



Scuttlebutt

Crow's Nest Officers' Club

September, 2012

Bringing Back the Art

By David Moores

You've never seen such clean walls.

Yes, the renovations are complete, the paint is dry, the bench is back, and we have a lovely, uncluttered club.

But an uncluttered Crow's Nest is hardly the Crow's Nest, now, is it? So now the last phase of the work is beginning: bringing back the art and the artifacts.

Be prepared for changes. The configuration of the club that we know came from the 1950s, and it's far from the way the Nest looked when the corvettes filled the harbour. We have some old wartime photos that show how the gunshield art was originally arranged, and we plan to use those photos to

restore the club closer to the way it was then. That includes a bookcase beside the chimney and even an antique radio.

Not everything is going back. We're finding a new place for the oak case which housed the collection of swords. Many of the ships' plaques are duplicates (or triplicates or even quadruplicates, if there is such a word), so we can slim down our display and still pay homage to our many visitors. And some of the artifacts, although valuable, have nothing to do with the Battle of the Atlantic or even the navy, so we're sifting through them as well.

Don't worry; we're not going to turn it into a museum or engage in historical

make-believe. Many things may not be part of the original Crow's Nest, but they are still important to OUR Crow's Nest. So back comes the caribou and many other items. We're consulting with the members to make sure nothing significant goes astray.

So before the first dinner this fall, we should be back in our old-and-improved Crow's Nest, clutter and all. Okay, perhaps a little less cluttered.



The Crow's Nest, newly renovated. It's not too late to donate. See page 8.

President's Message

by Tony Dearness

The Crow's Nest is open again, with a fresh coat of paint, and new confidence in the strength of the walls. The re-opening has been much anticipated, and it's clear that many members missed the Club this summer.

With the serendipity that seems to favour our Club, the opening on September 8 was marked by a visit from the officers of HMCS *Charlottetown*, on its way home from the Middle East, and the ship's badge from this operation was the first new artifact to be mounted. It was also a treat to watch our existing artifacts being replaced thoughtfully.

The reopening also marks

the conclusion of an active and enthusiastic campaign to raise funds for the restoration of the walls, and the ongoing conservation of the Club's space and its artifacts. The generosity and commitment shown by members and friends bodes well for our long-term vitality.

Thus, thanks are due to the many who contributed funds for the restoration. As of now, 190 individuals, families, and organizations have donated or participated in fund-raising activities to bring in \$85,000 for the project. As previously promised, donors of \$100 or more will be recognized on a plaque, and of \$500 or more

and \$1000 or more will be recognized through a plaque on a chair or a special crest, respectively.

In addition to funds, members and friends have contributed their time and energy, stripping out the upper floor of the artifacts and furniture, and protecting the artifacts, then bringing items back to the upper floor and re-installing them.

Thank you all.

Welcome back and enjoy the Crow's Nest.



Who was Charles Cavour Fawcett?
The story starts on page 5.



The Crows Nest Officers' Club

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LONDONDERRY 2013

by Pat Jessup - Chair, Public Relations and Londonderry Pilgrimage Coordinator
(Reprinted from "Action Stations," HMCS *Sackville*)

Following the tremendous success of the pilgrimage to Londonderry in 2011, preliminary planning is underway to participate in the 70th Anniversary commemorations of the Battle of the Atlantic in May 2013. A side trip to Liverpool to join in the Royal Navy's observances one week later is also under consideration. If you are interested in attending please email Pat Jessup at patjessup@ns.sympatico.ca. Even though we are a year away over 20 have already signed up, so we are expecting another banner group to be heading over to the UK for these events.

As part of the Londonderry activities, a bronze statue identical to the Atlantic Chiefs

and Petty Officers Association's Sailors' Monument on the Halifax waterfront will be installed on the old site of HMS *Ferret*. The monument is a tribute to the thousands of sailors from away who called Derry home during the war. Peter Bustin, the sculptor of the original statue will be engaged to create the replica which will be cast by Castle Fine Arts Foundry Ltd. in Wales.

Royal Navy Association members in Londonderry have embarked on a major fundraising campaign to cover the costs of the statue and have asked for our help. If you wish to contribute, please contact me for details on how this can be done from Canada.



Sculptor Peter Bustin and the Sailor's Monument in Halifax.

