

Chuck Rolfe, Editor
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Kinburn, Ontario
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FOUNDED
HALIFAX, N.S.
1981

FOUNDING MEMBERS

Glenn Adams P. Eng
André Desrochers
Leo Goneau
Terry Havik
Michael Walsh

First President
Stanley F. Watts

15 March 1994

**DIVING TENDER # 7 AKA
YARD MAINTENANCE TENDER No. 7**

I'm on the bottom now, whats left of me, making a home for some creatures with claws and antenna, sculpins, fläffish and a few other denizens of the deep, remembering my life which spanned from 1945 to 1968 - ending in a most degrading experience. During that time period the events, some humorous, some not so funny, were mostly the kind you never forget about. My memory is still pretty good even with the eels and wolf fish playing around my ribs and wormeaten keel but I can still recall all the major episodes that bring a smile or two, perhaps even a frown, some outright laughter, but most of all, beautiful memories, and it goes something like this:

My keel was laid down in a small Yard on the South Shore that specialized in custom crafts and yachts in the Spring of '45, perhaps that's why my lines were a little smoother and finer than the other 3 in my Class. Boats No. 1 & 3 were built on the North Shore and were pretty rough looking, and even from a distance you could see the difference, Boat No. 5 was built in another Yard beside me and was a good deal better constructed and cleaner lined, but when it came to my turn, the bosses must have shook their heads and said "No way!" No. 1 Boat was a bare bones affair, sturdy and dependable, but no lines or class, No. 3 Boat was a lemon from the day the keel-man chopped off his big toe with an adze and the plank-men used galvanized nails for securing her sideboards. Basically we were all the same size and configuration, roughly 35 feet overall, a 10 foot beam, drew 4 feet fully ballasted, single screwed, 6 cyl. diesel engine, 4 cyl. gas genny, coal fired hot water boiler, propane galley stove, manually cranked anchor and boom winches (optional air driven drill with adapter) and capable of 8 knots, although I never could go faster than 7, and at times that was too fast. From the bow looking aft you saw the anchor winch and cleats, the wheelhouse, propane cylinder(2), mast and boom with attached winch, entrance to the midship hold, a 4 foot square skylight, 5 foot square access hatch, oh, I forgot the 16 inch square skylight for the for'd mess, the pumphouse so called because it had an enclosed head whose tank had to be pumped up(true!) and a hatch to the Tiller Flats. Bollards were located at the bow, midships and stern, with a few cleats secured to the capping. There was a 1 foot break behind the wheelhouse, this gave more headroom in the for'd mess and brought the stern closer to the water. In the mess there were 6 narrow bunks, 2 on the starboard side, a closet, and of course the boiler, port side held the other 4 bunks, boot lockers used as seats around a pie shaped table, a fanny and handpumped sink were below the pass-through to the galley. The galley ran from side to side with the propane stove on the port side, it too had a handpump for it's sink water. The gash bucket was usually stored between the stove and ladder. The midship hold contained a spring bunk-bed-settee, a large 3' by 6' table, a mounted bladed fan and the skylight directly overhead. Now this made a lot of sense, 6 troops crammed in a three-sided room with hardly any air circulation and this big area for one person, although some head honcho's shared the good fortune, most didn't however. A watertight bulkhead separated this from the Engine Room. The engine was a 6 cyl. diesel, hand operated clutch and throttle, day tank fed from the main tank, a circulating pump handled the cooling, bilge pumping and firemain supply. A telegraph and voice pipe connected to the wheelhouse, a hand cranked generator, batteries and a charger completed this area. Due to the shape of the hull, the propellor shaft pierced a stem post and into the water, directly above the shaft gland a watertight bulkhead separated the Tiller Flats, nothing much of interest here except the rudder post, tiller bar

Glen Sine recently had a massive stroke and RCAF Flt Sgt Orville Begley(WWII Diver) passed away at age 75 from cancer on 3 Jan 94. He will be sadly missed by Walter & Audrey Hynek in White Rock, B.C. and by all his buddies.

