



## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Remembering PO2 Craig Blake
- Canadian Navy 100th Anniversary
- Aid From HMCS NIOBE

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## PO2 CRAIG BLAKE

In this issue of the DIPPERS DIGEST we mourn the loss of PO2 Craig Blake who is the first Canadian Clearance Diver to be killed as a result of wartime action since the branch was founded over fifty years ago. In deference to his memory and the passing of a true hero, we in the CNDA have decided to change the normally red borders within this issue to black as a mark of respect from the branch and a token of solemn remembrance.

Reports state that Craig died as a result of an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attack on 3 May 2010, just one day short of the 100th anniversary of the Canadian Navy. He was roughly 25 kilometers outside of Kandahar city when tragedy struck. Several newspaper articles state that he was dismounted at the time of the attack and had just successfully disposed of another IED from which he was retuning to base. He was only 38 years old and in the prime of his life.

He leaves behind a wife, Priscilla



and two sons Cain, 14, and Tie, 6, who meant everything to him. We cannot imagine what they are going through in this terrible time.

A memorial service was held in his honour at Shearwater, NS on Saturday 15 May 2010. A large hangar was used for the service since it was the only building large enough to

accommodate the crowds which included family, friends, co-workers, dignitaries and acquaintances. It was well turned out with over a thousand people in attendance. Dignitaries included Premier Darrell Dexter, Mayor Peter Kelley and MP Peter Stoffer who came and paid their respects. An honour guard was present comprised of 13 fellow divers surrounding his earthly remains. Following the service his remains were escorted to YDT GRANDBY which subsequently put to sea and his ashes were spread in Craig's beloved maritime waters after a thoughtful dedication.

The eulogies were a tribute to a great man that was well respected across the branch and painted a picture of a quiet, thoughtful individual whose only worry was to do the right thing. He was a very fit, athletic person who constantly strived to better himself and his family through sport and professionalism in his chosen occupation.

Rest in Peace Craig!

## SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL'S QUOTE TO CLEARANCE DIVERS

*In a fraction of a second they are  
projected into eternity and will never possess  
a final resting home.  
They have graves  
without bodies,  
they are an exceptional breed of people...  
It is an utmost proudness of myself to have met these men,  
those lords that I salute, praise and admire.*

*September 1944*





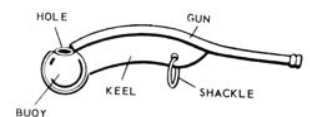
**Ahoy to all you anchor clankers....  
and to those who wish they were....!  
Heart of Oak....**



On May 4, 1910, Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Liberal government proclaimed the Naval Service Act, which created the Royal Canadian Navy. On Oct. 22, its first ship, HMCS Niobe, an aging 11,000-ton cruiser from the Royal Navy, steamed into Halifax Harbour. Flag and bunting-bedecked — “dressed” in nautic...



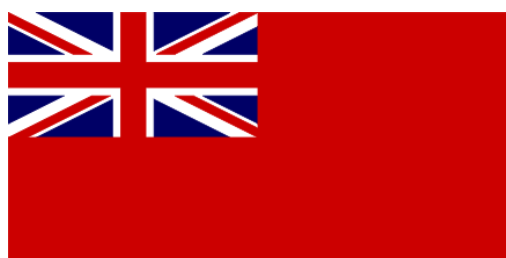
The CNDA Salutes the 100 glorious years of the Canadian Navy, keeping Canada strong and united!





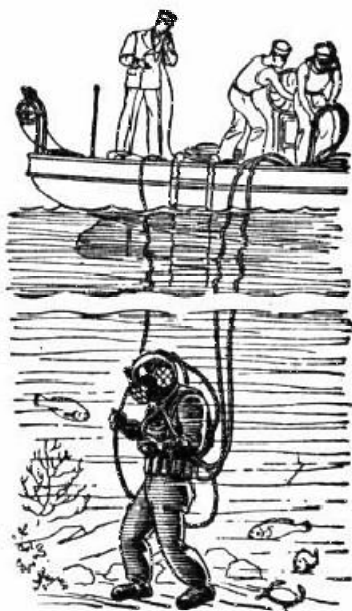
On 9 April 2010, a cold overcast day, Canada commemorated the 93rd Anniversary of the Battle for Vimy Ridge. It was the "End of an Era" as the last surviving World War One Canadian Veteran, Jack Babcock had passed away on the 18th February 2010. There were over 680,000 Canadians who fought in that War, and over 65,000 who never returned. The Minister of Veterans Affairs, Jean-Pierre Blackburn invited Chuck Rolfe to attend this event as the representative of The Canadian Naval Divers Association. Officiating was the Governor General Michealle Jean, together with the Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the Chief of the Defence Staff Walter Natynczyk, many Veterans and a crowd of over 3000 people to witness the ceremony.