Members' News

Last summer, fifteen Atlantic Canadians were presented with the Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendation, which is authorized by the Governor General. The Commendation is "awarded annually to individuals who have contributed in an exemplary manner to the care and well-being of Veterans or to the remembrance of the contributions, sacrifices and achievements of Veterans."

Crow's Nest Club member Jim Stanton of Labrador West was the only Labradorian presented with this award at the ceremony. His wife, RNC Inspector Paula M. Walsh, also attended.

If you have news you'd like to share with other Club members, please let us know at crownoc@nf.aibn.com.



Jim Stanton receives the Minister of Veteran's Affairs Commendation in Halifax.

THE SINKING OF *ESQUIMALT*, SIXTY SEVEN YEARS LATER

by HMCS *Sackville* Trustee Lou Howard, MID

Editor's Note

This story comes to us courtesy of "Action Stations," the newsletter of the HMCS Sackville. The Crow's Nest periscope is from U-190, mentioned in this piece.

Sixty-seven years ago on April 16, 1945, for a heart stopping twenty minutes, the engines of HMCS *Sarnia* were stilled, and as a twenty-one-year-old sub-lieutenant, I joined my mates on the scramble net to rescue the twenty-seven survivors of the torpedoed HMCS *Esquimalt* and recover the bodies of the thirteen who did not survive. Those of us present that day got on with our lives but the needless waste of forty-four young lives has never been far from our minds.

The sinking of *Esquimalt* by U-190 has been told several times in the official histories of the Canadian Navy. This retelling goes beyond those facts and touches on the sad consequences of bad communications and missed opportunities resulting in so many deaths, and the psychological toll on those who survived and of their families. *Sarnia* and *Esquimalt* had been taken off convoy work and ordered on a Search and Destroy Mission because a U-boat was thought to be lurking outside the Halifax harbour. The two ships were to meet at C buoy, April 16, 1945,

at 08:00 hours.

At 0630 on that fateful day, U-190 had already fired one acoustic torpedo, striking *Esquimalt* on the starboard quarterdeck. She sank in less than five minutes. There was no time to send an SOS. The captain, Lt. C. Robert Macmillan, in true naval tradition, was the last to leave his ship.

Meanwhile, *Sarnia*, at 0800, found that *Esquimalt* had failed to arrive and Lt. Bob Douty, captain, signalled Dockyard this information. The first of a series of inexplicable lapses occurred. There was no reply to his report.

0920: Lt. Douty signalled dockyard that he would sweep *Esquimalt's* patrol area. Once again no response. 0940: *Sarnia* made a strong ASDIC contact with a suspected U-boat, dropped two sets of depth charges with no results, and resumed her sweep of the area.

Finally, at 1114, dockyard asked if *Esquimalt* had joined. Our terse reply, "Negative." 1125, *Sarnia* was finally given the signal to search for the missing ship. 1140: Dockyard indicated the *Burlington*, *Drummondville* and *Kentville* were to join the search. Meanwhile, just over the horizon, Macmillan and his crew of seventy were in the frigid Atlantic where hypothermia was taking its

deadly toll on his crew.

Unbelievably, an RCAF patrol flew over them around 0800 and reported them as fishing vessels. Around 0830, two coastal patrol ships came within a mile of the survivors but also missed them.

1200: A RCAF patrol from Shearwater flew over us and signalled by light, "Survivors Ahead."

1300: *Sarnia* was dead still in the water as we picked up the twenty seven survivors and the thirteen who had perished.

1540: *Sarnia* secured to Jetty No. 5. Help was at hand.

The Board of Inquiry in May found that Captain Bob Macmillan was at fault for failing to zigzag and to stream the CAT gear. Some crew members claimed they were zigzagging but did not know about the CAT gear. No witnesses were called from Dockyard. This verdict weighed heavily and perhaps, unfairly, on the shoulders of Lt. Bob Macmillan. He seldom spoke of his war experience.

This story, however, does not end there. A poignant epilogue has been written in words and music as clarification of what transpired and, perhaps, a vindication of Lt. Bob Macmillan and the crew of *Esquimalt*. Scott Macmillan, son of Bob Macmillan is a musician and composer.

(Continued on page 5.)



Survivors of minesweeper HMCS *Esquimalt* await rescue off Halifax, 16 April, 1945.