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DIPPERS DIGEST #17

and steel wire rope connected to the Boat's wheel. An emergency steering bar was hidden in a corner, thrown there because a Sir stubbed his foot on it when it was lashed to the gunnel. This information is provided for your edification because in every bit there is a story or 2. They found a perfect piece of knot-free timber for a 10 by 18 oaken keel and enough for the stem, stern pieces, overheads & spreaders and knees. Steamed elm formed the ribs, 2 inch fir planks for the sides, there were no scarfs in the planks and each one was trimmed to a tight fit with hardly any space for oakum, all butt joined and secured with galvanized nuts & bolts. The knees were sawn to fit and all inside corners routed for a neat job. Never once in all the years did I take in water due to builders error, but mind you, I did take in some later, and the last time was for good. Gunnel posts and sides were oak and the eye-stopper was the capping - pure mahogany from Honduras; naturally some Sir said "Paint it" and it stayed that way. Considering the size of me, the wheelhouse was fairly large and windowed all around except the after side, it held the wheel, itself a beautiful piece of woodwork, compass, voicepipe, telegraph, a radio that never worked, CO² extinguisher and a small chart table. So there I was with a spanking brand new coat of paint ready to do my duty, but then the war was over so they parked me beside #3 Boat and let me peel paint for a few years. Meanwhile, #5 Boat was taken over by the Diving School and had her stern gunnel cut away to accommodate a ladder and officially named D.T. #5, in a short time it had the unofficial name of 'ALI BABA' and her crew 'THE FORTY THIEVES'. I had to admit that what with me peeling paint and her painted up to the nines with her white canvas dodger over the wheelhouse, she sure did look pretty spiffy, but my time was coming, though I didn't know then. The diving world pre 1950 was very small and didn't have the personnel to man another craft like me, a couple of Sirs, a Chief, a couple of PO's and a few other lower ranks, starting out with British Hardhats and manually cranked air pumps to gas driven compressors and American Navy gear, which in itself was a milestone.

In the Summer of 1950 something was in the wind as they put me and #3 Boat up on the slips and did a complete refit and overhaul - except for #3 Boat. They had so many problems with her that the Mateys shook their heads and gave her a ¼" paint job. Anyway, there I was looking like a winner in a beauty contest, and going nowhere. What I didn't know at the time was that a gent from France had demonstrated an air breathing device that carried it's own air supply, the Aqua-lung. The Brass in Ottawa were favourably impressed, along with a couple of Sirs, of whom one had experience in Oxygen Rebreathers and some time in X-Craft(three man submarines) so the germ of the idea of some sort of self-contained diving Unit was born. Even though the RCN had Divers, the RCAF and Army had some too, these men were all Hardhat and the Brass didn't think they would be adaptable to this brand new thing, so it had to be a new entitey entirely. So there I was, pretty as a picture alongside this discrepity thing called a Gate Vessel(G.V.)-if anything could be called ugly this was it - later on some lads called it home! During the war a pair of these sat outside the harbour mouth with a submarine and torpedo net stretched between them, lowering the net for ship traffic and raising it when passage was completed. These G.V.'s were about 30 feet wide, 55 feet long and drew 9 feet of water fully loaded with bunker coal and provisions, with about 4 feet of freeboard. The hull was poured concrete, upper deck structures of wood, a 4' by 6' poop house, and a micky mouse smoke stack that gave the appearance of falling on it's side. The below decks were separated for fresh water tanks(one on each end), bunker coal storage, boiler room, storage area, cold storage(ice) and workshop. On the main deck the wooden structure was set back a couple of feet on the sides for passage and 10' from either end for access to the cables & tanks; inside were the steam winches, the galley and messdeck, 2 cabins for Sirs, heads and shower, and the rest was living and sleeping quarters. As with most of the Navy, you slung your mick (the civvies used to have bunks of course). When alongside, power,water and steam were supplied. Not only was I tied up to this vessel, but directly astern of me was #3 Boat too, and even the ¼" paint didn't do anything for her, sad! The main thing about her was the diesel engine, it never did work right, back firing, belching black smoke and refusing to start - at times continually wearing down the batteries. A C2MM arrived with his Draft Chit and took over, the only thing was he only knew about highspeed gas Fairmile engines and nothing else. He couldn't understand about the day tank because on Fairmiles the pump did it so out went the day tank. What he didn't know was the fuel was gravity fed to the injectors. So, being a good Fairmile mechanic, and a Reserve to boot, he rigged up an electric pump he had in the trunk of his Vauxhall car(the pump was a spare he always carried) to the feed line waited until the chunking stopped and presses the starter button. The head promptly blew off and landed on the batteries, causing a short thereby wrecking said batteries, needless to say

