, and derring-do, and the stories themselves offer rich pictures of times gone by (or not, as Joel Zemel's tale of a false image will tell), but there is also a flotilla (if I may) of fabulous visual portraits to enjoy, interspersed among the words.

The visual bounty is especially appropriate because our last issue contained a picture without a story: *Argonauta*'s inaugural "Name that Yacht" challenge. I was so pleased to receive Karl Gagnon's detailed response to the request for help, and I'm excited by the prospect of future community challenges coming our way.

There is also a strong feeling of nostalgia running through each of this issue's pieces, an awareness that memory might not quite serve: H.T. Holman's story of the *Cape Breton*, a paddle steamer that has not received its due credit for being first across the Atlantic, writes (and rights) a historical error; Joel Zemel's analysis of a well-known image of the Halifax Explosion shows us the power of images—even false ones—to skew our ideas of the past. Likewise, Chris Varley's piece offers HMCS *Cataraqui*'s hidden history of training fighter pilots, while Dr David Chessum's story of two WW I US Navy cruisers gives us the outlines of what happened to them after the war, when their history became as murky as the water in which they were eventually submerged.

Varley's article is poignant, for as HMCS *Cataraqui* continues its project to celebrate 100 years of its Naval Reserve, it has fewer heroes who can tell their stories. There are five RCNVR veterans left at the stone frigate.

Now, as the snow flies, is the time for repairing the nets, preparing new oakum, and checking the sails. And while we regroup in anticipation of the open water to come, we are given gifts, stories of the past. Words and pictures splice together, a feast for the eyes during this quiet, icelocked season.

WMP,
Erika

President's Corner

by Michael Moir

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The arrival of January brings hope that the New Year will provide relief from the calamities of the last twelve months and will set Canada on a course for recovery. It is difficult to see much improvement amidst lockdowns and curfews, but it is heartening that interest in the CNRS has not flagged during these trying times. Dr. Sam McLean, our Membership Secretary, reports that a steady stream of renewals have arrived, many accompanied by donations. We hope that those who have not yet renewed will find time to visit our website and refresh your membership now that the bustle of the holiday season is behind us. Your continued support plays an important role in efforts to encourage the study of maritime history so the field is invigorated by insights from new researchers.

The Society benefits from your financial contributions, but it is made even stronger by your participation in its activities. The 2021 Annual Conference will be held online, giving members an opportunity to present papers, ask questions, and join in the discussion without leaving the comfort (or protection) of your home. While the conference's theme is "Canada's Pacific Gateway," proposals on other maritime topics of a contemporary or historical nature are welcome. The deadline for submissions is 15 March, giving you three months to mine the wealth of online sources to develop a proposal before turning your work into a twenty-minute presentation. *Argonauta* offers another venue for your participation through historical inquiry, news of community events or exciting discoveries in archives and museums, or reminiscences of a life spent in the navy, merchant service, or some other aspect of the marine sector. *Argonauta* has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of members sharing their interests and experiences in a publication shared with readers around the globe through our website.

Your membership is also key to sustaining the Society's journal, *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord*. The last two numbers of the thirtieth volume will be published in the coming months, bringing to a close the significant contributions of Dr. William Glover as Editor. Bill stepped forward twice since 2000 to serve as Editor and his commitment to the Society sustained the journal during difficult times. His decision to step down led to a search that culminated in December's announcement of Dr. Peter Kikkert as the new Editor. Peter, who holds the Irving Shipbuilding Chair in Arctic Policy at St. Francis Xavier University, assumes command of the journal with its next volume. In the meantime, he is leading the transition of the publication to the Open Journal Systems software offered by York University Libraries, which will host *TNM/Lmn* as a digital journal. This new approach to publishing will expedite the dissemination of research to the benefit of both young scholars and established members.

As we look ahead to another year of uncertainty, I hope that your membership in the Society will provide both a distraction and an inspiration for sharing knowledge through your participation in our conference and publications. May your contributions give voice to a rich and diverse maritime heritage that offers context to understanding to our past, present, and future.

First across the North Atlantic?: the paddle-steamer *Cape*

Breton

by H.T. Holman

The General Mining Association, established in London in 1826, had a major impact on the development of Nova Scotia.¹ Its mines in Cape Breton and at Albion Mines (near the port of Pictou) became centres of industrial development in the colony. The company was a major employer in the region and a leader in industrial development: the mines used steam technology, and the company constructed one of the first railways in North America.² What is less well known is that the company also had a significant role in local shipping, which extended well beyond its mining activities and contributed to the nautical history of the region.

Owing to the lack of reliable and timely communications within the region, the company was forced to develop its own steamer operations.³ These steamers, all paddle wheel vessels, were primarily used as tow boats and tugs assisting larger vessels loading coal at the company wharves, but they also plied between the two centres of company activity at Sydney and Albion Mines. Soon after being put in place, the Company steamers also filled a void by providing communication links within the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence and Northumberland Strait, connecting the Company's wharves at Sydney and in the Pictou area with Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island and the developing timber area at Miramichi in northern New Brunswick. Vessels such as the *Richard Smith*, *Pocahontas*, and *Albion* served as regional packets carrying mail and passengers, often with the support of subsidies from the region's colonial governments.

Most of these pioneer vessels were built in Nova Scotia, but the most impressive ship in the company fleet was the London-built paddle steamer *Cape Breton*, which operated in the area from 1833 to 1840. The *Cape Breton* was launched at Blackwall on the Thames in December of 1832 from the Benjamin Wallis Company yard. The vessel was 124 register tons with a length of 104 feet and breadth of 20 feet, steam powered, with a standing bowsprit, two masts, fore and aft rigged, square stern, carved sham quarter galleries and a bird figurehead.⁴ These last two details show that the vessel attempted a certain elegance that may have been lacking in its colonial-built cousins. In the sole contemporary depiction of the vessel (Figure 1), hints can be seen that the little paddle steamer also had other ornamental features. The two engines were rated at 35 horsepower each and had been built by Seward.

The Company wasted little time in sending the *Cape Breton* out to Nova Scotia; the steamer left London under command of Capt. Donkin on 29 May 1833.⁵ After a difficult passage down the Channel, it arrived in Plymouth on 5 June in a damaged condition with the funnel down and the paddle wheel inoperable.⁶ Nevertheless, the ship was able to depart Plymouth for Sydney on 20 June.⁷ The *Cape Breton* was spoken with by the ship *Jane*, bound for Liverpool, on 26 July at 47 west longitude, about 600 nautical miles east of Cape Breton, "under canvass with paddles unshipped and funnel on deck."⁸

The steamer arrived at Sydney on 2 August.⁹ The report from the Nova Scotia port noted that the vessel "is represented to be a fine vessel; built of the best seasoned Oak Timber... and we believe to have cost between 7 and £8,000 Sterling."¹⁰ The vessel must have had a difficult passage; sailing vessels between British ports and Nova Scotia often crossed the Atlantic in three to four weeks, while the *Cape Breton* took 44 days. Within a few days of the

steamer's arrival, an excursion trip had been arranged to the nearby Bras d'Or lakes, where a speed of 12 miles per hour under steam and canvas and 9 miles by steam alone was recorded.¹¹ On 27 August, the paddle steamer made its first arrival at Pictou and cleared for Sydney on 2 September—but not before making a round-trip to Charlottetown. There, the *Cape Breton* found a warm reception and the local newspaper expressed a hope that it would replace the packet steamer *Pocahontas*, also owned by the General Mining Association, “to which vessel she is in every respect, immeasurably superior.”¹²



Figure 1. The CAPE BRETON, STEAMER, COMMANDED BY E. SMITH. R.N. The CAPE BRETON altho of a small class, rode out the tempest and succeeded in making a Port in the channel after getting 1200 miles to the West in Lat 43 Long 34 W at the worst season of the year ... THIS PLATE is by permission most respectfully Dedicated to the Board of Directors of the GENERAL MINING ASSOCIATION by their most Obedient Servant W. J. Huggins – Marine Painter to His Majesty.

National Maritime Museum Greenwich London Object ID PAH8836. (Public Domain) https://images.rmg.co.uk/en/search/do_quick_search.html?q=s4565

The following year, between its other duties within the region, the ship made a trip from Halifax to Boston and New York. It was observed in the American press that this was the first steamer under the British flag to visit either of the American cities and that there were design differences between it and American boats. The purpose of the visit was soon made clear: “The boilers are constructed to use Pictou coal; the furnaces were filled with it on this occasion, and steam was generated faster than could be used, the engineer frequently causing it to escape. Mr. Chenard [*sic*] is confident that Pictou or Sydney coal may be made to serve all the purposes of propelling our boats rapidly at about two thirds the expense of wood; and there will be a saving of room on board and a security from cinders not now enjoyed.”¹³

In 1835, the paddle steamer re-crossed the Atlantic from west to east and in September was offered for sale at Lloyd's Coffeehouse in Cornhill as it lay at the South West India Dock. It does not appear to have sold, and on 16 October it cleared at the Custom House bound for

Pictou, Nova Scotia in ballast under Capt. E. Smith, R.N.¹⁴ On the 27th of the month, the paddle steamer departed Falmouth.¹⁵ The *Cape Breton* was spoken to on 9 November, some 750 nautical miles west.¹⁶ However, on 2 December, the badly battered vessel returned to Falmouth with considerable damage, having been forced to put back. On 28 December, the *Cape Breton* returned to London.¹⁷

The reason for the abrupt return was the *Cape Breton*'s encounter, on 23 November, with a hurricane some 1200 miles west of the Scilly Isles. A letter to the *Cornwall Gazette*, signed by the mate and seven of the crew, testified to the skill of Captain Smith:

During a most tempestuous gale of wind, with the sea running at least one hundred feet above the vessel, appearing every moment as if the next coming wave was commissioned to swallow her up and all on board by its overwhelming fury, carrying away boats, stanchions, and spars, and with her stern in pieces and the sea washing every man from the wheel, so that it became necessary to lash each man alternately to the helm, where they received much injury,—during this trying situation, in the heaviest of the gale or rather hurricane, Capt. Smith coolly excited every man to his duty and stood the whole night by the helmsman, although frequently exposed to great danger, the sea running completely over him. The morning presented a scene of wreck and desolation, such as is seldom witnessed and not to be described. Every sail split, fore-yard carried away, boats stove, the funnel, upwards of a ton weight adrift on deck, one of our number lying dead, and others disabled with bruises and fatigue, with upwards of three feet of water below, and only two helmsmen to take the wheel alternately for 36 hours—in the midst of all this Capt. Smith calmly performed the ceremony for the dead, and had the body shrouded in a hammock committed to the deep. He attended to the various duties which then devolved on him with as much coolness as if it had all been in perfect safety, getting a temporary fore-yard and sails prepared in as fit a state as practicable for scudding before it... he brought the ship to land with the greatest precision seldom leaving the deck by day or night, and attending minutely to the wants of the sick and disabled among the crew...¹⁸

The event is further memorialized by the publication of an aquatint engraving from a sketch by W.J. Huggins, "Marine Painter to His Majesty," and published by Huggins and Capt. Smith and dedicated to the Directors of the General Mining Association.¹⁹ The engraving shows the vessel on its beam ends under a frightening sky. Owing to Captain Smith's involvement in the print, it is likely that the engraving is an accurate depiction of the vessel. In spite of the hurricane damage, the *Cape Breton* was quickly repaired. In a Lloyd's Survey for Repairs dated 9 February 1836, the surveyor noted, "Her appearance is very favourable and she has proved herself to be a strong well built vessel"; he confirmed the classification as 11A1.²⁰ The publication of the aquatint may have raised the profile of the *Cape Breton* (and of Captain Smith), but it apparently did not increase the saleability of the ship; at the end of May, 1836, the steamer was once again in Halifax, having completed its second east-to-west passage from London, stopping at Deal and Portsmouth before its 23 days at sea.²¹

An 1836 report on regional communications from Halifax indicated that General Mining Association steamers were serving between PEI and Pictou and between Pictou and New Glasgow. It was noted that the *Cape Breton*, upon its arrival, was expected to form part of the steam navigation links between the principal places in the region.²² By July, advertisements had appeared in newspapers of the region with a twice-weekly schedule of service from Pictou to Miramichi, with a stop at Charlottetown.²³ This regular packet service continued until the *Cape Breton* left the region in 1840.