The Battle of the Atlantic 65th Anniversary was celebrated in Ottawa on Sunday 2 May 2010, with Chuck Rolfe laying a wreath on behalf of the National Council of Veterans Associations (NCVA) at the National War Memorial. Normally the representatives of the NCVA, The Royal Canadian Legion & the Army, Navy & Air Force normally go up together to lay each of their individual wreaths, but this year five went up together, with the Korean Veterans and the War Amputations being the other two groups. There were ceremonies conducted also in Halifax and Victoria. The Chief of the Canadian Forces Maritime Staff, Vice Admiral Dean McFadden took the salute at the march past.



The Red Ensign, the flag under which Canadians fought from 1914 to 1918, was flown specially for this occasion. There was a very poignant passing of the torch ceremony from World War One, to World War II, to Korean War, to the Gulf War, to the Afghanistan War and finally to the Youth of Canada. Fresh poppies were laid on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier by the Dignitaries, and by the general Public after the ceremonies were over. A flock of white pigeons were released as a memento to their use as Message Couriers during this

conflict, and a Sopwith Pup WWI aircraft flew over the crowd, just prior to the final march past. One should also remember that the Government of the day implemented a personal Income Tax in 1917 that was supposed to be "a temporary measure" to help finance the First World War!



**Pat Connelly &  
Milt Skaalrud  
Watson Lake Clearance  
1978**



Pat Connelly phoned Chuck Rolfe of the CNDA National Office to renew his membership after reading all the good bumph on the navydiver.ca website, which really impressed him! It had been some time since his last membership, and we discussed much of what had been going on in the Association, and where some of his buddies are now. Along with renewing his membership for 2 years, Pat decided he wanted a CNDA Mug, Tie, Lapel Pin & Millennium Coin shipped out to him. He was also informed how to get into the website file where all the old time DIP-PERS DIGEST'S can be accessed to read up on.

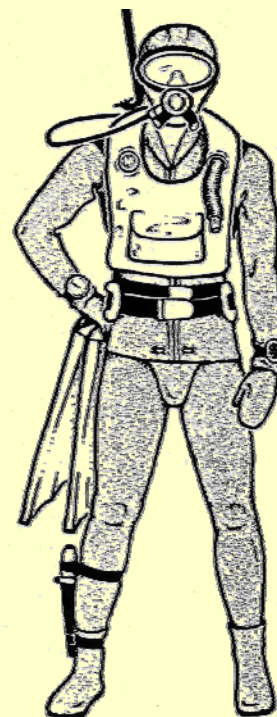
Karl Reiter contacted the National Office from his home in Houston, Texas to say that he was qualified as an RCN Diver way back in 1952, and wished to become a member of CNDA after being informed about our Association by one of his buddies in Canada. He has his own Salvage & Diving Company, operating out of that part of the United States.



Jack Lewis in Grand Valley, Ontario contacted Chuck Rolfe in the CNDA National Office about obtaining some of our saleable goods, which we packaged and mailed out to him. We had a very enjoyable phone conversation concerning various diving related schemes and incidents, which are quite hilarious upon second recollections! Jack stated his Divers ball cap (amongst other things) is getting very dilapidated, and he would like to get one from us, however they were all sold out at the last Reunion in Victoria, BC. New ones will have to be purchased for the next 2012 Reunion in Halifax, NS.



