

Scuttlebutt

Crow's Nest Officers' Club



December 2010



Veterans Record Their Stories by John Moyes

Two veterans of the Battle of the Atlantic have added their stories to the Crow's Nest collection. Earlier this year in Vancouver, I was lucky enough to meet the Hon. John L. Nichol, C.C., who was an Asdic Officer on *HMCS Victoriaville* during the surrender of U190, and Cliff Hill, who joined the Canadian Navy in Vancouver and spent much of the war as a Corvette officer on convoy escort. Both still remarkably youthful men, they fondly remember the Crow's Nest as it was in the early formative years. Thanks to my son Jonathan's video camera, we have 30 minutes of both men on DVD telling their stories.

I would like to thank John and Cliff for taking the time to tell their stories as personal witnesses to a dangerous and desperate struggle to beat a determined foe. All of the information we have on each of them will be added to our website as a continuing record of those who took part in the Battle of the Atlantic and visited the Crow's Nest when it was the Seagoing Officers' Club. For this issue of Scuttlebutt, I will attempt to give you a capsule of each story with the hope they will trigger more members' memories of wartime St. John's and the Crow's Nest.

John C. Nichol was encouraged by Bill Rompkey to give to the Crow's Nest his collection of three U190 sketches drawn by one of the U-boat's officers and we thank him for another welcome addition to our collection. We were royally entertained by John and his lovely wife from Newfoundland, the former Roseanne Cashin, who has spent many happy hours with friends at the Crow's Nest. Interestingly enough, her stepfather, Ted Godden, was president for several years.

John C. Nichol joined the Canadian Navy, training in Victoria, B.C., followed by postings on the *Valleyfield* and *HMCS Saskatchewan*. In John's own words: "I was a Lt. RCNVR, ASDIC Officer in the *Victoriaville* when we took the surrender of U190 and took her into Newfoundland. At the time the captain of U190 did a drawing for me of the U-boat and stamped it with the ship's stamp. I think it was the Captain who made the drawing, but it may have been the First Officer. I am enclosing the original drawing that he gave me. It is folded because I carried it around in my wallet for many years..."

cont'd on. p. 4

Tot tub arrives!

As reported in the last edition, LCdr Sherry Richardson (Ret'd) handed off her tot tub to Captain Billy Graham in the Royal Artillery Park Mess in Halifax. Bill, a pilot of some resourcefulness, vowed to transport the tub to the Nest by hook or by crook. A somewhat cryptic e-mail had Jessie Taylor meet Bill at the St. John's airport late one evening for a brief rendezvous to take possession.

The tub is now resident in the Club and ready for all ceremonial functions. A big thank you goes to members Sherry, Bill and Jessie for their generosity and skill in getting the job done. Bravo Zulu!

Capt. Bill Graham presents the tot tub to Jessie Taylor at St. John's airport.



Report from the President by Gary Green

It has certainly been a busy fall at the Nest. Weepers were well attended and all but a couple of the dinners were sold out. The season started with our traditional Oktoberfest Buffet, complete with appropriate music.

The Nurses Dinner paid tribute to the role nurses played and continue to play in the military. It was held close to the anniversary of the death of the only nurse to die by enemy fire during WWII. Nursing Sister Agnes Wilkie died in the sinking of the *SS Caribou* in October, 1942. During the course of our research in Ottawa this fall, Ruth and I uncovered the original telegrams relating the story of her death and burial. These were read to the attendees. Our own veteran nursing sister, Ruby Dewling, was the after dinner speaker, recounting the history of military nursing in a presentation amply illustrated by fellow nurse Marilyn Beaton. Thank you ladies.

The Trafalgar Mess Dinner saw members turned out in their finest to commemorate Lord Nelson's death and Britain's victory in the sea battle which played a major role in determining the course of world history for the next hundred years. At the call of the trumpet, diners assembled in the dining room for Chef Christian's parading of the beef. The splendid meal was followed by toasts and a presentation on the battle by David Moores. The meal closed with chocolate ships of the line reenacting the battle. Norm Macfie did a fine job of drumming for both the parade and the battle.

The Remembrance dinner had a number of special folks in attendance - veterans Bob Innes and Ruby Dewling; *HMS Newfoundland* Royal Marine Terry Hull; Station Chief CPO2 Herman Harris and CFNES Detachment Chief, CPO2 David Broom; Bob and Millie Harnum, a wartime hostess at both

the Crow's Nest and the Caribou Hut; Jessie Taylor, a hostess at the Caribou Hut; and Dr. Steve High, principal author of the newly released book, *Occupied St. John's*.

