

Navy vets celebrate centennial exhibit

Archives and Collections Society tells stories of people who served

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He might not on have been a ship out on the ocean, but the memories came back just the same for George Devonshire and some of his Canadian Navy colleagues Saturday.

When asked what he felt when seeing old acquaintances and a wide variety of archives and photographs at the Victory on Picton's Main Street for the Archives and Collections Society's "100 Years Of Our Navy," Devonshire became choked up.

"It's emotional," he said after pausing a few moments to collect his composure. Devonshire served in both the navy and the merchant navy and between 1941 and 1945, he spent much of his time running convoys across the North Atlantic. There, he worked on deck, firing depth charges and an anti-submarine weapon known as a hedgehog.

He said that was the place to be because, unlike the engine crew, he was aware of his surroundings and he rarely had idle hands onboard a ship.

"When you're faced with danger, you're too busy to be frightened," he said. "When you're young, it's all part of an adventure. It was exciting more than anything else."

Devonshire was one of several naval vets who came to celebrate the centennial exhibit, with some coming from as far away as London and parts of Quebec. Many wore coats and shirts with badges depicting the ships they served on, or medals earned in service.



FOND MEMORIES Mary Wellein, a Wren, pictured here with Paul Adamthwaite, enjoyed seeing fellow veterans of the Canadian Navy at the exhibit opening at The Victory Saturday. (Adam Bramburger/Gazette staff)

A good number of the guests actually played a role in the exhibit by telling their own stories of naval service to Archives and Collections Society summer students Natalie Anderson and Madelaine Johnson. Also, they freely shared their artifacts for the display and as such, through the photographs, tools, documents, artwork, films, and models, others can get an idea of the work they have done for this country over the years.

Mary Wellein, a local veteran of the WRCS Wrens, volunteers with the Archives and Collections Society. She shared a story of how she joined the navy years ago on the promise of a raincoat and a posting in the medical unit. She served for one night a week for years later and has many fond memories of her

time with the navy.

Wellein said she was thrilled to see the many memories brought to life.

"I think this is terrific," she said. "It's nice to see all the real navy stuff."

Archives and Collections Society executive director Paul Adamthwaite thanked the many volunteers who spent months putting the exhibit together.

Adamthwaite discussed the formation of the navy under former prime minister Wilfrid Laurier in May, 2010, and explained how it built its reputation in the First and Second World Wars, particularly the latter, where it increase from about 20 ships and 10,000 people to having more than 110,000 men and women serving, the world's third largest navy. Adamthwaite said he hoped the exhibit would

highlight the peoples' history.

"One of the things that strikes me is that no navy exists without the people who are involved with that navy," he said.

Besides veterans and their families, the opening also attracted a number of historians interested in the navy's centennial. James Pritchard, a past-president of the Canadian Nautical Research Society (Adamthwaite is the current president) was one of those scholars, who traveled from Kingston to see the exhibit opening. He was impressed not only with the exhibit, but also the presence of Vice-Admiral Dean McFadden, Canada's head of maritime staff, to declare the exhibit open.

"It's an excellent exhibit. The paintings are wonderful and the things under glass are really neat," he said. "It's a very good exhibit in that it's focused on local veterans, yet (Adamthwaite) was able to encourage the chief maritime commander to come to Picton and recognize the importance of connecting with people."

The exhibit runs at the Victory from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily until Aug. 8. Some highlights to come include the addition of naval ship models from MARCOM from July 16, 23, and two book signings. Today, Napanee's Sherry Pringle will be on hand to sign her book *All the Ship's Men* from 1-3 p.m. while Richard H. Gimblett will sign his book *The Naval Service of Canada 1910-2010: The Centennial Story* July 17.