In July 1838, ownership of the vessel changed from a group of London bankers and gentlemen—who no doubt held title to the ship on behalf of the General Mining Association—to Joseph Cunard, and the registration was transferred from London to Miramichi.²⁴ Joseph was younger brother to Samuel, and was at the time one of the wealthiest men in New Brunswick with major land holdings and involvement in shipbuilding and timber export. Samuel may have assumed management of the vessel owned by his brother, for in 1839 and again in 1840, it was his name that appears as the recipient of £500 annual subsidy paid by the Government of Prince Edward Island in order to have the ship carry mail and passengers to the Island on a regular schedule.²⁵ Throughout this period, the *Cape Breton* continued to operate as a government-subsidized packet steamer running primarily between Pictou and Miramichi, where Cunard's interests and operations lay.

By the spring of 1840, however, there was concern that the agreements between the owners of the *Cape Breton* and the colonies of Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia would end at the end of the season. The PEI House of Assembly took the initiative to ask the other colonies to cooperate to ensure that the steamer service in Northumberland Strait would continue.²⁶ The *Cape Breton* was on the route for the rest of 1840, but not all passengers had enthusiastic words for the steamer. Sir George Seymour, on a trip to visit his estates on Prince Edward Island, remarked, "Embarked between 6 and 7 in a small dirty steam Vessell [sic] the Cape Breton..."²⁷ Whether the *Cape Breton's* owners had already determined to abandon the service or if a satisfactory financial arrangement could not be reached is not known, but early in December 1840, the *Cape Breton* left Halifax bound for Glasgow and, after a passage of 26 days, passed Waterford Ireland on its way to the Clyde.²⁸ There, the engines were removed and the vessel was rebuilt as a full-rigged ship.²⁹ It made a number of voyages to South America and was reported lost at sea in 1857.

The *Cape Breton's* role as a pioneer of the trans-Atlantic passage was established at an early date. When the better-known *Royal William* left Pictou in 1833, it was a fortnight after the arrival of the English ship in Sydney, and the vessels may have crossed wakes in Nova Scotia waters. Like the reputation that the *Royal William* has gained—perhaps unfairly—as the first steamer across the North Atlantic, the *Cape Breton's* role is circumscribed by limitations. Newspaper reports reference the *Cape Breton* as the first British steam ship to cross the Atlantic and to that paddle steamer goes the credit for the first east-west passage. As early as 1838 and following the arrival of the *City of Kingston* in Norfolk, Virginia, there was comment on which ship should receive credit for the first Atlantic crossing. Another claimant was the *Sir Lionel Smith*, which also crossed in 1837. In newspaper accounts in both North America and Ireland, readers were reminded of the success of the *Royal William* and the *Cape Breton* while giving the primacy of passage to the 1819 voyage of the American-built *Savannah*.³⁰

There is still doubt, however, that the *Cape Breton*, although certainly fitted with engines, used them during the passage. We are not much aided by contemporary accounts. As Basil Greenhill pointed out in 1964 and 1966 notes in the *Mariner's Mirror*, neither the passage of the *Cape Breton* nor that of the *Royal William* resulted in any commentary beyond simple notice of their arrival in the British press.³¹ The 1833 accounts mentioning *Cape Breton* note that it was under sail "with paddles unshipped and funnel on deck" when spoken to.³² Further, the relatively small size of the ship would have hardly allowed for extensive use of the engines, as the fuel consumption would have required a large amount of coal. The fact that it took 44 days to make the passage—considerably more than many sail-powered vessels—suggests only sparing use, if any, was made of the engines. Finally, an account from Boston a year after its crossing notes that the vessel left London under sail and "received her machinery at Pictou."³³ This is clearly in error, as the engines were installed at the time of the building of the vessel, but does suggest that they were not used until after its arrival in Nova Scotia.

Claims of “firsts” can be difficult to prove and must be surrounded with careful language, but it can be said with some assurance that the *Cape Breton* was the first British-registered vessel equipped with steam engines to make an east-west passage of the North Atlantic. However, the importance of the first, and later a second round trip crossing is probably of less significance than the eight years of steam packet service linking the growing communities of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick in the early years of steam in Atlantic Canada. The *Cape Breton* was indeed a pioneer vessel and deserves greater recognition.³⁴

Endnotes

1. The General Mining Association has been the subject of several studies but none have given more than passing reference to its marine activities. Marilyn Gerriets, "The Impact of the General Mining Association on the Nova Scotia Coal Industry, 1826-1850," *Acadiensis*, XXI, 1 (Autumn 1991), pp. 54-84. Daniel Samson, "Industrial Colonization: The Colonial Context of the General Mining Association, Nova Scotia, 1825-1842," *Acadiensis*, XXIX, 1 (Autumn 1999), pp. 3-28. Marilyn Gerriets, "The Rise and Fall of a Free-Standing Company in Nova Scotia: The General Mining Association," *Business History*, 34:3, (1992) 16-48.
2. By 1839, the company had invested nearly £300,000 and employed nearly 1000 workers. Samson "Industrial Colonization" p.10.
3. The ships included the *Richard Smith* (1830), *Pocahontas* (1831), *Cape Breton* (1832), *Albion* (1835), *Pluto* (1850), *Dolphin* (1861), and *Alexandria* (1863). Mills List.
4. These details are from the re-registration of the vessel at Miramichi in 1838, but are no doubt taken from the original London registration on 20 May 1833. LAC R.G. 12 Series A, sub-series 1 Shipping registers Vol 104 Miramichi N.B. 1835-1841. Registration No. 12/1838.
5. *Kentish Gazette* [Canterbury] 4 June 1833 p.3.
6. *London Courier and Evening Gazette* 6 June 1833 p.3, *Royal Cornwall Gazette* 8 June 1833 p.2.
7. *Lloyd's List* 25 June 1833 p.2.
8. *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser* [London] 21 August 1833 p.4 *Lloyd's List* 27 August 1833 p.2.
9. By 18 September 1833, the news reached London that the *Cape Breton*, "a very fine iron steam vessel with two engines," had reached Sydney in 44 days. *Sun* [London] 18 September 1833 p.4.
10. *Colonial Patriot* [Pictou] 27 August 1833 p.3.
11. *Acadian Recorder* [Halifax] 14 September 1833 p.3.
12. *Royal Gazette* [Charlottetown] 3 September 1833 p.3.
13. *Montreal Herald and Daily Commercial Gazette* (quoting an unidentified Boston paper) 21 August 1834 p.3. *London Evening Standard* 26 September 1834 p.2 (with a report from a New York paper). "Mr. Chenard" was Samuel Cunard, who accompanied the vessel to Boston with the aim of selling GMA coal for steamer services.
14. *Morning Advertiser* [London] 17 October 1835 p.4, *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser* [London] 17 October 1835 p.4.
15. *Lloyd's List* 30 October 1835 p.3.
16. *Sun* [London] 25 November 1835 p.1.
17. *Lloyd's List* 4 December 1835 p.2, *Morning Advertiser* [London] 29 December 1835 p.1.

18. *Cornwall Gazette*, reprinted in *Naval and Military Gazette and Weekly Chronicle of the United Service* [London] 2 January 1836 p.4.
19. *Naval and Military Gazette and Weekly Chronicle of the United Service* [London] 20 February 1836 p.7, 16.
20. Lloyds Survey Report <https://hec.lfoundation.org.uk/archive-library/ships/search/everywhere:cape-breton> accessed 1 October 2020. The Lloyds classification was an assessment of the quality of build and materials. "A1" was the highest classification. The "11" was an estimate by the Lloyd's surveyor of the number of years the vessel could be expected to retain its quality level with normal maintenance and repair.
21. *Bee* [Pictou] 8 June 1836 p.23, *Sun* [London] 5 May 1836 p.4, *Lloyd's List* 10 May 1836 p.2, 23 June 1836 p.5.
22. *Evening Mail* [London] 13 June 1836 p.1.
23. *Bee* [Pictou] 20 July 1836 p.71. The same notice also appeared in the P.E.I. *Royal Gazette*.
24. LAC R.G. 12 Series A, sub-series 1 Shipping registers Vol 104 Miramichi N.B. 1835-1841. Registration No. 12/1838.
25. *Journal of the House of Assembly of Prince Edward Island* 1840 Appendix L p.68, 1841 Appendix L p.51.
26. *Journal of the House of Assembly for the Province of Nova Scotia* Session 1839-40 p.A67-A68-172. A similar request was made to New Brunswick.
27. The journal appears as Douglas Sobey, ed. "Prince Edward Island in 1840: The Travel Journal of Sir George Seymour" *The Island Magazine* No 54, Fall Winter 2003 pp 26-33.
28. *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette* [London] 9 January 1841 p.2.
29. *Lloyd's Register* 1841.
30. *Long Island Farmer and Queens County Advertiser* [Jamaica N.Y.] 18 April 1838 p.1, *Sligo Journal* 17 April 1840 p.2.
31. Basil Greenhill "A Possible Steam-Assisted North Atlantic Crossing" *Mariner's Mirror* Vol 50 No.2 1964 p.145, Vol 52 No.4 1966 p.328.
32. *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser* [London] 21 August 1833 p.4.
33. *Montreal Herald and Daily Commercial Gazette* 21 August 1834 p.3 quoting an un-named Boston paper.
34. One of the few notices taken of the vessel's Atlantic crossing is as one of the 100 events commemorated in the *Mountbatten Medallic History of Great Britain & The Sea*, a 1974 series of commercially produced collector coins.