Steve was the after dinner speaker and gave the audience insight to the development of wartime St. John's. At the end of the dinner, Millie was made an honorary member and we hope to see her and her husband as club regulars.

Traditionally, Remembrance Day is one of the busiest days in the Nest and this year was no exception as members filled the club to capacity after the ceremony at the National War Memorial. The soup was hot as was the music played by Bob Innes on the piano. After Bob had left the stage, an impromptu music session by a few members who just happened to have their instruments with them kept things moving well into the early evening. We were pleased to welcome visitors from across the country, out-of-town members including members of *HMCS St. John's* ship's company, and their honours, John and Jane Crosbie.

Our tribute to the Canadian Navy's Centennial took the form of a mess dinner with representatives from CFS St. John's, *HMCS Cabot*, Canadian Forces Naval Engineering School, Naval Officers' Association Newfoundland and Labrador, and Canadian Forces Liaison Council in attendance. Commander Max Harvey, Project Manager, Naval Reserve 2010 and president NOANL was the

after dinner speaker. Max spoke about the past, present and future of the Canadian Navy.

A "girls only" afternoon decorating party saw the Club rooms transformed for the holiday season. Members will note that Boo the caribou is sporting a new bow tie for the festivities. Thanks to all who put such a great effort into the event. The Club never looked better.

On November 10, John Moyes and I laid a wreath at the Merchant Navy and Naval War Memorial at Marine Institute as part of the annual Merchant Navy and Naval Remembrance Ceremony. I also attended the Festival of Remembrance, a stirring two-hour concert hosted by our own Richard Beaton. Well done Richard!

Thanks to Janet McNaughton and Norm Macfie for volunteering to help with the web site and accounting respectively.

I am looking forward to the winter season and hope you will enjoy the program we have for you. I am particularly excited about the trip to Ireland in May (see separate article) and hope that some of you will be able to go.

On behalf of the Board I wish you and yours a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. May the peace, love and joy of the season be with you throughout the coming year.

See you at the Club.

This Month in Naval History

10 December 1941 - *HMS Prince of Wales* and *HMS Repulse* were attacked by land-based bombers and torpedo bombers of the Imperial Japanese Navy. Without air support, the ships were destroyed, adding to the devastation that began with the attack on Pearl Harbour three days before.

26 December 1943 - The German battleship *Scharnhorst* capsized and sank in the North Sea after a running battle of several days with Allied ships headed by *HMS Duke of York*. Of the battleship's complement of 1,968 men, only 36 of the enemy sailors were rescued.

Derry Pilgrimage Planned for 2011

Pat Jessup, a trustee with the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust, which maintains *HMCS Sackville*, is organizing a trip to Londonderry (Derry), the eastern terminus for the famous Newfy-Derry Run of the Newfoundland Escort Force. This is your chance to see the other side.

Plans for the no-host visit to Derry include participation in all RNAL Battle of the Atlantic activities such as the formal dinner on May 7 and the wreath laying ceremony on May 8. Pat has pre-booked rooms at the Tower Hotel in Derry which is adjacent to both the War Memorial at the Diamond and St Columb's Cathedral.

A draft itinerary includes an overnight flight to London on May 3, two days in London May 4-5, a flight to Belfast and train/bus to Derry on May 6. There is also the possibility of visiting Dublin before returning to Canada. At this point, it is max-flex and Pat welcomes comments/

suggestions to improve the program. If you would like more information on costs, etc., contact Pat at 902-462-3089 or patjessup@ns.sympatico.ca. If you are interested, please contact Pat ASAP since RNAL needs numbers to be able to book function facilities.

Dress Code for Club Dinners

Dress for dinner and special functions is dress of the day for male serving members, and suit/sports jacket/blazer with tie/ascot/turtleneck for male civilian members.

For ladies, dress of the day for serving members and dress/skirt/slacks for civilians.

Please note that dinners begin at 1900 for 1930 hours, unless otherwise specified.

Wreath Laying on Nov. 10



President Gary Green and Past President John Moyes lay a wreath at the Merchant Navy and Naval War Memorial at the Marine Institute, as part of the annual Merchant Navy and Naval Remembrance Ceremony.

Scuttlebutt

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Club Secretary



Battle of the Atlantic Veterans Record

Their Stories cont'd from p. 1

The submarine was taken into Newfoundland under the command of Lieutenant Fred Burbidge from Winnipeg, who later became the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Canadian Pacific. He was one of the best and most efficient officers I had the pleasure of serving with during the War.