Esquimalt survivor carried ashore by *Sarnia* sailors. Collections Canada.

As a child and throughout his early life, Scott knew, somehow, that his father's war experience had marked him and shadowed their lives as well. His son, Ian, is a film maker. Scott has written a four

part concerto, "Within Sight of Shore," telling the tragic history musically while Ian developed the visual and written history. Combined, this documentary makes a powerful statement. The CBC has

bought the documentary and it has been aired nationally. The *Sackville* Trust has honoured Scott and Ian by acknowledging their work. The *Esquimalt* story is now secure.

Who was Charles Cavour Fawcett?

By Mike Lewis

Author's Introduction

Some time ago I was given a collection of newsprint articles that had been compiled by one of my parents. The selection had been reproduced from the *Sackville Tribune Post*, of New Brunswick and it contained the history of many of my relatives who originated there in the past. As I began reading I was especially touched by some of the brief articles describing my ancestors' service to country and stories of adventure—and of loss. One story in particular resounded deeply, that is the story of the man I am about to introduce. As I began researching him more carefully, I wanted to understand what made him unique, what inspired him, and what his experiences

were. Did we have anything in common? Did his efforts make a difference? Armed with these questions, the newspaper articles, a copy of his service record, and a brief understanding of his fate, I traveled to St. John's early in 2012 to fill in the missing pieces. That busy harbour had been a bustling place in wartime, and it was the last place he had seen land before his untimely loss at sea. And it was there, on the 70th anniversary of his death, that I was welcomed by the generous hospitality of the Crow's Nest members. I would like to offer my sincere thanks for the kind manner in which I was received and accepted, albeit on short notice. Through what I learned on that brief trip, I became

proud of this story even more so and it is with great pleasure that I now have the opportunity to share it in better detail.

Who was Charles Cavour Fawcett?

When Lieut. Fawcett, RCNVR, reported for duty in St. John's harbour on January 12, 1942, HMCS *Spikenard* had just returned from her last Iceland run (with convoy ON-52). Charles was then perhaps the newest addition to the ship's crew. Just a few weeks later, on February 1st, they sailed as lead escort vessel for convoy SC-67. This was *Spikenard's* first voyage on the newly-created Newfoundland-Derry run, in which the convoy (Continued on page 6.)

escorts would rendezvous with the Royal Navy some distance south of Iceland and then continue on to the port of Londonderry. But Charles and most of his shipmates would not get to see the green shores of Northern Ireland (Schull, p.101). Just half a day's travel short of their rendezvous point, on the night of February 10th, they were sunk by an enemy submarine with the loss of fifty-seven men. This talented young officer would not survive to realize his potential for a very successful career in the navy. His service had been brief, but his achievements had certainly not been lacking.

Born in January 1910, Charles was the oldest of four children. He was raised in his hometown of Sackville, New Brunswick where his grandfather had previously established the local foundry. As a boy, Charles maintained an interest in boating and sailing. He had performed well throughout his schooling and participated in a wide variety of sports, belonging to the Sackville Country Club and the local swimming team. He was also skilled at shooting and thoroughly enjoyed building model planes. In 1928 he vacationed in London, England prior to beginning his Engineering studies at Mount Allison University.

Charles soon had the opportunity to expand his professional skills and thus began work as a draftsman for aircraft production at Vickers Co. in Montreal, Canada. At the time they were producing flying boats for the RCAF Forestry Patrol. He worked there during the summer

months and remained a student at Mount Allison, in Sackville, throughout the rest of the year. He had also taken an interest in flying and endeavoured to take lessons on his own time. Then, at the age of 20, he enlisted in the RCAF Reserve as a Provisional Pilot Officer, and would soon find himself undergoing flying training with No. 1 Squadron RCAF in Borden, Ontario.

Fawcett had spent two summers at RCAF Borden in what were the pioneering years of the Royal Canadian Air Force. He did very well there, and soon began entertaining the local community in his hometown with aerial stunt flying. On one occasion, while opening at a local football game with a performance using a Moth biplane, he crashed on takeoff because of a downdraft. He was not seriously hurt, however, and he quickly recovered. Charles awaited further training opportunities after 1931 but his ambitions for a full flying commission into the RCAF did not materialize. And thus, the rest of his studies at Mount Allison took him in the direction of boating and the open sea.