The RGS Photograph: An Evaluation of a Purported 1917 Halifax Explosion Artifact

by Joel Zemel © 2020

"There are two ways to be fooled. One is to believe what isn't true; the other is to refuse to believe what is true."—Søren Kierkegaard

In June of 2020, I received a request for my opinion on the viability of an image that has come to be known as the RGS photograph. The CBC Halifax newsroom was in the process of putting together a story based on the premise that this was an actual photograph of a moment in time from the 1917 explosion in Halifax Harbour. The photograph seemed interesting enough, so I volunteered to conduct research to trace the image's provenance as well as to determine its viability as a genuine artifact of the Explosion. Establishing an image's provenance and determining the exact nature and viability of its content are two entirely different areas of research, each requiring specific skill sets. I brought my years of experience in both fields of endeavour to this challenge.

The RGS photograph has been housed for several years at the Community Archives of Belleville and Hastings County (CABHC) in Ontario and is part of a collection of World War I photographs and postcards featured on their website. The image depicts a scene that is both surreal and enigmatic: it features a moored, hulked vessel about to be enveloped by a wall of smoke. The following description is handwritten on the verso: "Halifax thirty seconds after the explosion, R.G.S." (Fig. 1).

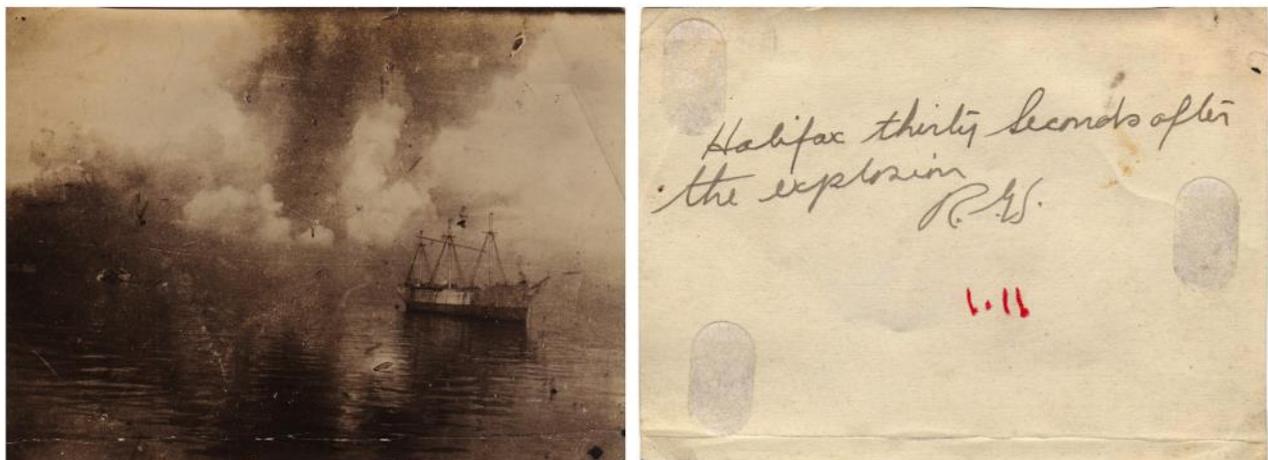


Fig. 1 RGS photograph (Halifax Explosion, Dec. 1917) and verso—Fonds 2012-14-p08/01—First World War photographs, Community Archives of Belleville and Hastings County, Ontario, Canada. (jpeg)

The digital copy sent to me was of high enough quality for study. I immediately noticed some oddities within the image having to do with the calmness of the water and the indeterminate nature of several small items within the photo (possibly other boats). However, the scenario, as a whole, seemed possible. My immediate priority was to establish the location where the image might have been photographed. The angle looking down to the hulked vessel appeared high from the photographer's point of view. With no docks, land or other features in sight, there were few options as to where such a photograph could have been taken.

Information as to ownership of the image had already been established. Some of the photographs within the collection at CABHC had originally been in the possession of a navy man named Reginald Garnet Stevens, assumed to be the “R.G.S.” referred to on the image’s verso. In order to validate the image, it was necessary to connect Stevens to the photograph, either through a personal letter or a diary entry. As well, determining the identity and location of the hulked vessel was key. Other photographs indicated Stevens had served in the Royal Canadian Navy during WWI. So, the first order of business was to check the Canadian Navy Lists to establish his rank and on which vessel he served. The December 1917 Canadian Navy List showed that Reginald G. Stevens, a mate in the Royal Naval Canadian Volunteer Reserve (RNCVR) was borne in HMCS *Niobe* as of July. The situation began to look promising.

The notion that the image may have been photographed from aboard *Niobe* initially seemed viable. The ship’s decks would have been a suitable vantage point for the photographer due to their height. However, *Niobe*’s distance from ground zero, approximately three quarters of a mile—raised some skepticism about the thirty-second timeframe written on the image’s verso. The presence of the enveloping smoke and the calmness of the water did not seem correct. Also, the presence of a hulked vessel in such close proximity to *Niobe* made little sense. I accessed the first-hand detailed accounts of the event by the ship’s first officer, Lieutenant-Commander Allan Baddeley (*Daily News*, Perth, 11 December 1937):

“From momentary unconsciousness I emerged, reeling, with brain still recording those masses of wreckage hurled skyward in sky-wide flame. Miraculous to be alive. Futile to stay to be killed when that wreckage fell. “The conning tower!” I shouted to my companions of the glass-strewn bridge. Into the cramped dimness of the conning tower crowded the chief yeoman and another signalman, my messenger, the Captain of Patrols [Walter Hose] and myself. Not a button left on the rags of my jacket. With wreckage crashing down on her, the ship lifted ponderously beneath us, hung for a few seconds and lurched down with rolls to port and starboard. The explosion had set in motion a great mass of water which, in the manner of a tidal wave, had swept down on the *Niobe* and treated her 11,000 tons as a pond ripple bobs an empty bottle. High overhead spread a vast canopy of smoke, swirling and glinting and changing color in the sunshine... Fires ashore, close under our port bow, were rapidly approaching a military magazine... To replace the shattered jetty giving access to the dockyard I contrived a floating bridge out of the College schooner, boats, and a jumble of flotsam that had jammed alongside the ship. Across this bridge went parties to join the military and civilians in fire-fighting and rescue work; others to gather and guard the widely scattered contents of dockyard store sheds.”

Baddeley’s account makes it clear that *Niobe* could not have been the photographer’s location, in part due to the frenetic onboard activity generated by the blast, but mainly because the subsequent tsunami had filled the surrounding water with debris—not evident in the photograph. As it turned out, Jeff Noakes, an historian at the Canadian War Museum, had already checked the January Canadian Navy List and found that Mate Stevens was assigned to the guard ship HMCS *Acadia* just prior to the explosion. Although these vessels were on opposite sides of the blast—*Niobe* on the harbour side, and *Acadia* off the eastern shore of Bedford Basin, just above the Narrows—there was still reason enough to think the RGS photograph could be genuine. So, I quickly shifted my focus to try and establish the location of the image within the area where the guard ship was moored. I was enthusiastic about Mate Stevens’s connection to *Acadia*, the only surviving vessel

from the Halifax Explosion, and an important part of my research of the event for many years. A wonderful photograph from the CABHC collection shows Mate Stevens (standing second from right) along with his ship's fellows. (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2 Mates aboard HMCS Acadia (H.M.C.S. Acadia)—Fonds 2012-14-p09—First World War photographs, Community Archives of Belleville and Hastings County, Ontario, Canada. (jpeg)

The most detailed known first-hand account from someone aboard *Acadia* in the timeframe immediately before and after the explosion comes via the diary of an ordinary seaman named Frank Herbert Baker, assigned to the guard ship at the beginning of its tenure in Bedford Basin on 4 December 1917. The diary is housed at the Dartmouth Heritage Museum. Baker's entry from Thursday, 6 December provides stark reminiscences of the moments surrounding the explosion:

“The first thud shook the ship from stem to stern and the second one seemed to spin us all around, landing some under the gun carriage and others flying in all directions all over the deck. Our first impression was that we were being attacked by submarines, and we all rushed for the upper deck, where we saw a veritable mountain of smoke of a yellowish hue and huge pieces of iron were flying all around us. A shower of shrapnel passed over the Forecastle, shattering the glass in the engine room and chart room to smithereens, which came crashing down into the alleyways. It was the greatest miracle in the world that we were not all killed. God only knows how we escaped. The fires all burst out on to the floor of the stokehold and it was a marvel that the stokers were not burned to death, but all of them escaped injury as did all the

other of the ship's company. A tug was alongside us at the time and part of her side was torn completely out and three of the crew were injured... A hail of shrapnel descended about 20 yards from the ship, this came with such force that had it struck us we should certainly have all been lost, it was so terrific. This was the last of the explosion, the whole of which had taken place inside of five minutes. We were fully impressed by the time that we were being attacked by submarines and we were expecting our turn to come at any moment. Then came a lull of a few minutes and when the smoke had cleared sufficiently, we saw clearly what had happened."

Of the seamen who took extant photographs of the blast cloud in its early stages, most are anonymous. However, Edward McPeck of CS *Tyrian*, Victor Magnus of HMS *Changinola*, and the rest were apparently aboard vessels not adversely affected by the blast. As with *Niobe*, it is difficult to imagine how anyone aboard *Acadia*, in the midst of such panic, confusion and violence, and with duties to perform, would have had the wherewithal to stop, take the time to find a camera, and snap a photograph. Again, the scene in the RGS photograph appears quite calm, but the situation aboard *Acadia* and the surrounding area was completely chaotic. Baker mentions that the episode took five minutes to subside. Even if his perceptions were off by a minute or two, the image being taken "thirty seconds after the explosion" seems improbable.