Retired P1 NESOP H.E. Bob Ward (Former Ships Diver) Emailed the National Office to attempt to locate his old time shipmate, Brian Millar (P1CD) who was a Sparker aboard HMCS ASSINIBOINE back in the 1960's era. We forwarded the request on to Brian "Dusty" Millar, who appreciated our getting in touch with him. Dusty stated that he and Bob sailed together over 31 years ago, and he often wondered what had happened to all his old buddies. Brian started a new family in 1993 which has kept him quite busy, as his 16 yrs old son is in his final years in High School (keeps me busy as a shuttle driver) before heading off to University. Dusty is just commencing to get in touch with his old friends again, and will keep in touch as often as possible. He gets to an occasional Ottawa Branch Submariners Association Meeting who hold their get togethers at the C&POJs Mess at HMCS CARLETON on a regular basis.



## NATIONAL COUNCIL OF VETERANS ASSOCIATIONS ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

Norm Herd, CNDA President and Chuck Rolfe, CNDA Sec/Treasurer represented our Association at the Annual General Meeting of the NCVA held in Toronto, Ontario on 4 November 2009. The NCVA consists of 57 Member Groups, whose members consist of only Veterans and retired members of the military. Cliff Chadderton CC, 0. Ont, LLD, who heads up the War Amps of Canada, is the NCVA Chairman.

NCVA has been most successful in accomplishing their objectives, such as:

- Getting continuation of the Veterans Independent Program(VIP) for life for widows of Authorized Veterans
- Getting an allowance for Veterans of \$20,000.00 who were exposed to Agent Orange
- Getting an allowance of \$24,000.00 for Veterans suffering the effects of radiation exposure who were "guinea pigs" during atomic tests
- Ensuring that exhibits in the Canadian War Museum are correctly displaying the Veterans efforts, and removing some that put Veterans in a poor light, and
- For Veterans with health problems, that they receive all benefits which allow them and their spouses to remain in their own residence, and assists them when they require other long term care facilities.

The National Council of Veterans Associations finds that it is far better to operate in meetings with Ministers, Deputy Ministers, and senior Bureaucrats to effectively "GET THINGS DONE", rather than attempting to operate through Parliamentary Committees!



**George Critch**

*George Critch is the diver that crawled out of some wreckage, manned the pump and got the divers to the surface after the tsunami and blast from the Halifax explosion hit.*

*The remaining photos of the NIOBE Divers at a more peaceful time.*

## AID FROM HMCS NIOBE

Halifax - Early on the morning of December 6, 1917, the French munitions ship Mont Blanc, inbound and the Belgian relief ship Imo, outbound, collided in the Narrows of Halifax harbour. The Mont Blanc was carrying 2,300 tons of picric acid, 200 tons of TNT, 35 tons of benzole and 10 tons of gun cotton; the fire which broke out on board caused her crew to abandon ship immediately, leaving the burning wreck to drift in the harbour.

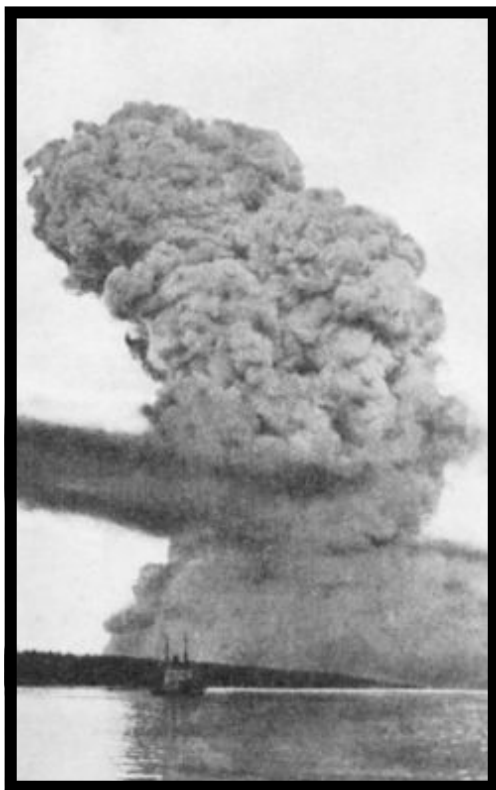
The Tug Stella Maria, on her way to Bedford Basin, had seen the accident and came racing back in an attempt to help. By the time she arrived on the scene, the Mont Blanc had already smashed into a jetty, setting fire to the buildings on shore. Vainly the tug tried to combat the inferno with her single hose.