He began taking courses in naval architecture, and produced his first successful yacht design in 1932. Working under the guidance of the same architect who designed the *Bluenose*, Charles was indeed very skilled. By 1934, he had produced three more designs. The following year, having completed his university studies, he accepted a permanent position at Vickers and resumed drafting work for various aircraft.

As part of his contribution to aircraft production for the RCAF, one of his component designs was even patented in 1940 (CIPO Database).

It invariably must have been Charles' love of sailing that guided him to join the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve. He enlisted in June 1940, and a month later he was married to Ella Isabel Grant of Port Hawkesbury, N.S. She had also been living in Montreal and was working at McGill University at that time. In September, Charles was posted to Halifax for training and in early 1941 he was appointed his first active duty. This was a shore posting with the Examining and Signals Service, at HMCS *Captor* in Saint John, N.B. He remained there with his wife until his posting to *Spikenard* almost a year later.

Early in January 1942, HMCS *Spikenard* departed Iceland for the last time and linked up with convoy ON-52 on its westward voyage (Johnston, p.52). After having passed through a bad storm with the convoy, Charles' new ship finally arrived in port in St. John's for provisions. He was to sail with them on their next outing, an anti-submarine patrol in coastal waters, around Cape Race on the south eastern tip of Newfoundland (Johnston, p.53). Charles' first encounter on the open water was not with an enemy submarine however, but instead with a life raft containing four bodies from a Norwegian merchant ship. The *Belize* had been torpedoed nearby and the survivors had drifted for three days on the (Continued on page 7.)

frigid sea before *Spikenard* discovered the raft on January 24th. It was all that was ever found of that vessel. (Uboat Database). They encountered more unfavourable weather on the 29th, which was to have bad consequences for them. Their radar antenna had been swept away in the storm, and the limited facilities in port meant that this would not be repaired in time for their next voyage (Johnston, p.57). *Spikenard* arrived back in St. John's at the end of the month, its crew unaware of what would be waiting for them on their next convoy run.

Amid the ever-present threat of danger on the open water, and just out of reach of enemy submarines, lay a new retreat in St. John's for the officers of the RCN stationed there. The Crow's Nest, as it became affectionately known, was a much-needed and welcome relief from the harsh reality of the North Atlantic (Collins). The role of *Spikenard* in respect to the Club is of course well known, but it bears repeating here. On opening night at the end of January, 1942, her captain, Lieut-Cdr. Shadforth of Vancouver, B.C., challenged some of the other officers to see who could drive an iron spike through its hardwood floors with the least number of blows. He won the contest, and being such a highly regarded officer, "His Spike" became a prized memento (Johnston, p.62), for Shadforth was a popular, well-liked and experienced merchant navy officer who maintained a high morale on his ship (Johnston, p.51). Lieut. Fawcett, with his adventuresome spirit and skilled ingenuity, therefore, must have been considered a most suitable addition to the crew of the

Spikenard.

All too soon the crew were preparing for their next voyage, as they were tasked to be senior escort ship for the eastbound convoy SC-67. When the ship and her crew departed St. John's on February 1st, their radar had still not been repaired. Neither it nor their sonar equipment were in fact functional, leaving *Spikenard* without her two primary means of locating enemy submarines (Johnston, p.57). But they remained on task, for the convoy had to be protected and this could best be achieved only by strength in number. So throughout their voyage they worked hard with the five other corvettes to keep the possible threat of enemy submarines at bay. Although, apart from her eight survivors who were picked up later, the *Spikenard*, along with Lieut-Cdr. Shadforth, Lieut. Fawcett and the rest of her crew, were never to be seen again.

By 1943, the Royal Canadian Navy had grown from just a handful of ships at the outbreak of war to a force of 50,000 men and nearly 300 warships (Milner, p.5). By war's end it would grow to become one of the largest and best-equipped navies in the world. For the crews that manned our fighting ships, "it was a time of adventure and high achievement" (Milner, p.xiii). But that substantial growth and development did not come without a long and difficult period of learning through struggle. Shortages of reliable modern equipment and the lack of thorough training were common in the RCN early in the war, and these problems remained

prevalent throughout 1942 and even into 1943 (Milner, pp. xiv-xvi). This made the task of protecting convoys extremely difficult. Our ships' crews accepted this crucial task in spite of such challenges and only with incredible skill and determination did they succeed. Such is the kind of courage, skill and ingenuity that makes Lieut. Fawcett and others like him such an inspiration for younger generations, for a long time to come.