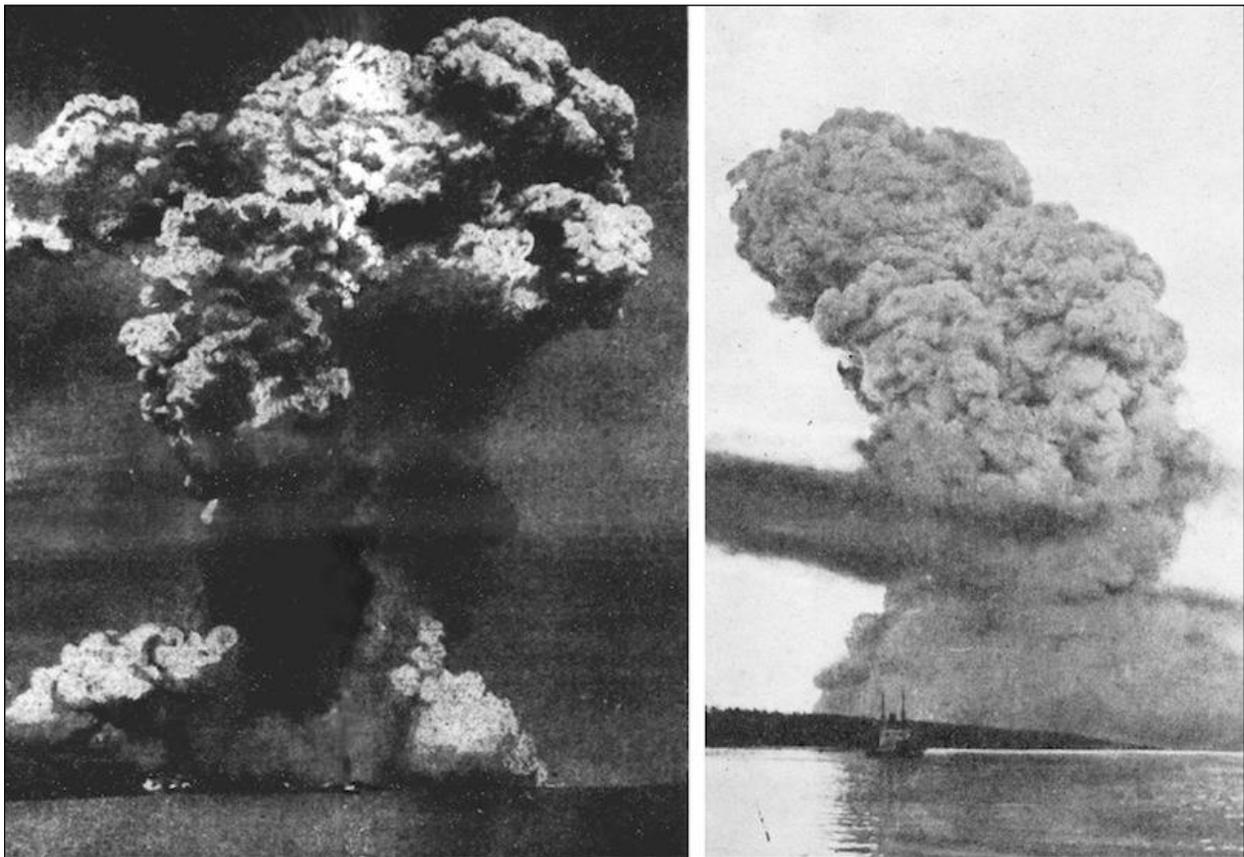


Fig. 3 View of the Blast Cloud Harbourside (looking northward), *The Daily Mirror* (London), 30 December 1917 (left); View of the Blast Cloud from Bedford Basin (looking southward), National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), U.S.A., Reference #165-WW-158A-15 (right). (jpeg)

Reading the entirety of Baker's account, his mention of clearing smoke appears to be a reference to the enormous blast cloud that engulfed the North End of the city and not to any smoke surrounding *Acadia*. But the notion of the guard ship as the photographer's location lacks viability for another reason: archival photographs of the harbour and Bedford

Basin taken immediately following the explosion show very clearly that the mass at the base of the blast cloud do not extend beyond an approximate half-mile radius. The land and water surfaces outside of this perimeter are clear of smoke. The US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) image of a view looking towards the Narrows confirms that there was no smoke whatsoever near where *Acadia* was moored, approximately one-and-a-quarter miles from the blast. (Fig. 3)

[Please note: The small vessel shown in the NARA image is not HMCS *Acadia*]

I established *Acadia*'s location several years ago from the inquiry testimony of Lieutenant Arthur McKenzie Adams, RNVR, a Naval Control staff officer assigned to the guard ship on the day of the explosion. Adams directly confirmed the position on a map derived from an Admiralty Chart, Exhibit M.B.E. 63. (Fig. 4)



Fig. 4 Exhibit M.B.E. 63 (left) from *In the Privy Council, On Appeal from the Supreme Court of Canada, Record of Proceedings Vol. 2, Exhibits and Facts*; *Location of HMCS Acadia in Bedford Basin*, © 2020 Joel Zemel (right). (jpeg)

For the better part of a month, much of my time and effort was spent attempting to decipher the visual aspects of the mysterious image. The content of the RGS photo had presented very little contextual information and was problematic from the outset. Establishing the location and identity of the hulked vessel was proving impossible to determine. My colleague, the very knowledgeable Mac MacKay, and I had used every resource available and still came up with no solid leads. The search to trace the RGS photograph's provenance had yielded some success, but all efforts to decipher its contents only resulted in more doubt and even more questions. CBC had delved into the life and times of Mate Stevens through two printed articles, a video news presentation and a national piece on *As It Happens*, but evidence regarding the image was mostly anecdotal. A direct link to the RGS photograph via a personal letter or diary belonging to Stevens could not be found. The hulked vessel's identity and location had not been determined.

The scenario depicted in the RGS photograph did not comport with any available fact-based accounts, observations, or documented photographs associated with the

explosion's blast cloud, and much too often even contradicted these resources. The wall of smoke and the eerie stillness of the water were out of place. As well, no answers could satisfy questions regarding other small anomalies within the image. Although I stopped short of calling the image a fake, my expressed frustrations and concerns about its troublesome content were a matter of public record. Without the possibility of any substantive information resulting from further efforts, I decided it would be best to discontinue my research.

Within a few days, however, historian and geophysicist Alan Ruffman brought new information to my attention, which he insisted could not be ignored. Alan pointed out that several cloud formations within the RGS image were uncannily similar to those in a photograph taken by Sub-Lieutenant Victor Montague Magnus, RNVR, entitled *Explosion at Halifax*. Magnus, who was known to always carry his camera around his neck, took his snapshot from aboard HMS *Changuinola*, a British armed merchant cruiser situated in Halifax Harbour, approximately three-quarters of a mile from the explosion. Even though *Changuinola* lay just abeam of *Niobe*, the ship sustained only minor damage from the explosion. (Fig. 5)



Fig. 5 Victor Magnus blast cloud photograph (*Explosion at Halifax—9. Am, Dec. 6th 1917*)—taken by Victor Magnus, contributed by Ken Cuthbertson, courtesy of Damian Saunders, UK. (tiff)

I had known of Victor Magnus's WWI photographs for several years. The vast collection is managed by his great-grandson, Damian Saunders. A number of Magnus's stunning photographs taken at the time of the Halifax Explosion were published in the UK by the *Daily Mail* in 2014 to commemorate the one hundredth year since the beginning of WWI. I happened to have a low resolution digital copy of this particular Magnus image in my personal collection. So, I created a composite of the RGS and Magnus photographs.

During a CBC interview, Dan Conlin, an historian and curator for Pier 21, had postulated that the RGS photograph could be a composite. "Photoshopping" is by no means a modern-day concept. Methods of altering photographs have been in existence since 1846. During WWI, composites were created by incorporating multiple layers of negatives, photographic manipulation, and staged scenes to dramatically enhance images of battles and their aftermaths. Famed Australian photographer Frank Hurley (1885-1962) used these controversial techniques to produce many of his wartime photographs. (Fig. 6)



Fig. 6 *Morning at Passchendaele*, by Frank Hurley, National Library of Australia number nla.pic-an24574133, TLF resource R2924. (jpeg)

The results of the RGS and Magnus photographs composite were surprising, to say the least. The blast cloud images were not only similar but, for all intents, identical. This development made it necessary to locate a higher resolution Magnus photograph. Historian and author Ken Cuthbertson had written a 2018 article for *Queen's Quarterly* that included this image. Ken kindly forwarded a 300 dpi scan of the Magnus photograph he had obtained from Mr. Saunders. Below are the composite (Fig. 7) and a point-by-point comparison of the two blast cloud images. (Fig. 8)

Composite of Magnus and RGS photographs



Fig. 7 Composite image of RGS and Magnus photographs, © 2020 Joel Zemel. (tiff)

The Magnus photograph is at 50% opacity. Its borders have been cropped out for the purposes of the composite. The RGS photograph is at 100% opacity. As shown, the resemblance between the two blast clouds is very close, but cannot be exact as the proportions of the Magnus photograph appear to have been slightly altered in the RGS photograph. Nevertheless, the evidence strongly indicates that Victor Magnus's unique and unmistakable image has been embedded within the RGS photograph. There are no indicators that would suggest a double exposure. Due to the rapid speed at which formations change during an explosion, I have ruled out the possibility of a simultaneous shot by another photographer.

Blast Cloud Comparison

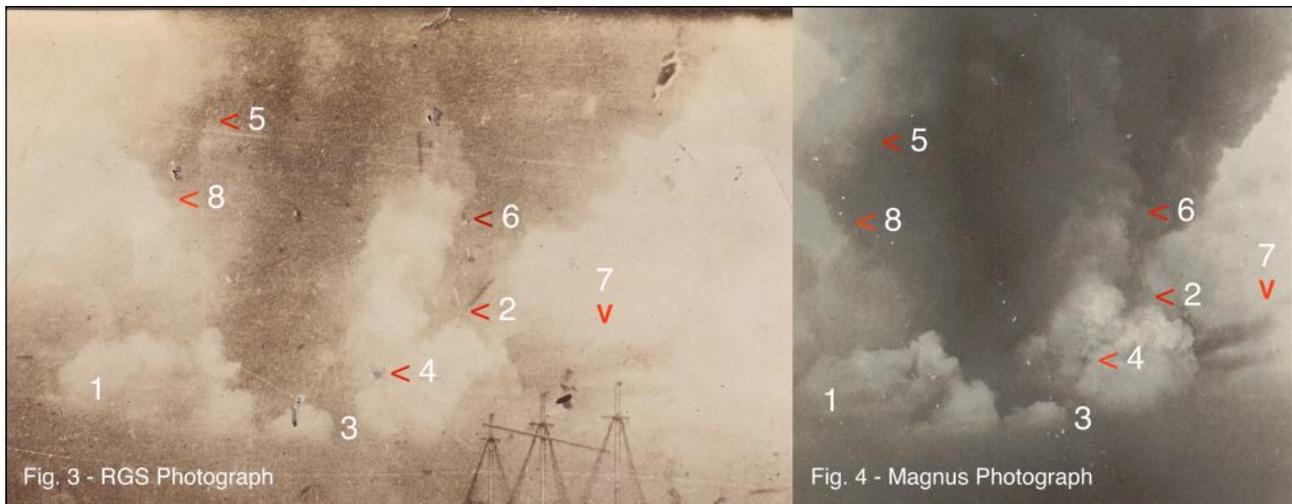


Fig. 8 Blast Cloud Comparison, © 2020 Joel Zemel. (tiff)

In both images, the overall shape of the blast cloud is triangular, with distinctive smaller white cloud formations near the base and a thinner column running vertically just to the right of center. The blast clouds are depicted at slightly different angles and there is more of the top portion of the cloud visible in the full Magnus photograph. Proportions of the images are constrained. The points below describe the most apparent similarities. It is important to note that during an explosion, an expanding blast cloud's size and shape increase exponentially with each passing microsecond. According to Alan Ruffman, this cloud would have reached its full height of approximately 12,000 feet (or more) in a matter of seconds.