We were instructed to appear at a rendezvous spot with all of our lights on, and the U-boat was instructed by Berlin to appear at the same spot on the surface. When we got there he was not to be found. We were understandably nervous to be sitting on a calm sea with our lights on with a U-boat in the area, so we turned our lights off and moved away. We returned the next day and by then he was on the surface and stopped. He then surrendered.”

John remembers that when the U190 officers and crew were being transferred to the *Victoriaville*, they stood shouting, Heil-Hitlering and saluting the fatherland. They were all very young and patriotic.

Capt. Les Hickey would not take them on board, sending them back to the U190, and let it be known that he would not tolerate that kind of behaviour. He offered them a choice: a calm, respectful surrender on the *Victoriaville*, or be turned over to a Russian vessel for internment. After a brief chat, the Germans made a very orderly surrender. Of course, there was no Russian vessel, but the ploy worked well.

John enjoyed many happy hours in the Crow's Nest from 1943-1945, and was a distant relative of one of the founders, Rollo Mainguy, though they never met at the Crow's Nest.

Lt. Cliff Hill, also of Vancouver, was introduced to me by John Paterson, a Newfoundlander and long time friend now living in West Vancouver. In 1944 Cliff visited the Crow's Nest about a dozen times while

a lieutenant on *HMCS Middlesex* under Capt. Piercey, a Newfoundlander. The following are brief notes taken from the interview on DVD.

Cliff Hill volunteered for the navy in 1942 and trained in Courtney, B.C., and Troon in Scotland. He was then ordered to pick up an LCL with another officer, Wally Sherrin, after which they went to Weymouth for the build up to the D-day landing on June 6th 1944.

Cliff Hill loaded 140 men from the Durham Regiment. Their Captain, the Marquis of Huntington, spent the night on the bridge with Cliff, when the invasion was put on hold due to poor weather. They got to know each other very well while waiting for sailing orders. In the morning, the soldiers were served what in the Navy was known as 'red lead and bacon' but many were already sea sick after a terrible night. At the 11th hour, orders came for the dash across the channel with a thousand other ships of all sizes. Sadly, the Marquis was killed 4 days later. Cliff says he was a fine officer.

After D-day, Cliff was posted to *HMCS Middlesex* under Capt. Piercey for Atlantic convoy escort duty on the Derry to St. John's run. While in St. John's, Cliff visited the Crow's Nest for only a few days at a time before they were off again. Maybe a dozen visits in all.

I asked Cliff if there was a membership fee, but he does not remember one. The Nest was manned by volunteers keen to give the officers all the comfort they could whilst in port. Cliff did play the spike game and tells me the hammer used was the heel of one's shoe or wellington boot. At last I can now see why it was such a challenge to hammer the spike into the floor. Thank you, Cliff, for clearing that up.

Lieutenant Cliff Hill still lives in Vancouver, after a successful career in business in the Marine Building downtown. Cliff keeps fit, has a wonderful sense of humour, and is still married to the former Geraldine Mitchell after more than 50 years.

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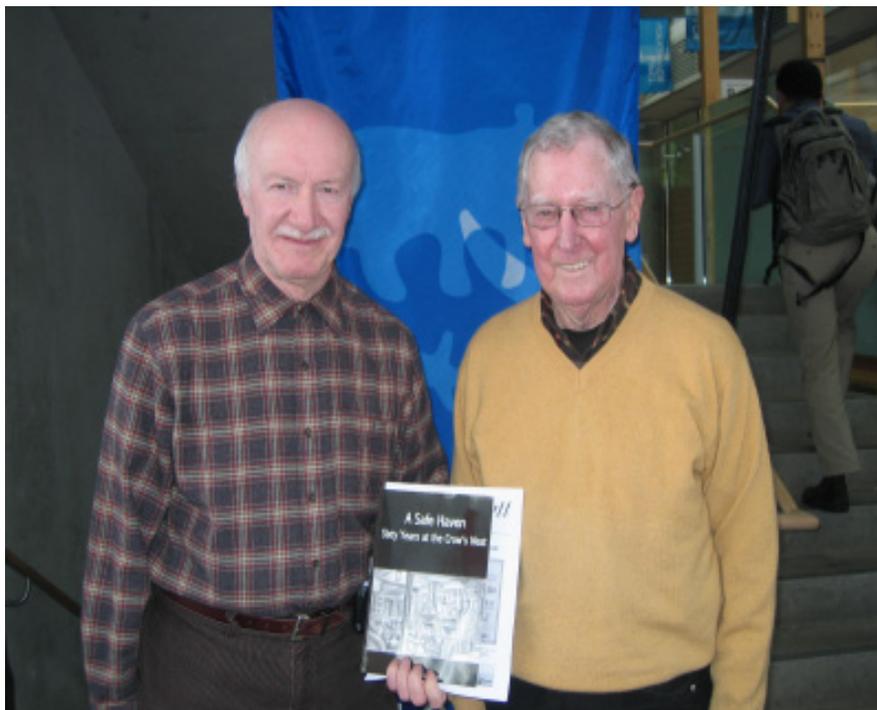


John C. Nichol , wife Roseanne and their dog at home in Vancouver.