our MM was a little leary of our engines and to my knowledge never went into an Engine Room again until his time was up. Anyway, #3 Boat was towed away for repairs, fixed up and returned in the same way she was before. She never was used for any task that was noteworthy and eventually they got tired of pumping her out and gave her back to the Yard, she leaked like a sieve, poor thing. Strange that she rode so high that the copper paint below the boot topping showed, probably because there wasn't any gear, water, or fuel aboard her they thought. In the Fall of '50 and Spring of '51 events were happening that started to shape up as the beginnings of a new autonomous Diving Unit.

HERE & THERE

Some moves that took place in 1993 were: Gerry Mailloux from XO FDU(P) changed with Steve Milne who went on Exchange Duty to Bethesda, Maryland USA; Robbie Roberts to EOD School at CFB BORDEN as Instructor taking the place of J.J. Chaisson who returned to FDU(P); Bob Frank and Ron Hayman moved down East to FDU(A); Doug Hinchliffe finally learns to swim in the Swan River, Manitoba (courtesy Winnipeg Free Press!); Dave Holland to MANTA while Tim Stevens goes into FDU(P) as Training Officer; Al McRae is seconded from his position with DSS to DND for HMCS PROTECTEUR refit; Henry Mark now in FDU(P) as SSO Diving; Bob Gwalchmai went to HMCS CORMORANT while Al MacDonald leaves there to go to FDU(P); Danny Bewsher leaves the EDU (Experimental Diving Unit) at DCIEM (Defence and Civil Institute of Environmental Medicine) to go out West while Carl Dutrisac goes to DCIEM in his place; eight new Trade Group II (TGII) Clearance Divers are welcomed into the Branch, 4 to FDU(A) & 4 to FDU(P); a highlight of the West Coast's June Ball was a marathon wrist twist between CPO Darryl Skaalrud and Lt. Dowker (out of that huge metropolis in Saskatchewan - Watrous!) and it was rumoured that Darryl claimed victory, however he has now retired from such strenuous competition; and finally - word was going around that the Leading Hands on the West Coast were developing a most unique scheme whereby all Chiefs could be retired before the 1993 Christmas "At Home". There evidently will be quite a few West Coasters who will be RVing Down East for the September 1994 Reunion, such as: Dave Pilot, Stan Stephenson, Al McRae, Jim Balmforth, Doug Hinchliffe and Tom Kelly from Florida. Guy Desnoyers (Engineer & Diver) has been promoted to Commander and appointed to DMEE 4 at NDHQ in Ottawa - congratulations are in order!! Wally Green called to say that he still intends to move to the Thousand Islands region near Brockville, Ontario so that he can get some quality sailing time in with his boat, that is if he can sell his house in Ottawa. Bruce Downie drops in on Wally occasionally from Peterborough, Ontario and the last time he came up was in January. John & Patricia Cole have more time on their hands now that John has retired and took a trip down to the Naples, Florida area from 28 December to the end of February to enjoy the good life there and to leave the frigid blasts of Winter behind for a change. Whilst in the Jupiter/Tequesta area they dropped in on Bud and Gloria Nuquist for a most pleasant visit. John also notes that Roy Busby in Red Deer, Alberta has had some recurring problems with his hip joint replacement and hopes that it has been resolved for the better by now. Les Nelson our intrepid WWII Diver now living at 5469 Pennant Bay, Ladner, B.C. V4K 4R8 writes that the previous Summer was nothing to write home about, but the Fall was pretty good. He and his wife intend to take a long 28 day Caribbean cruise on the ship AMAZING GRACE, which is part of the Barefoot Cruise organization, and then possibly on to the Reunion in Halifax. Les says that he is amazed with the advancements that have occurred in the diving industry since he finished his diving career, and that Canada had so much to do with many of the unique developments. He relishes getting the Newsletter as it provides him with information about some of those gallant Divers of yore with whom he worked, and took out membership for 2 more years with the Western Chapter. Stephen & Elaine Bushell tell us that although they have some health problems, they are still getting along OK albeit their sons sure keep them on their toes, what with hockey and their scholastic achievements. Elaine has given up her P.C.W. career due to back problems while Stephen is now on his 5th career. John & Pat Zambory have retired and moved to a condo at 409-8403 Fairmount Dr S.E., Calgary, Alta. T2H 0Y9 thereby donating their snow shovel & lawnmower to their kids. They are off to Arizona for February and will be spending their Summers at the cottage on Ghost Lake. They intend to take a tour of the country, ending up at Halifax in September. Paddy Dutton had his good wife Mary bring his last DIGEST to him in Buenos Aires, Argentina where he has been working with his company since June 93. It is like going back 50 years there - he is next in Shanghai - another time warp. Beam me up Scotty!! He will be please to get back in the 90's again. Paddy says the cars are only about 30 years behind the times though.