Sources

"CIPO - Canadian Patents Database," Website: <http://brevets-patents.ic.gc.ca/opic-cipo/cpd/eng/introduction.html> Collins, Wickford, "The Fifty-Nine Steps to Food and Play," in *A Safe Haven - Sixty Years at the Crow's Nest*, Crow's Nest Officer's Club, Canada, Shanon M. Lewis, Editor, 2002. Johnston, Mac, *Corvettes Canada: Convoy Veterans of WWII Tell Their True Stories*, John Wiley & Sons, Canada, Ltd., Mississauga, 2008. Lewis, Kathryn Fawcett: "The Fawcetts of Sackville", Vol. 3, Centennial QuikPrint, Fredericton, NB, 2000. (pp.824-31). Military Personnel Files, RG-112 Vol. #30477, National Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. Milner, Marc, *The U-Boat Hunters: The Royal Canadian Navy and the Offensive Against Germany's Submarines*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, ON, 1994. Schull, Joseph, *Far Distant Ships*, Stoddart, Toronto, ON, 1987. "UBoat Database - Ships Hit by U-boats - 'Belize'". Website: <http://www.uboot.net/allies/merchants/ships/1275.html>

Club Dinner Schedule, September - December 2012

<p><u>Friday Sept. 21st, 2012</u> <i>German Buffet</i> \$24.95 per person</p>	<p><u>Saturday Oct. 27th, 2012</u> Roma Tomato Soup Citrus Salmon (Chicken Alternate) Bavarian Cream \$22.95 per person</p>	<p>\$22.95</p>
<p><u>Saturday Sept. 22nd, 2012</u> <i>German Buffet</i> \$24.95 per person</p>		<p><u>Friday Nov. 30th, 2012</u> <i>Weepers</i> Complimentary hors d'oeuvres</p>
<p><u>Friday Sept. 28th, 2012</u> <i>Weepers</i> Complimentary hors d'oeuvres</p>	<p><u>Saturday Nov. 10th, 2012</u> Sweet Tomato Salad Lamb Dinner Apple Dumpling \$22.95 per person</p>	<p><u>Friday Dec. 7th, 2012</u> <i>Christmas Weepers</i> Complimentary Hor's D'oeuvres</p>
<p><u>Saturday Oct. 6th, 2012</u> Beef Vegetable Soup Champagne Chicken (Salmon Alternate) Chocolate Parfait \$22.95 per person</p>	<p><u>Sunday Nov. 11th, 2012</u> <i>Remembrance Day</i> Complimentary Soup and Bread</p>	<p><u>Saturday Dec. 15th, 2012</u> <i>Christmas Dinner</i> Roasted Squash and Apple Soup Traditional Turkey Dinner (Salmon Alternate) Christmas Pudding with a burnt Rum Sauce \$22.95 per person</p>
<p><u>Friday Oct. 12th, 2012</u> <i>Curry Buffet</i> \$24.95 per person</p>	<p><u>Friday Nov. 23rd, 2012</u> Garden Salad Hazelnut Cod (Chicken Alternate) Pear Strudel \$22.95</p>	<p><u>Monday Dec. 31st, 2012</u> <i>New Years Celebration</i> Lobster Bisque Oven Roasted Prime Rib New York Cheesecake \$55.00</p>
<p><u>Saturday Oct. 13th, 2012</u> <i>Curry Buffet</i> \$24.95 per person</p>	<p><u>Saturday Nov. 24th, 2012</u> Garden Salad Hazelnut Cod (Chicken Alternate) Pear Strudel</p>	
<p><u>Friday Oct. 26th, 2012</u> <i>Weepers</i> Complimentary hors d'oeuvres</p>		

Restoration Fund Campaign Deadline: October 15

To have a final tally of names for the Restoration Plaque which will recognize contributors, we need your donation before October 15. Any amount of \$100 or more will be recognized. Please send your contribution by cheque to the Crow's Nest at **P.O. Box 23161 St. John's, NL Canada, A1B 4J9** or donate on line through **Canada Helps** at www.canadahelps.org/CharityProfilePage.aspx?charityID=s57622

Thank you for your generous support. See you at the Club!