- 1: This area shows a reclining head-like figure with distinctive nose and mouth shapes that are consistent in both images.
- 2: The configuration and outline of this area are consistent in both images.
- 3: The shape of the space between the clouds as well as the configurations to the left and right are similar.
- 4: This dark circular mark is indicated in both images. The surrounding cloud formations are also consistent in both images.
- 5: Similar configurations are apparent at the beginning of left downward slopes of the clouds.
- 6: The general configuration of the whole centre section of the cloud is similar in both images. Finer detail is visible in the Magnus photograph. Some areas are washed out and softer in the RGS photograph. Despite the differences in contrast, the similarities are apparent.
- 7: Though contrast varies, the darker parallel wisp patterns are consistent in both images.
- 8: This cloud configuration is consistent in both images but appears washed out in the RGS image.

Further evidence suggests that the photograph may not have been taken by Mate Stevens—that it was a gift, possibly from another naval man. The “R.G.S.” initials on the verso of the image and those on a 25 January 1918 postcard sent by Mate Stevens from aboard HMCS *Algerine* in British Columbia to Miss A. Campbell in Ottawa, are noticeably dissimilar. The face of the postcard features a photograph of Mates aboard HMCS *Algerine* in 1918. Mate Stevens is standing fifth from the left. (Fig. 9 and Fig. 10).



Fig. 9 RGS photograph verso, (Halifax Explosion, Dec. 1917) Fonds 2012-14-p08/01—First World War photographs, CABHC (left); Postcard verso, Fonds 2012-14-p05/02—First World War photographs, CABHC (right); R.G.S. Initials Comparison, © 2020 Joel Zemel. (jpeg)



Fig. 10 Mates on HMCS Algerine, West Coast 1918, Fonds 2012-14-p05/02, First World War photographs, Community Archives of Belleville and Hastings County, Ontario, Canada. (jpeg)

Conclusion: The RGS photograph is a WWI-era composite made up of two or more negative layers and is not a true representation of a moment in time from the 1917 Halifax Explosion. Because the image appears to be one of a kind from a private collection, I view the photo as a possible experiment by an amateur photographer or a composite image created as a lark. It may have been a gift from an associate of Mate Stevens. I contacted Damian Saunders in the UK to enquire whether he had any knowledge as to how a unique photograph taken by his great-grandfather came to be embedded in a WWI era composite image owned by a Canadian Navy man. Mr. Saunders replied he had no idea how this could have occurred.

In a recent article for my online column, I noted that my esteemed colleague and leading expert on RMS *Titanic*, Charles Haas, always says, "History is fluid." With each new discovery, long-standing ideas or even those newly put forth must either be revised or discarded entirely. As with all serious research into the subject of the 1917 explosion in Halifax Harbour, I encourage healthy debate, but firmly believe that all available findings on the subject must be considered before any steadfast conclusions are formulated.

Joel Zemel resides and works in Halifax. He was awarded the prestigious 2016 John Lyman Book Award in the category of Canadian Naval and Maritime History for his book *Scapegoat, the extraordinary legal proceedings following the 1917 Halifax Explosion*. Joel was the historical consultant for Canada Post Corporation's stamp commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Halifax Explosion and wrote the description for the OFDC and stamp pamphlets. His name is included in HRM Archives' "List of Professional Researchers." He also writes a monthly historical column for an online newspaper, HalifaxToday.ca.

The Sale of ex-US Warships to Canada in 1930-31

By Dr David Chessum

The Washington Naval Treaty, signed on 6 February 1922, was a disarmament treaty intended to reduce and ultimately limit the naval strength of the major naval powers of the day – the United States, the British Empire, Japan, France, and Italy. In order to prevent signatories from getting around the disarmament provisions by transferring surplus warships to friendly nations outside of the Treaty regime, the Treaty contained the provision that “Each of the Contracting Powers undertakes not to dispose by gift, sale or any mode of transfer of any vessel of war in such a manner that such vessel may become a vessel of war in the navy of any foreign Power.” In 1930-31, plans by a US company to sell two former US Navy warships to an American Company operating in Canada created a test-case that limited how broadly that treaty prohibition could be interpreted.

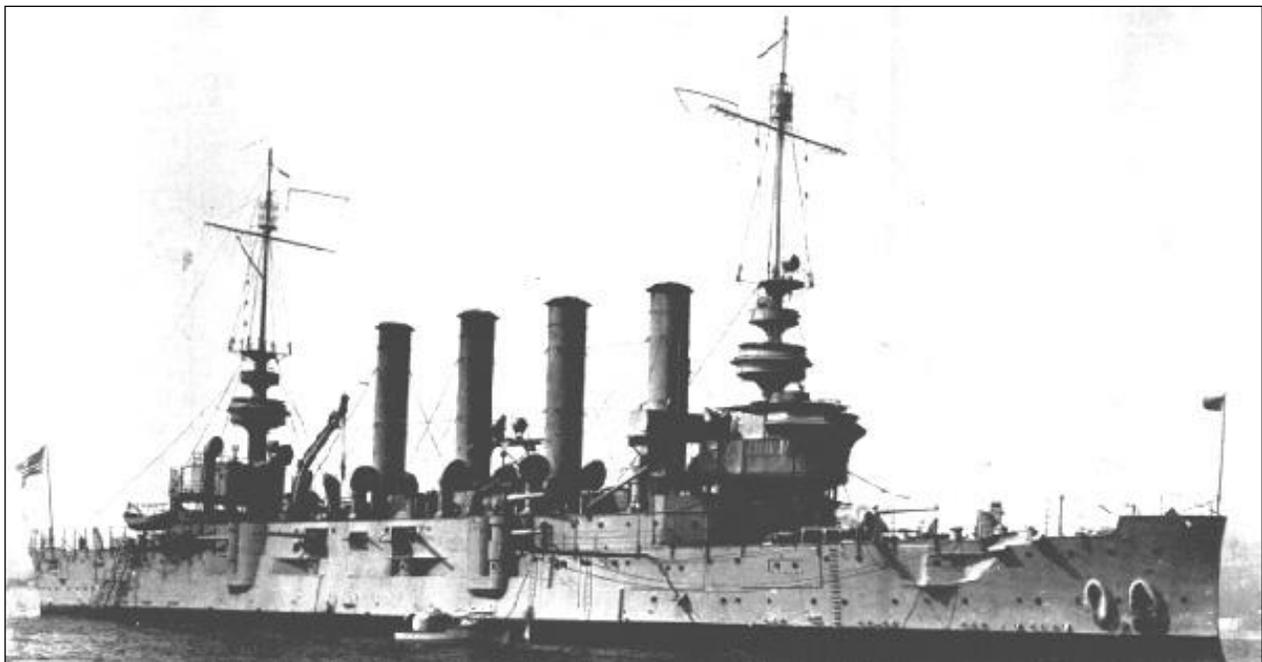


Fig 1: USS *Charleston*. Public Domain. Photo Credit: US Navy

USS *Charleston* was a 9,700-ton *St Louis*-class protected cruiser completed in 1905. After active service in World War One, *Charleston* was decommissioned on 4 December 1923, and sold in February 1930 to Abe Goldberg of Seattle for scrapping by the Lake Union Dry Dock and Machine Works. USS *South Dakota* was a 13,680-ton *Pennsylvania*-class armoured cruiser completed in 1908. Renamed USS *Huron* on 7 June 1920 to release its original name for a new battleship, the vessel was struck from the Navy list on 15 November 1929, and also sold to Abe Goldberg & Co on 11 February 1930 for disposal.

On 15 August 1930, the American *Charge d’Affaires* in Tokyo advised the Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs that it was proposed that *Charleston*’s hulk be on-sold to the Powell River Company, Limited, an American Company operating in Canada. At the time of the proposal, all of *Charleston*’s armour plate had been removed, along with the engines, boilers, and generators, and the superstructure was being dismantled. On 30 August 1930, the Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs replied that the Japanese Government had no

objection to this proposed sale. On 25 October 1930, the hulk of *Charleston*, cut down to the waterline, was towed to the log pond at the Powell River pulp mill in British Columbia to act as a part of a floating breakwater.

On 1 July 1931, the US Government advised the other Treaty signatories of the desire by the Powell River Co to purchase the former USS *Huron* as well. At this time *Huron* had been reduced to the condition of an empty shell, and it was asserted that there could be no practicable possibility of it being incorporated into the navy of a foreign power. This argument was accepted by the other signatories to the Washington Naval Treaty, who each replied that they had no objections to the sale. *Huron* joined *Charleston* in the breakwater in August 1931.

On 18 February 1961, *Huron* sank in a storm. That same year, *Charleston's* hull was removed from the floating breakwater because it was also in danger of sinking, and moved to the booming ground at Kelsey Bay on Vancouver Island where it was grounded as part of another breakwater. The remains of the hulk are still there.

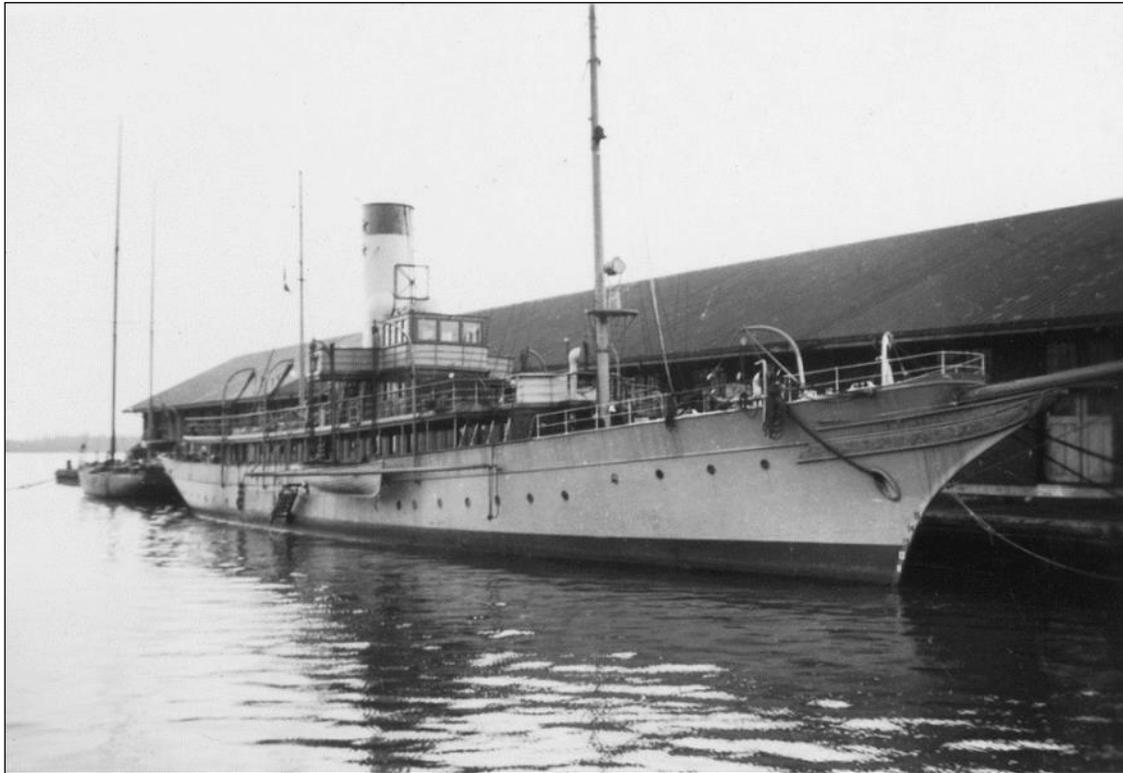
Endnotes

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Dr David Chessum is a former Officer in the Royal New Zealand Navy, and currently a Naval History Researcher based in Sydney, Australia. In 2018 he completed his PhD on the naval history of interwar naval arms control, and he is currently in the process of updating that thesis for publication as a book.