CNDA NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

NATIONAL TREASURER'S 4TH ANNUAL REPORT TO MEMBERS

The undersigned, Treasurer of the Canadian Naval Divers Association, submits the following Annual Report for the year 1993.

The National Headquarters holds eleven Credit Union shares totalling a sum of \$55.00, which shall be reimbursed to the Association should we close out the Account. It is to be noted that we also pay annual Credit Union dues of \$3.25 per year.

The balance on hand as of 1 January 1993 was \$1585.61. There was received from all sources from 1 January 1993 to 31 December 1993 the total of \$760.83; during the same period of time the total expenditures amounted to \$809.47, leaving a balance on hand in the National Defence Credit Union Account of $(\$1585.61 + \$760.83 - 809.47 =)$ \$1536.97.

The Annual Statement of Receipts and Expenditures attached will show in detail the sources from which the receipts were obtained, and the objects to which expenditures have been applied.

The Association's finances continue on an even keel albeit the revenues were slightly less than preceding years. There are adequate stocks of Jacket Crests, Lapel Pins and Decals to continue sale of same for a few years. Once the outstanding dues have been received, the Association's financial situation will improve for the year 1993.

All of which is respectfully submitted.



Charles V. Rolfe, Treasurer
National Headquarters
Canadian Naval Divers Association
January 1, 1994

CNDA NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

1993 ANNUAL STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND EXPENDITURES

1 Jan 93 to 31 Dec 93

CNDA NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS IN ACCOUNT WITH NATIONAL DEFENCE CREDIT UNION

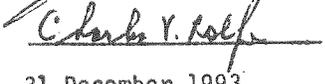
<u>REVENUES</u>		<u>EXPENDITURES</u>	
1992 Dues from Eastern Chapter	\$117.00	Postage	\$288.48
1993 Dues from Western Chapter	\$204.00	Saleable Goods(Lapel Pins)	\$505.68
1993 Dues from Ottawa Chapter	\$198.00	Credit Union Shares(2)	\$ 10.00
Saleable Goods	\$229.92	Credit Union Dues	\$ 3.25
Bank Account Interest	\$ 8.66	Receipt Book	\$ 2.06
Credit Union Dues Adjustment	<u>\$ 3.25</u>		
	\$760.83		<u>\$809.47</u>
Account Cash Balance as of 31 December 1993 is $(\$1585.61 + \$760.83 - \$809.47 =)$ \$1536.97			

We do hereby certify that we have examined the Accounts and vouchers of the Treasurer, and find them correct, and that the balance in his hands in the National Defence Credit Union is \$1536.97 as of this date.

