

BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC PILGRIMAGE – LONDONDERRY, IRELAND

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Public Affairs Chair – HMCS Sackville

While the longest battle of the Second World War raged on the North Atlantic, Canadian and other Allied sailors and air personnel found solace and much needed rest and relaxation following convoy duty in Londonderry - Derry, Northern Ireland. *In his memoir War at Sea: A Canadian Seaman On the North Atlantic*, Frank Curry recalled entering Lough Foyle en route to Derry, with its “countless gardens alive with flowers and lush green grass” after a particularly difficult voyage: “It was like a dream. The snow and ice of Newfoundland, the winter gales, the heavy grey seas were no more. We were surrounded on both sides with the utter beauty of green Ireland, and it was as if the fairies themselves had wafted us into a land of magic that was almost beyond beliefIt did much to restore our souls, even though we knew we would only have forty-eight hours layover. For those brief hours and days, we would become human beings again; in touch with peace and beauty and tranquility; far removed from all the ugliness of war”.

On May 5-8, Second World War Veterans from across Canada along with Captain(N) Harry Harsch, the Naval Advisor, Canadian High Commission in London travelled to Londonderry Ireland to participate in ceremonies commemorating the Battle of the Atlantic and the loss of HMS *Laurentic* in 1917. The *Laurentic*, a White Star liner seconded by the Admiralty during the war, was carrying a crew of 475, several of whom were members of the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve, when she struck two mines and sank with a loss of 354 men in Lough Swilly, Ireland. The sinking is remembered in annual services on 25 January at the Church of Ireland in Fahan and the Catholic cemetery in Cockhill, County Donegal. During the pilgrimage an additional service was held to enable the Canadian Battle of the Atlantic participants an opportunity to commemorate the loss of the Newfoundland sailors in the tragedy.

Our group included Earl Chadwick, Sylvan Lake, Alberta, a cook onboard HMCS *Bowmanville* who witnessed the surrender of the U-Boats at Lisahally. Trustee Gordon Wright, also from Alberta, served onboard HMCS *Swansea* in Escort Group 9 – whose task was to hunt and sink enemy submarines and protect convoys from Norway to North Africa. Recalling the fierce weather of a North Atlantic crossing in January, Gordon likened the transit to the movie “A Perfect Storm”. “Some of the deck plates on the fo'c'sle were torn loose and the water gushed into the mess deck I was in:” he recalled. “The water tight doors were immediately closed and we were trapped in the mess deck with the water rising. Pumps were brought in and the deck head shored up and we escaped drowning”.

Rodney Carson from Warren, Manitoba, who as luck would have it, was in hospital with a badly infected finger when his ship HMCS Shawinigan was torpedoed by U-1228 in the Cabot Strait off Newfoundland, 24 November 1944 with the loss of all hands. Of the recent trip to Londonderry, Rodney wrote: "The pilgrimage brought to mind the zeal and vigour of my youth, to serve my country without fear or dread. To look back now, as an aged veteran, I realize I was spared by God's providence. Hence, a fresh meaning and purpose to attend was more profound. Never before did I know or realize how significant my small part was in such a big picture of Canadian history. I was filled with a sense of pride and at the same time, humbled..."

During the course of the war at sea over 20,000 RCN sailors made Derry their home-away-from-home, more so than another other British port. That special link remains today and was reinforced by the exceptionally warm welcome extended by our hosts to our group of visiting Canadians.

The City of Derry has been named the Cultural Capital of the UK for 2013, which coincidentally is the 70th anniversary of the turning of the tide in 1943 during the Battle of the Atlantic. It was apparent to those of us on the pilgrimage that 2013 would be a very good time to return to Derry. Plans are tentatively in place to attend events in Derry mid-May 2013. If you are interested in participating, in what promises to be another outstanding and historical event in Northern Ireland, please contact me at: patjessup@ns.sympatico.ca. Already, over 57 names are on my list.

Of Note: The Royal Naval Association – Londonderry Branch with the approval of the Atlantic Chiefs and Petty Officers Association has embarked on a project to install on the old site of HMS *Ferret* (renamed HMS *Sea Eagle* after the war) a replica of the ACPOA's Sailors' Monument on the Halifax waterfront. Fundraising is underway and the RNA is hopeful that the monument – a tribute to the thousands of sailors from the Royal Navy, Royal Canadian Navy, US Navy, Free French, Free Dutch and Royal Indian Marine that called Derry home during the Second World War – will be in place for the 70th anniversary 4 May, 2013.

The following are a few pictures of our very full program in Derry and Donegal:



Canadian Wreaths at SS Laurentic cenotaph.



HMS Laurentic procession, St. Mura's, Church of Ireland graveyard, Fahan, Donegal.



Tracy McRory performing the "Laurentic Lament" during wreath laying ceremony.



Our group at Fort Dundree, Buncrana, Donegal.



Cdr Peter Campbell on the left, presenting Earl Chadwick, a cook from HMCS *Bowmanville*, with a memento of the pilgrimage. Cdr Campbell brought greetings from Her Majesty the Queen. Eddie Lavery, Royal Naval Association, looks on.



Capt(N) Harsch, and our NI hosts, Commander Donald Crosbie, Senior Naval Officer for Northern Ireland, and Lesley Buchanan and Robert Buchanan, Chairman of Area 12, Royal Naval Association. Capt(N) Harsh brought greetings from the Canadian High Commissioner to Great Britain, James Wright.



Jim Reddy, 1st Lieutenant HMCS Sackville, presenting Robert Buchanan, Chairman of Area 12, RNA, with pewter replica on behalf of the Atlantic Chiefs and Petty Officers' Association 'Sailor's Monument' – to commemorate 2013 Londonderry project. WW2 Veteran, Ted Kirby from Portsmouth UK looks on.

Canadian contingent forming up for Battle of the Atlantic parade.



BOA Parade approaching reviewing stand.

Canadian contingent passing the reviewing stand.



Memorial inside All Saints Clooney Anglican Church after wreath laying ceremony. Of note is the Newfie-Derry bell, consecrated in St. John's NL in 2007, on the right.



Second World War Veterans (L-R) Ted Kirby, Rodney Carson and Earl Chadwick.