Name that yacht: an *Argonauta* challenge

When I included Tony Jupp's image of the mystery ship and his appeal to the collective genius of the *Argonauta* community in our last issue (Fall 2020), I anticipated no definitive answer, but a number of educated guesses. Instead of a slew of speculation as to the name and history of the beautiful vessel docked in the unnamed berth, I received a single, complete tale of pleasure boating and wartime bravery! *Argo* reader Karl Gagnon had the answer, and he shares with us not only the name and history of the mystery ship, but his own path to discovery.



The answer...

Karl Gagnon

The story began on a Friday while on night watch in a military operations centre; I was reading, during quiet time slots, the newest edition of *Argonauta* I had downloaded a few hours earlier. While browsing the magazine, I landed on the article "Name that yacht: an *Argonauta* challenge" by Erika Behrisch.

Intrigued by the title, I read the piece and studied the vessel's photo; the photo and the events surrounding it awakened in me a feeling of déjà-vu. I continued browsing, intending to return to the article later. I knew that Canadian civilian yachts had been loaned to the RCN and its naval divisions during the Second World War to ensure the vessels were worked and maintained during that period, as fuel was not available.

The article mentioned that the vessel was in the Toronto area when the photo was taken, that the owner of the camera was a member of an armed forces, and that the picture was taken during the war, and that Toronto had a Naval Reserve Division, HMCS *York*. That

information indicated that the vessel could have been one of these loaned yachts; however, the vessel could have been employed by another RCN division on the Great Lakes. The year was also significant, as the vessel would not have been allowed to navigate freely. The photo also revealed that the vessel was large and seemed to be in naval livery; the size eliminated many small vessels, and the livery indicated possibly being under naval control. The photo also revealed some particular features: the tall funnel, the narrow hull and a very distinctive antenna on the bridge house.

Returning home in the morning, I began consulting my photo archives of Canadian warships and auxiliaries and quickly eliminated most commissioned warships. (I collect reference material to help to draw profiles of ships and military equipment; I draw profiles of Canadian warships as a hobby.) From my naval tenders files, I quickly disregarded the small ones to concentrate on the large ones and, after a few minutes, identified the vessel; photos from my file show the vessel in location and angle close to the photo in *Argonauta*.

I then communicated my discovery to Erika.

Drumroll please.....

The vessel is the yacht *Venetia*, built in 1904 by Hawthorne and Co in Leith, Scotland, for F.W. Sykes of Green Lea in Yorkshire, from plans drawn up by the designers Cox and King. The vessel was sold in 1905 to Morton F. Plant of New York, New York, and brought to the US in 1908. In 1911, it was sold to John Diedrich Spreckles of San Francisco, California, who leased it to the US Navy on 4 August 1917. Designated USS *Venetia* SP-431 and fitted out at the Mare Island Navy Yard in Vallejo, California, *Venetia* was commissioned at Mare Island on 15 October 1917 under the command of Commander L.B. Porterfield.

The converted yacht departed Mare Island on 23 October, transited the Panama Canal to reach Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on 15 November 1917. It underwent further alterations before departing for its first transatlantic crossing on 21 December towing SC-67 (allocated to the French Navy) via Bermuda with other vessels. It reached Gibraltar on January 18th. After repairs, the *Venetia* continued escorting a convoy to Tunisia to return to Gibraltar, its homeport. The vessel performed escorts to many convoys and came in contact with U-boats three times and was credited at the time for sinking them; *Venetia* was awarded a "star of reward" for its anti-submarine work; the star was mounted on its stack. During its last month in European waters, *Venetia* made a round-trip voyage to Portugal before sailing for the United States on 21 December, towing SC-223. It sailed via Guantanamo Bay to the Panama Canal to reach San Francisco on 20 February 1919. One week later, the vessel was shifted to the Mare Island Navy Yard where it was decommissioned, and all of the military fittings were removed. *Venetia* was returned to its owner on 4 April 1919.

Venetia remained under the ownership of John D. Spreckles until his death in June 1926. The yacht was then sold to James Playfair, of Midland, Ontario, who owned the ship from 1928 to 1939. The ownership changed hands again in 1940, when R. S. Misener of Sarnia, Ontario, acquired the ship.

Because of the lack of fuel during WW II, many Canadian yachts were leased to the RCN for \$1 for the duration of the conflict, allowing the vessels to be run and maintained. From September 1941 to September 1945, *Venetia* served as a naval tender to HMCS *York*, the Naval Reserve Division in Toronto, Ontario. It very likely served as a training platform for new recruits. It was returned to R. S. Misener after the war. I lost track of *Venetia* after the war but, after some 65 years in operation, the latter years on the Great Lakes, it disappeared from the Lloyd's Register of Yachts in 1968 and probably was scrapped.

The vessel was 226 ft Length Overall (LOA), 196 ft at the water line, for a beam of 27 ft 2 in and draft of 15 ft. It displaced 589 tons and had a steel hull. It was propelled by two Scotch boilers for one propeller capable of reaching 13 knots with a range of 8,000 NM. It was not armed while serving with the RCN, but carried guns and depth charges in US service.

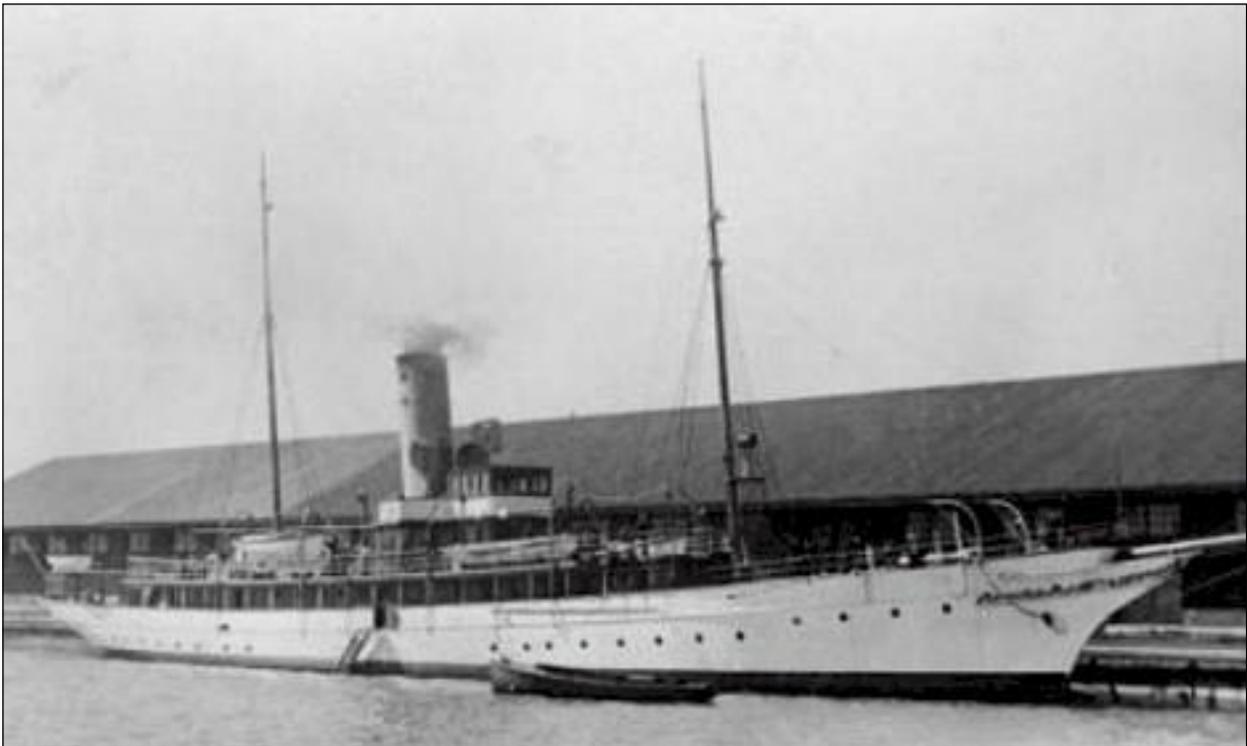


Photo: official RCN image of *Venetia*, property of Karl Gagnon

HMCS CATARAQUI's Wings in Reserve: VC 921 Squadron

By Chris Varley

It might sound surprising to some, but Kingston, Ontario's Norman Rogers Airport has a rich naval history dating back to World War II.

On the 17th of December 1939, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom signed an agreement creating the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. The Plan was created to train aircrew for the Royal Air Force, the Royal Canadian Air Force, Royal New Zealand Air Force, and Royal Australian Air Force in navigation, gunnery, bombing and as pilots. In April of 1940, it was announced that a service flying training school would be established in the Kingston area in May of 1941, with one thousand staff and students. These young men came from all parts of the world, including the United Kingdom, Poland, Australia, New Zealand, Rhodesia, Fiji, France Ceylon, Norway, Greece, Belgium, Fiji, the Netherlands, South Africa, Canada, Argentina, Denmark, Finland, Czechoslovakia and the United States.

Due to the fall of France in July 1940, along with other European countries such as Norway and Denmark, the German Luftwaffe now had available airfields that allowed them to attack ports and airfields in the United Kingdom. This included airfields that were used for the training of aircrews. The original school was Royal Air Force Number 7 Service Flying Training Station at Peterborough, United Kingdom, but with the operational pressure on British airfields and airspace, the space and time for training activities had to be kept to a minimum. It was therefore decided to transfer training to Canada as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

In several stages, the Number 7 Service Flying Training School was transferred to Kingston in the fall of 1940 and was designated 31 Service Flying Training School as of October 1940. The first group of naval ratings arrived at the Airdrome for pilot training in January 1941. Not only was Number 7 Service Flying Training School the first to be transferred to Canada, but it also became the only station to train pilots for the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm.

The Fairey Battles were the first aircraft to arrive in early October, while the first North American Harvards arrived later in the month of October 1940. Other aircraft used for training were the Avro Anson, Supermarine Walrus, de Havilland Gypsy Moth and Westland Lyanders.