Veterans' Stories

In September, here in St. John's, I met two British veterans who also served on convoy escort duty. John Laundon of the destroyer *HMS Icarus*, refitted for anti-submarine warfare and eventually joining the 2nd Canadian escort group in 1942. A week later I met Robbie Robinson who served on *HMS Northern Spray*. Both John and Robbie, along with their wives, Margaret and Kath, visited St. John's and the Crow's Nest as part of a British government scheme to help veterans visit places where they saw action during WWII. Canadian government please take note!

I have about about 16 pages from Robbie's wartime memoir, and several pages from John and will endeavour to write them up for inclusion in the next Scuttlebutt.



Interviewer and Past President John Moyes (L) visiting Cliff Hill in Vancouver.

Crow's Nest Property Report by Gary Walsh

As a result of the wonderful sold-out dinners it became apparent that noise levels in the Dining Room were excessively high and communication had become a problem. To deal with the matter, a combination of 13 wall and ceiling mounted acoustic panels were installed this past summer and the acoustic quality of the space has been significantly improved, as noticed during the recent Club Dinners. So instead of yelling to friends across the table, a gentler and lower tone of voice is now needed. Other building upgrades and renovations approved by the Club Executive to be carried out early in 2011 are:

1: The installation of an air handling/ventilation system in the Upper Deck (Club Room) to control heat and humidity, needed to protect the artifacts. This system shall also capture and recirculate existing heated air and reduce power bills. This is not an air-conditioning system and the mechanical unit is to be mounted indoors.

2: The existing exposed finishes on the exterior walls of the Upper Deck shall be removed and replaced with new fire resistant and abuse resistant gypsum board. During this process, new batt insulation will be placed between the existing wood studs and a vapour barrier installed. This is similar to what was done in the Dining Room during the renovations of the early 1990's. The existing wall finishes to be removed are old, dirty, peppered with holes and

highly flammable. This work shall reduce the potential of flame spread and present a fresh new finish. The Artefacts Committee will coordinate the removal and reinstallation of all artefacts.

It is planned for the Club to remain open during the renovations, and dates and additional information regarding the renovations will be published in the new year.

Welcome Aboard to New Members

In Town:

Carson Leonard, William Collings, Catherine Street, Bridget Haynes, Dr. Peter Fisher, Capt. Peter Savage, Corey Ronayne, Jennifer Abbott

Out of Town:

LCdr (Ret'd) Michael Timmins, Happy Adventure, NL
Dale Hacket, Rothesay, NB
Honorary:
Amelia (Millie) Harnum

Our Newest Honorary Member

by Gary Green

During the war, by day Millie Harnum was a civilian clerk in the damage control section of *HMCS Avalon*. In this position, she was privy to some of the most closely guarded secrets of the Newfoundland Escort Force (NEF) - later renamed the Mid Ocean Escort Force (MOEF) - and the Battle of the Atlantic. Convoy progress and losses as well as the operational status of ships in the NEF/MOEF were kept on a locked chart in her section.

At night, Millie volunteered as a hostess at the Caribou Hut, a club for servicemen located in the King George V building opposite the National War Memorial. That is, except for the one night a week that women were allowed in the Crow's Nest. Then she climbed

the 59 steps to serve cookies and sandwiches to the seagoing officers.

Upon entering the club rooms for the first time in many years, she commented on how little the place has changed. She fondly remembers the people and good times in the Nest. Though she has lived in Topsail for many years, Millie was unknown to us until out-of-town member Barry Davenport brought her to the club on a recent visit.

Right from the start, it was easy to see how her charm and graciousness must have made her a hit with the young sailors. For her wartime service, Millie was awarded an Honorary Lifetime Membership in the Club at our Remembrance Dinner.



Honorary Member Millie Harnum

Music at the Naval Centennial Dinner



Members and guests at the Naval Centennial Dinner, with Gloria Thistle and Cdr. Larry Jones at the piano.

Donations, Preservation and New Books by Gary Green

With the impending renovations to the upper deck, work on placing new items on the walls has come to a halt. However, work on the collection continues with relocation of smaller badges to the posts and beams on both decks.