A whaler and another small boat with 14 sailors arrived from HMCS NIOBE, with orders to get the burning ship away from the jetty area. Half of the sailors boarded her to fasten a tow line. When this line proved to be too weak, a second attempt with a stronger rope was made. But there was no time to complete this second effort. It was 9:06 a.m. The fire had finally reached the Mont Blanc's hold; the resulting explosion would go down in the annals as one of the worst disasters in North American history.

Only one man in the immediate vicinity of the Mont Blanc survived the explosion. And according to the best estimates, 1,963 people were killed, 9,000 were injured and 199 blinded. But most experts agree that the actual figures were much higher than this. Most of the North End of the city was levelled, and no part of either Halifax or Dartmouth escaped damage.

On board NIOBE, further down the harbour, two funnels of her four crumbled, the superstructure of the topdeck was levelled and fire broke out. The tidal wave which washed down the harbour separated her from her moorings. But the crew struggled on. Her two tugs immediately started taking the injured from the shore to the hospital ship Old Colony in the harbour. NIOBE had her fair share of the many heroic acts which took place in the explosion's aftermath. Just before the explosion, two of the ship's divers had been working on the concrete foundation of a crane bed off the dockyard pier. Six men were manning the divers' air pumps, watched by Chief Master-at-Arms John Gammon, RCN.





One diver was already in the water and the other was descending the ladder when the explosion hit. Of the seven men ashore, five died on their feet. The divers were both alive, but the men on the ladder had been blown into the water, tangling the air hoses. But there was no air coming through anyway, since the pump house had collapsed. One of the survivors, Able Seaman Walter Critch, RNR, realizing that the immediate problem was to get air to the divers, rushed to the pump. He found it undamaged, but jammed under the fallen roof.

Unable to clear the broken timbers and metal sheeting, he squeezed in between them and the pump and heaved upwards with his shoulders. He managed to shift the wreckage of the wheels and then, with one hand supporting the leaning roof, he started the pump with the other. Slowly the piston began to suck in air. It usually took four men working in relays to work the pump; Critch managed to literally singlehandedly keep a trickle of air going to the divers until Gammon, the other survivor, got their face masks open. But this wasn't the only danger to the divers. The same tidal wave which had hit the NIOBE was on its way back down the harbour. Critch managed to get the air hoses untangled and both divers to the ladder before it hit.

For their actions, Gammon was awarded the OBE (Order of British Empire) and Critch the Meritorious Service Medal. And for their work on the Mont Blanc before the explosion, posthumous awards were made of the Albert Medal to four of the 14 NIOBE crewmen.

*Kindly submitted by Mark Simonsen*





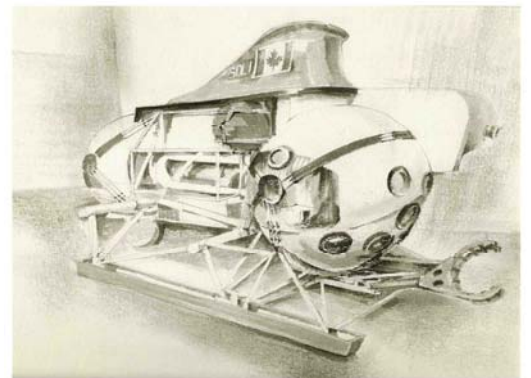
Βψ Ποπυλαρ ρεθυεστ:

## ΜΟΟΣΕ ΜΙΑΚ ΡΕΧΙΠΕ (ΦΟΡ 50 ΠΕΟΠΛΕ)

20 LITRES WHITE MILK  
16 LITRES VANILLA ICE CREAM  
1 X 40 OZ VODKA  
2X 40 OZ DARK RUM (CAPTAIN MORGAN)  
1 X 40 OZ WHITE RUM  
1 X 40 OZ TIA MARIA