In addition to the main facilities at Kingston, the School maintained several "relief fields," which included Gananoque to the east and Sandhurst to the north. They ran two bombing ranges—one at Millhaven Bay and another in Bath—where depth-charge dropping was regularly practiced with the Harvards.

In mid-1944, the BCATP began to scale back and combine schools. Fourteen SFTS moved from Aylmer to Kingston in August 1944, and the two Schools merged under the name 14 SFTS until it was disbanded in September 1945. By then, the unit's main function was to store aircraft pending disposal.

By the time the school was disbanded, 5096 ratings were trained as pilots for the Fleet Air Arm. 49 officers and ratings died while serving or training at SFTSs 31 and 14. After the war, the airfield was renamed Norman Rogers Airport, and it continues to be in operation today in Kingston, Ontario.

With the end of the war, officers, ratings and wrens were demobilized and returned home to carry on with their lives. A number of officers and ratings continued their naval service by joining their local reserve division. This was the same with Kingston's HMCS *Cataraqui*, which included a small number of pilots. These pilots wished to continue flying, and the idea was presented to the Commanding Officer. The idea of *Cataraqui* having its own air squadron was addressed as early as October, 1948 in a letter to the Director of Naval Reserves from Commander Hank Hill, Commanding Officer of HMCS *Cataraqui*. **(photo 1)**

In the letter, Commander Hill requested that the Division be permitted to charter, from the Kingston Flying Club, one Fairchild Cornell aircraft for a period not to exceed a total of 30 flying hours. He went on to state that it would permit serving reserve officers with private pilot's licences to give familiarization instruction to reserve officers and University Naval Training Division cadets of the Division.

Commander Hill's proposal was well received but was ultimately declined by the Naval Board because certain concerns were raised: the lack of naval aviation training or discipline, that training in a Fairchild Cornell would not be advantageous to subsequent naval aviation training, and most pilots would be over-age—the maximum age limit for a fighter pilot was 23/24 years.

It wasn't until the Naval Board approved the formation of naval air reserve squadrons that Kingston was again considered as a possible location for a naval air squadron. The airport was, in fact, an ideal location for a possible naval air squadron, especially as it continued to be under the authority of the Royal Canadian Air Force. A number of the original wartime facilities remained intact, including the hangars.



Commander Hank Hill
Courtesy HMCS *Cataraqui*

The main reason, however, that Norman Rogers Airport was considered as a possible location for a naval air reserve squadron was the contracting out of the maintenance work for servicing the aircraft by the Kingston Flying Club. It was for this reason an initial meeting was held with the Kingston Flying Club, during the first week of June 1953, regarding the establishment of a naval air squadron. After an emergency meeting of the Club's Board of Directors, a letter was sent to Commodore Kenneth Adams confirming the Kingston Flying Club's interest in co-operating with the formation of the squadron. A second meeting was held.

Once the maintenance contract was signed, a message was sent to Canadian Flag Officer Atlantic stating that a requirement existed for Harvard aircraft to form VC 921 Squadron. Two Harvards arrived at the airport in late September. A directive was then sent out confirming that the squadron was to be commissioned effective 30 September 1953. Thus, VC 921 Squadron became the second of five naval air reserve squadrons to be commissioned. The others were VC 920-HMCS *York* (Toronto), VC 922-HMCS *Malahat* (Victoria), VC 923-HMCS *Montcalm* (Quebec City) and VC 924-HMCS *Tecumseh* (Calgary).

It was during this time that Lieutenant (P) Bill Gourlay, RCN was appointed to the squadron as Staff Officer (Air) and Residential Flight Instructor. One of his first duties was the

advertising in the local paper for the recruitment of pilots. The first advertisement for the squadron was in the Kingston *Whig Standard* 19 September 1953. The minimum requirements for each candidate with no previous military were the following: they had to have their pilot's licence with a minimum of 70 hours of flying time, and be between the ages of 18 and 24. Once these candidates passed all their preliminary requirements, they were appointed as Midshipmen in the Royal Canadian Navy (Reserve). Other candidates for the squadron were former wartime pilots who had served with the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy or with the Royal Canadian Air Force. This included post-war pilots who had served with the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Lieutenant Gourlay's responsibility for the formation of the squadron included recruiting, public relations, training, reviewing all applications, press releases related to the squadron, setting up a training syllabus, and arranging for classrooms. Classes for ground school were held at HMCS *Cataraqui*, which was located at 47 Wellington Street until the facilities were made available at the Kingston Flying Club. With the assistance of two members of VC 920 Squadron and the Kingston Flying Club's Aircraft Engineer, offices and storage space were created inside the Flying Club's hangar for aircraft parts for the squadron.



LCdr (P) Al Burgham, DSC
Courtesy HMCS *Cataraqui*

Among the first group of former wartime pilots were Allan Burgham, Frederick Hooper, and David Humphries. Burgham, a New Zealander, and Hooper, a Canadian, trained at Norman Rogers in 1941 while Humphries, British, had trained in the United Kingdom. The enthusiasm of the former wartime pilots was very high; however, their flying capabilities left much to be desired because of their long absence from flying. This was rectified after a few hours in the air. By the end of January of 1954, all pilots in the squadron had commenced flying training. Ground School training was held every Thursday night at the naval division. Subjects included Aero Engines, Radio Aids, Theory of Flight, Airmanship, Navigation and Meteorology.

In May 1954, Acting Lieutenant-Commander (P) Allen Burgham was appointed Commanding Officer. He was to remain the only Commanding Officer of the Squadron throughout its short history.

One of the problems faced by the Squadron during its first winter of flight operations was the lack of snow removal on the runways. A request was made of the RCAF to provide snow ploughing, but this request was declined. Instructional flying had to be cancelled until the Kingston Flying Club could hire a private contractor.

August saw ground school continue, while the squadron waited for the third Harvard to arrive, which would increase more advanced formation flying training. October saw members of the squadron participate in their first Trafalgar Day Parade and Trafalgar Ball. Squadron members, with their ladies, attended the Trafalgar Ball.

Basic Officer Training for Midshipmen was held through the winter at *Cataraqui*. The training included instruction in parade training, power of command, flashing exercises, meteorology, naval ranks, naval terms, steering, compass and helm, discipline, and Officer of the Watch duties.



Trafalgar Day Parade
Courtesy HMCS *Cataraqui*



Trafalgar Ball, Standing Dave Humphries, Don Hamilton, Pat Galt, Ken MacLennan, sitting Fred Hooper, Al Burgham, Bill Gourlay, Courtesy HMCS *Cataraqui*

VC 921 Squadron became the first winner of the Safety Flying Award for completing the 1954-1955 training year without a single accident. The squadron would be awarded the Award again for 1955-1956.



Receiving the Flying Award
Courtesy HMCS *Cataraqui*

In March of 1956, one of the squadron's Harvards was forced to make an emergency landing due to smoke in the cockpit, the result of a possible electrical fire. There were no injuries. The Safe Flying Trophy – Reserve Squadrons was created and donated by Commodore Kenneth Adams, Commanding Officer Naval Divisions. It was awarded annually to the naval air reserve squadron with the lowest accident rate.

As part of their continued training programme, conversion courses for Avengers and Beechcraft were held at HMCS *Shearwater* with VT 40 Squadron.



Burham, Galt, Humphries
Courtesy HMCS *Cataraqui*

VT 40 Squadron served as the RCN's training squadron, and provided specialized training through to flights, namely the Advanced Training Flight (ATF) and All-Weather Flying Flight (AWF). The squadron operated from May 1954 until May 1959, when its functions were absorbed into VU 32. September 1955 saw the arrival of a fourth Harvard and an Expeditior.

An area of ongoing concern for the squadron was the lack of adequate crash facilities at the airport. An accident involving a Royal Canadian Air Force Harvard, which turned over on its back on the Kingston Airfield, served to underline the precarious operating conditions at the airport.

It was not until one of the Harvard's occupants walked into the crew room—considerably shaken and a bit bloody—that anyone was aware that an accident had even taken place, there being no control tower or commanding view of the field from the hangars. When one considers that this accident occurred shortly before the airfield was secure, imagination alone can conceive what might have resulted had the pilot and passenger not been able to walk or fire had broken out.

The answer to the problem of control at Kingston, however, was too costly to install and too uneconomical to run for the size of the operation. It was a continuing problem, especially during the winter operations when the snow, piled on the sides of the runways, obscured vision from the hangars even more than did the hay during the summer.

Of the five reserve air squadrons then active, VC 921 and VC 923 were inadequately provided with full-time suitable crash rescue vehicles. Appropriate vehicles had been obtained for these divisions, but unfortunately the provision of manpower was not allowed for in complement. This oversight ultimately prevented the delivery of the vehicles.

It was determined that a crew of four would be required per vehicle, only one of which must be trained in aircraft firefighting. An overall increase in complement could be avoided by substituting an aircraft controlman for other air trades that were now in complement but not filled. Finally, in August of 1958, a Petty Officer 1st Class Controlman was drafted to VC 921 Squadron to assist in resolving the adequate firefighting.

Lieutenant-Commander Gourlay (P) was relieved by Lieutenant-Commander (P) Eddie Myers as Resident Instructor and Staff Officer (Air).

In 1956 the squadron attended the Air Force Day display at Royal Canadian Air Force Station Trenton, and joined with the Flying Club in a mass flight to Oshawa for an Air Rally of aircraft from the whole of the Southern Ontario Region. Over one hundred aircraft were present, including flying club aircraft from various points in the province, RCAF aircraft from Trenton and points west and north; the navy's representation was VC 921 Squadron.



Flying In
Courtesy HMCS *Cataraqui*



Flying in Formation
Courtesy HMCS *Cataraqui*

April 1956 also saw the ground school transferred to the air field. This move provided a cooler location in the hot summer, and increased flying hours up to the commencement of lectures.

In May, the Squadron exercised with Cougar, *Cataraqui's* motor launch, which afforded the squadron the opportunity to carry out basic anti-submarine exercises. Over two weekends, with the Cougar movements unknown, the squadron planned and carried out anti-submarine searches and strikes, assuming the Cougar was an enemy submarine running on the surface.

Following this exercise, a greater emphasis was placed on formation flying in preparation of the two weeks of squadron training at HMCS *Shearwater* located near Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

The squadron took part in an amphibious assault exercise during September involving sub-units of the Princess of Wales' Own Regiment and vessels from *Cataraqui*. Acting as the enemy, they carried out a succession of strikes on the fleet while the ships were in transit. The squadron then reverted to friendly and flew a strike against the enemy-held assault beaches just as our own forces were on the run-in. During the land battle phase of the exercise, the aircraft provided close support for the ground forces.



Flour Bombing the Cougar
Courtesy HMCS *Cataraqui*

The squadron was most enthused at being allowed to put into practice some of the skills gained during armament exercises at *Shearwater*, using small paper bags of flour to substitute for armament.

The squadron continued to be well represented at both the Trafalgar Ball and Trafalgar Church Parade, which was held every October.