In the past few weeks we have been contacted by two people with items connected with the surrender of U-190. One individual has come into possession of arm bands which were stashed aboard *HMCS Moose Jaw* by the submarine's crew while being transported to Halifax. Another person has contacted us about donating material from a member of the RCN who was present at the submarine's surrender. We look forward to seeing this new material.

During the fall, I had the privilege to interview and record Bob and Millie Harnum. Millie was a hostess in the Nest and Caribou Hut during the war. She was most entertaining as she relayed stories of both the Nest and the Hut. More information on Millie is contained in a separate article. Her husband, Bob, had many stories of wartime St. John's.

I also interviewed Pat Pennefather who served in *HMCS St. Croix* as a code breaker and was based in St. John's during the war. Pat had to sit for promotion examinations and came off the ship shortly before her fateful last voyage in which she was lost with only one survivor. He was in town to see his son-in-law, Dr. Gary Kachanoski, installed as the new president of Memorial University. Thanks to Bob, Millie and Pat for taking the time to share their memories with us.

Two members, Ruth Green and Steve Foster, attended a workshop on preservation skills sponsored by the Archives Association of Newfoundland and Labrador. During the workshop they had opportunity to talk to folks from other archives and to chat with the instructors. The

knowledge gained will be used to enhance our care for the collection. Several damaged items were brought to The Rooms for evaluation and sourcing for repairs. We hope to see the items back in the collection soon.

Two books containing material from our archives have been launched in the past few weeks. **Occupied St. John's** is a phenomenal book on wartime St. John's which includes many pictures, some of which

have never been published before. Each chapter begins with a picture of and the story associated with a piece of gun shield art from the Nest's collection. **Citizen Sailors: Chronicles of Canada's Naval Reserve, 1910 - 2010** recounts the story of the Naval Reserves including the wartime Wavy Navy which made up most of the Club's founding membership. Both books are available from bookstores and on line.



OCCUPIED ST JOHN'S

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF A CITY AT WAR, 1939-1945

Edited by STEVEN HIGH

Club Dinner Schedule - Winter/Spring 2011

Saturday December 18, 2010

Christmas Dinner
Roma Tomato Soup
Traditional Turkey Dinner
(Salmon Alternate)
Christmas Pudding with a Burnt
Rum Sauce
\$ 22.95

Friday December 31, 2010

New Year's Eve
Lobster Bisque
Oven Roasted Prime Rib
New York Cheesecake
\$ 55.00

Saturday January 22, 2011

69th Anniversary Dinner
Potato and Bacon Chowder
Calvados Apple Chicken
(Salmon Alternate)
New York Cheesecake with a
Blueberry Sauce
\$ 22.95

Friday January 28, 2011

Weepers
Complimentary hor's d'oeuvres

Saturday February 5, 2011

Corvettes' Wake Dinner
Tiger Shrimp Cocktail
Pork Loin in a Cognac Cream
Sauce
(Chicken Alternate)
Apple Dumpling with a Bailey's
Custard
\$ 22.95

Saturday February 19, 2011

Spinach Salad
Pan Fried Cod
(Chicken Alternate)
Two Tone Orange and Chocolate
Parfait
\$ 22.95

Friday February 25, 2011

Weepers
Complimentary hor's d'oeuvres

Saturday March 12, 2011

Paddy's Day Irish Buffett
An Assortment of Irish
Traditional Recipes served buffet
style
\$ 26.95

Friday March 25, 2011

Weepers
Complimentary hor's d'oeuvres

Saturday March 26, 2011

Smoked Salmon Mousse
Spring Lamb slowly roasted in
rosemary and served with
homemade mint sauce
(Salmon Alternate)
Ice Cream with Strawberries
Flambeed in Grand Marnier
\$ 22.95

Saturday April 9th, 2011

Seafood Chowder
Flipper Dinner
(Chicken Alternate)
Pear Strudel
\$ 22.95

Friday April 29, 2011

Weepers
Complimentary hor's d'oeuvres

Saturday April 30, 2011

Battle of the Atlantic Dinner
Smoked Salmon Mousse
Carved Roast Beef
(Salmon Alternate)
Belgian Chocolate Parfait
\$ 20.95

Sunday May 8, 2011

Mothers Day Brunch
\$26.95

Friday May 27, 2011

Weepers
Complimentary hor's d'oeuvres

Saturday May 28, 2011

*70th Anniversary of
Newfoundland Escort Force*
Roasted Squash and Apple Soup
Carved Roast Beef
Pear Strudel with Homemade
Hazelnut Ice Cream
\$ 22.95

Saturday June 8, 2011

Spinach Salad
Lobster Dinner
New York Style Cheese Cake
\$ 26.95