NOTE: The Eastern Chapter forwarded their 1992 Dues in 1993. Their 1993 Dues have not been received to be included in this Audit Report



Chairman



Treasurer

31 December 1993

Auditors, National Headquarters
Canadian Naval Divers Association

5TH TRIENNIAL REUNION

CANADIAN



NAVAL DIVERS ASSOCIATION



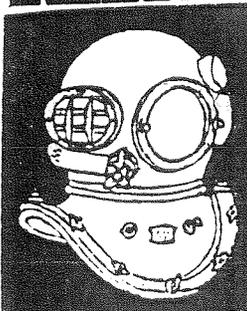
September 9th, 10th & 11th, 1994

Fleet Diving Unit - Atlantic

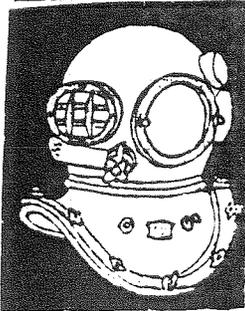
Halifax/Dartmouth, Nova Scotia,

Canada

NAVY



NAVY



94 CNDA REUNION INFORMATION

ACCOMMODATIONS: You may contact the following Hotels/Motels early to reserve your own accommodations - in Halifax: Sheraton Hotel 1-800-325-3535; Cambridge Suites 1-800-565-1263; Citadel Inn 1-800-565-7162; Delta Barrington 1-800-268-1133 and Prince George 1-800-565-5464.
in Dartmouth: Keddy's 1-800-561-7666 and Best Western 1-800-528-1234.
For those with RV's, the site in Dartmouth is the Shubie Campground phone 1-902-464-2334 or FAX 1-902-464-2308.
For inquiries about lodgings you may contact André Desrochers at: phone 1-902-434-5545 or FAX 1-902-469-6948.

REGISTRATIONS: All inclusive for all events is \$45.00. For those unable to participate in the Dinner/Dance but wishing to attend the Meet & Greet and Tour, the part rate registration fee will be \$15.00. We urge you to ensure you pre-register at an early date which will allow the Committee to plan for the correct number of meals and arrange for the required seating place. Those registering late may find that the caterer is unable to provide meals due to the lead time they require to order the food. Registration packages will be available for pickup in the Lower Compound at FDU(A), "Y" Hangar, CFB SHEARWATER commencing at 1200 hours on Friday, 9 September 1994

DIRECTORS MEETING: The National Directors Meeting will be conducted in "Y" Hangar from 0830 to 1200 hours on Saturday morning. Elections of the National Directors for the next three years will take place at this meeting.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Friday, September 9th, 1994

1200 - 1800 Registration Confirmation "Y" Hangar FDU(A)
Meet & Greet

Saturday, September 10th, 1994

0800 - 1100 Late Registration "Y" Hangar FDU(A)
0830 - 1200 CNDA National Directors Meeting "Y" Hangar FDU(A)
1100 - 1500 YMT-12 Harbour Tour(FDU to HMCS CORMORANT & HMCS SACKVILLE)
1130 - 1300 Lunch Time on your own
1300 - 1600 Sightseeing on your own
1900 - 2000 Cocktails
2000 - 0100 Dinner/Dance *MAYFLOWER CURLING CLUB - HALIFAX*

Sunday, September 11th, 1994

1100 - 1300 Farewell Brunch (steak, eggs & Chips) *BEST WESTERN, DARTMOUTH*
1300 - Au Revoir ~~"Y" Hangar FDU(A)~~

Queries? - Contact Stan Watts, 6283 Jennings St. Halifax, N.S. B3H 2C3 Phone (902) 423-7787

Please Print

1994 CNDA REUNION APPLICATION FORM

Name _____ Spouse/Friend 1st name _____ Phone No(Home) _____

Address _____ Phone No(Work) _____

Number of Persons Attending _____ Total Registration Fees Enclosed \$ _____

Number for Harbour Tour _____ Number for Lobster Dinner _____ Chicken Dinner _____

Make all cheques or Money Orders Payable and forward to: André Desrochers Registration Fees are \$45.00 per person
Part Rate Fees are \$15.00 per person

70 1994 CNDA REUNION 73 McLaughlin Road Dartmouth, N.S.