In April of 1957, Lieutenant (P) Gerry Watson, RCN was appointed to the squadron, relieving Eddie Myers as Staff Officer (Air) and Resident Instructor.

Prior to being sent off to *Shearwater* for advanced training with the newly created Collective Air Group, the members of the squadron attended Wet Dingy Drill, held at the Royal Military College pool. The Reserve Air Group, consisting of all five naval air reserve squadrons, arrived from their respective Naval Divisions on 17 August and remained in *Shearwater* for two weeks of flying training and an extensive armament programme. The training of the Reserve Squadron as a Collective Air Group at *Shearwater* was an excellent idea. Undoubtedly their operational efficiency was considerably increased during their two week stay, and their enthusiasm and drive indicated their morale was of the highest. Facilities at *Shearwater* were not over-taxed with the arrival of the Reserves, but in the future, it had been planned that some of the *Shearwater* squadrons would be on leave during the reserve visit to avoid overcrowding.

A total of 55 aircrew and 60 maintenance crew participated in the two-week course. It was during this training period that, tragically, VC 921 Squadron lost one of their own. On the morning of 27 August, Lieutenant Ed Trzcinski, United States Navy—an American Exchange pilot from Hartford, Connecticut with VF 870 Squadron—was airborne in a Banshee jet, practicing mirror landings on runway 16 at *Shearwater*. VF 870 was to embark on the then-new carrier HMCS *Bonaventure* at the end of September, and the practice mirror landings were an integral aspect of pre-carrier training for every pilot about to embark.

Lieutenant Trzcinski was so intent on his flying that he did not notice that his radio had become unserviceable, nor did he notice red flares from the control tower directing him to abort his approach and go around. He continued on the touch down, flying the mirror and then accelerating down the runway on the touch and go.

At about the same time that Lieutenant Trzcinski was on the downwind leg to runway 16, a section of three TBM 3E Avengers were cleared for a stream take-off on runway 20.

Runways 16 and 20 intersect each other at approximately the midway point of each. The weather that morning was foggy and, although reduced, there was sufficient visibility to continue flying.

The three Avengers began their take-off rolls individually at intervals. Pilot John Freeman was number two in the stream. Freeman observed the red flares and attempted to abort his take-off, leaving 200-foot skid marks on the runway. Still, he crossed the intersection of the two runways at the same instant as Trzcinski's Banshee. The aircraft locked wings, rolled together and burst into flames. The impact and ensuing fire totally demolished both aircraft and was fatal to both pilots.



Crash Site Shearwater
Courtesy HMCS Catarauqui

Pat Galt was the third pilot in the stream and witnessed the entire collision. There were no other occupants in the Avenger. Sub-Lieutenant John Freeman's body was escorted home

from Halifax to Battersea, Ontario by a member of the squadron. A guard of six officers stood by the body while it lay at the funeral home. Members of the squadron acted as Pallbearers. *Cataraqui* provided a Guard of Honour for the funeral, along with members of the ship's company and members from VC 920 Squadron and the Reserve Air Group.



S/LT Julian Freeman
Courtesy HMCS *Cataraqui*



CDR John Chance and S/TLT (P) Neal Shaw
Courtesy HMCS *Cataraqui*

November saw the squadron take part in a training flight to VC 923 located at Quebec City. In July 1958, the squadron participated in Reserve Air Group for the second year at *Shearwater*. A total of 45 aircrew and 50 ground crew of the different squadrons took part in the 12-day exercises, which commenced 6 July.

On 29 January 1959, Sub-Lieutenant (P) Neil Shaw was awarded his wings by Commander John Chance, Commanding Officer HMCS *Cataraqui*. The ceremony was witnessed by Lieutenant Jerry Watson and Lieutenant-Commander Allan Burgham. Sub Lieutenant Shaw was the last officer in the squadron to be awarded his wings.

When word had been received that the squadron was to be disbanded, a mock funeral was held onboard *Cataraqui*. Sub Lieutenant (P) Ken Dennis summed up the collective feeling: "For the last time I took a Harvard up and for several hours ... chasing the clouds..."

The Squadron was officially decommissioned the 3rd of March 1959.

End Notes

1. The mirror landing aid was a gyroscopically-controlled concave mirror on the port side of the flight deck. On either side of the mirror was a line of green coloured datum lights. A bright orange source light was shone into the mirror creating the ball, which was seen by the pilot. This system assisted the pilot in landing the aircraft safely.

Chris Varley has been a member of HMCS *Cataraqui* since 1992, and is currently President and Historian for the HMCS *Cataraqui* Association. He was in the Canadian Navy 1969-1982 (Regular and Reserve), and graduated from St Lawrence College in 1986 in Civil Engineering Technology. Presently the HMCS *Cataraqui* Association is working on a project to honour the 100th Anniversary of the Royal Canadian Navy Reserve, 1923-2023.

CNRS 2021 CONFERENCE AND CALL FOR PAPERS: Canada's Pacific Gateway

The Canadian Nautical Research Society/Société canadienne pour la recherche nautique will hold its annual conference **10-11 June 2021**. In commemoration of the 150th anniversary of British Columbia joining Canada, 25 July 1871, the conference theme will be Canada's Pacific Gateway: past, present, and future. Proposals are invited for papers or presentations related to the general theme of Canada's wider Pacific Ocean dimensions, as well as other maritime topics both contemporary and historical.

Presentations will be a maximum of twenty minutes, followed by time for discussion. This will be a virtual conference. The Annual General Meeting of the society will be held virtually on Saturday 12 June 2021.

Proposals should be sent by email no later than **15 March 2021** to **Michael Hadley** pilgrim33@telus.net or **David Collins** birchinall@gmail.com. Please include your name, affiliation (if any) and title, and a brief description of 250 words or less. Abstracts for accepted papers will be published in the CNRS newsletter *Argonauta* prior to the conference.

Call for Papers

2021 McMullen Naval History Symposium



23-24 September 2021

U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD #McMullen21

The approaching new year, 2021, marks the 100-year anniversary of the Washington Naval Conference. This event, the first multilateral naval disarmament conference in modern history, brought delegations from nine different nations to Washington D.C. to discuss naval armament reductions and interests in the Far East. The conference resulted in multiple treaties that affected the future of naval warfare and international relations. Arguably, the most influential agreement signed was the Five-Power treaty which limited the warship tonnage of the five most powerful signatories, the United States, Great Britain, Japan, France, and Italy. 200 years ago, the US Navy was actively engaged in counter-piracy operations in the West Indies. The actions of the swashbuckling crews onboard ships such as the brig *Enterprise* and sloop of war *Hornet*, would cement a heroic legacy of the early 19th-century American naval forces as they fought to clean up the pirate-infested waters of the Caribbean Sea. And 300 years ago, in 1720, Russian and Swedish naval forces were embroiled in the Battle of Grewgarn in the Baltic Sea. This battle, the final *guerre d'escadre* of the Great Northern War, led to the signing of the Treaty of Nystad in 1721, effectively shifting the balance of power in Europe for decades to come.

Like the open sea, naval and maritime history has no defined boundaries on its influence on society. From operational history, to social history, to political history, and every approach in between, the naval and maritime history of the United States and the wider world remain rich areas of research and scholarship.

The History Department of the United States Naval Academy invites proposals for papers to be presented at the 2021 McMullen Naval History Symposium on *any topics related to American or world naval and maritime history.*

Proposals should include a one page vita and an abstract of no more than 250 words which summarizes the research and its contribution to historical knowledge, *collated in a single PDF or Microsoft Word file*. Panel proposals (made up of three presenters, a chair, and a commenter) are highly encouraged, and should include all relevant material on the presenters, as well as a one page vita for the chair and commenter.

Proposal deadline: 16 February 2021

Email proposals to navalhistorysymposium@gmail.com by midnight. ***The program committee anticipates this year's conference may be presented in an all-virtual format due to COVID-19 restrictions.*** A policy on travel stipends will be announced following a final decision on format. The USNA History Department will make an announcement confirming the format of the conference by May 2021 and will announce a draft program by mid-June; papers are due to the committee and to panel chairs/commenters by 16 August 2021.

On-line registration for the conference will begin in late May of 2021. There will be no travel stipends available due to the virtual format of the conference. Financial support for this conference comes from the generosity of the McMullen Sea Power Fund established in honor of Dr. John McMullen, USNA Class of 1940. The committee will publish a volume of proceedings in the *New Interpretations of Naval History* Series, containing a selection of the best papers presented, at a future date.

Further information on the 2021 McMullen Naval History Symposium will be available online at www.usna.edu/History/Symposium. Specific inquiries may be directed to the Symposium Director, Dr. Virginia Lunsford, PhD, or the Deputy Director, Commander Stan Fisher, USN, PhD via the email address listed above.

The Society for Military History invites applicants for the Allan R. Millett Dissertation Research Fellowship Award

The Allan R. Millet Dissertation Research Fellowship is awarded annually to a full-time graduate student in an accredited graduate doctoral program. Applications should include a three-page, double-spaced proposal outlining research topic, goals, historiographical contributions, and research budget; a curriculum vitae; and a letter of support from the dissertation advisor. The proposal should demonstrate a sound knowledge of the historiography, a realistic research plan, and the promise of making an important contribution to the field.

The deadline for proposals is January 31, 2021. Applicants should send their proposal and curriculum vitae as a PDF attachment to Professor Kara Dixon Vuic of Texas Christian University, the Chair of the Committee (k.vuic@tcu.edu). Advisors should send confidential letters of support in a separate email attachment to Professor Vuic. The winner will be announced by March 1, 2021.

Please see <https://www.smh-hq.org/awards/millett.html> for more information.

Guidelines for Prospective Authors

Argonauta aims to publish articles of interest to the wider community of maritime research enthusiasts. We are open to considering articles of any length and style, including research articles that fall outside the boundaries of conventional academic publishing (in terms of length or subject-matter), memoirs, humour, reviews of exhibits, descriptions of new archival acquisitions, and outstanding student papers. We also publish debates and discussions about changes in maritime history and its future. We encourage submissions in French and assure our authors that all French submissions will be edited for style by a well-qualified Francophone. Articles accepted for publication should be easily understood by interested non-experts.

For those producing specialized, original academic work, we direct your attention to *The Northern Mariner*, a peer-reviewed journal appropriate for longer, in-depth analytical works also managed by the Canadian Nautical Research Society.

Except with proper names or in quotations, we follow standard Canadian spelling. Thus, the Canadian Department of Defence and the American Department of Defense may both be correct in context.

For ship names, only the first letter of the names of Royal Canadian Navy ships and submarines is capitalized, and the name appears in italics. For example:

Her Majesty's Canadian Ship (HMCS) *Protecteur*

Her Majesty's Canadian Ship (HMCS) *Preserver*

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Following current industry standard, ships are considered gender-neutral.

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Articles should conform to the following structural guidelines:

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With each submission, please include a brief (5-7 sentence maximum) biography.



The Canadian Nautical Research Society

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