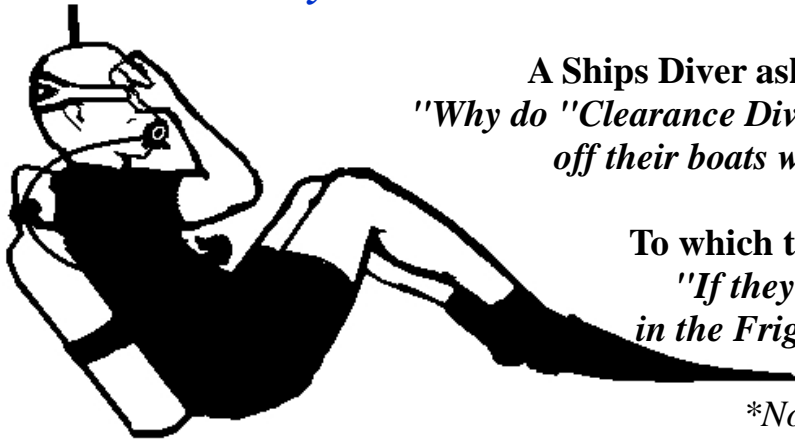
NUTMEG TO TASTE

When mixed thoroughly - Stand back,  
announce loudly  
**"THE MOOSE IS LOOSE!"**  
serve and let the games begin





*Finally - An answer we can all understand!*



A Ships Diver asked an old "Chief Diver":  
*"Why do "Clearance Divers" always fall backwards  
off their boats when they enter the water?"*

To which the "Chief Diver" Replied:  
*"If they fell forwards they'd still be  
in the Friggin\* boat, wouldn't they?"*

*\*Note—substitute any expletive  
you can think of here...*



**Brassedout**

## NAVAL CADETS

One last class before graduation at HMCS  
VENTURE and the instructor gave out one final assign-  
ment:



"Given one metal pole, two bags of  
cement, a selection of shovels, a  
wheel barrow, and other tools neces-  
sary, One Chief, one Petty Officer and a selection of Able  
Seamen. Describe the process you take to erect the pole so  
that a flag hung from it can be seen from X number of feet  
away. You have two hours to complete this assignment.

**Begin!**



The "almost" Acting Sub-Lieutenants began to  
write with concentration.

At the end of two hours, the Instructor called time  
and collected the papers.

Paging through the papers, he announced the grades.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, there are some thorough and de-  
tailed responses here, but only one response ranks an "A."  
I would like to read it to you. I predict that this young man  
will go far in his Naval Career.



In order to erect the flag pole, I would do the follow-  
ing:

I would say, "Chief, put up the flagpole" and then I  
would leave the area.



bp,  
We're bringing oil to American Shores  
Doh!!!!



## CNDA

Founded

HALIFAX, N.S.

1981

President: Norm Herd

### FOUNDING MEMBERS

Glenn Adams

André Desrochers

Leo Goneau

Terry Havlik

Michael Walsh

First President: Stanley F. Watts

The mission of the Canadian Naval Divers Association (CNDA) is to keep Naval Divers, both Serving and Retired, informed and aware of what is happening within CNDA and other matters pertaining to Service Diving in Canada. It is also intended to keep everyone in touch with others of the diving community who may have been friends and diving team members from those tremendous days of service in our past.

### Contact Information

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We're on the Web!  
[www.navydiver.ca](http://www.navydiver.ca)

## Editor's Corner

It goes without saying that it is with a heavy heart that I publish this issue of the DIPPERS DIGEST given the recent news of the loss of Craig Blake in combat operations in Afghanistan. This is only my second edition as editor and I never imagined that such a tragic event would occur during my watch. I can only look on from a distance with helplessness as the family and fellow divers who worked closely with Craig have started to pick up the shattered pieces of their lives and carry on in his memory. I think I speak for everyone when I say that the loss of a fellow diver in such circumstances has touched me deeply this past month and will continue to do so for a very long time to come. Back, not so long ago, when I proudly wore the CF uniform, I had always known that, we, the divers in the branch, played for keeps and this only drives the fact home. Craig has regrettably paid the ultimate sacrifice for his country and will always sit in that special place where heroes belong. For that we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Let us also not forget all those service members who have gone before and will follow him afterwards into harms way since, they too, wear a heroes badge.

Strength in Depth Craig,  
we shall always remember and honour your sacrifice!