B2W 3R8 Phone (902) 434-5545

TOM SAWYER

Tom Sawyer was born and brought up in Verdun, Quebec, in 1926 and decided at the tender age of 14 that he was going to war with everyone else in 1941 as he didn't want to miss it. He altered his Birth Certificate to read 1922 instead of 1926 and joined the RCAF as potential aircrew on 27 Jun 41, however his eyesight was not up to par for that, so on 20 Jul 42 he transferred to the RCNVR, which he served with till Sep 47. Tom then became part of the RCN(R) and went Active upon the start up of the Korean War. It was during this time that he turned RCN Regular Force. In all, he served on the ships: HMCS WARRIOR, SIOUX, ASSINIBOINE, NOOTKA, PRESTONIAN, NEW WATERFORD, SWANSEA, and LA HULLOISE as well as the Submarines HMCS OJIBAWA, & HMS ANDREW, AENEAS and ALCIDE. Tom was with the Coronation Contingent as well, which he succinctly remembers due to the fact that he never marched so much in all his life!

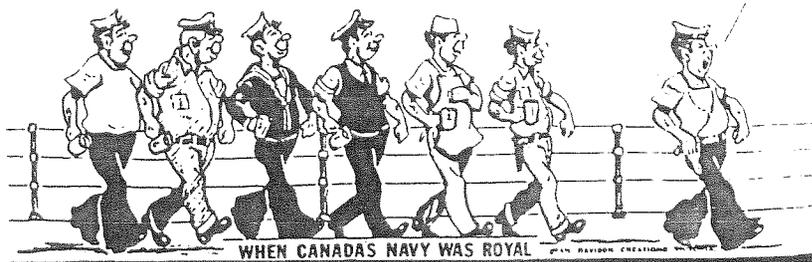
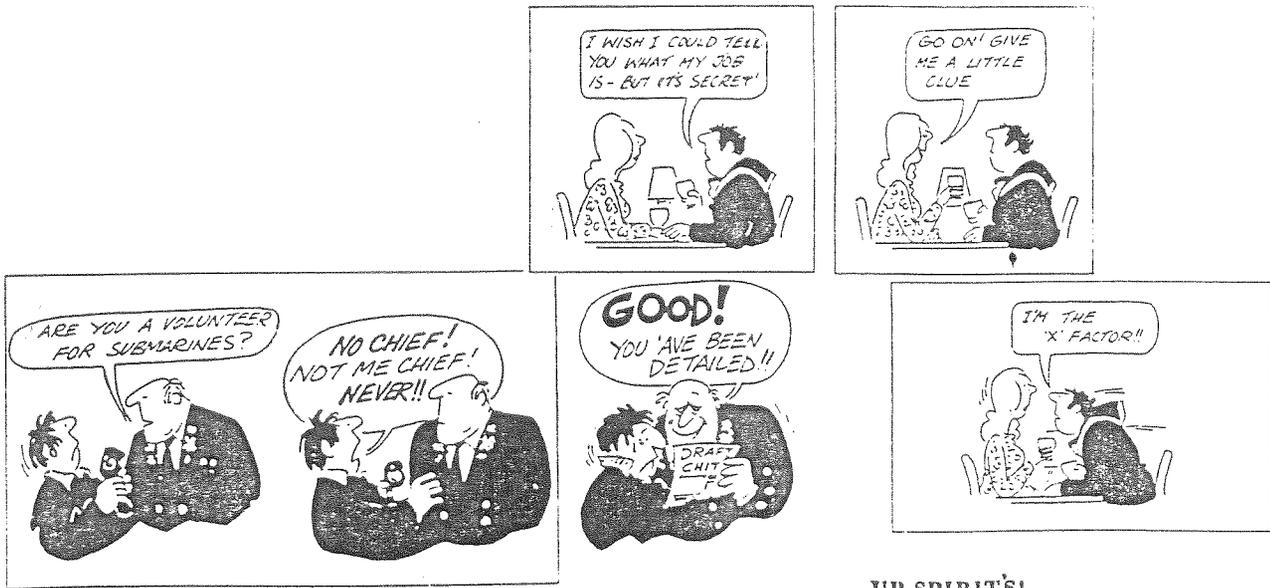
His Diver training commenced in HMS TAMAR, Hong Kong, when the SIOUX was there for a period of R&R during the Korean conflagration as the boiler tubes had collapsed and they were laid up for a 3 month repair period. He qualified there in Jul 51 using SALVUS gear; the suit was a "clammy" and if you ever used one, you made sure that you stowed the apron clamp properly! He had one experience there that almost had him quit diving before he even got going. The qualifying dive at HMS TAMAR was undertaken at Stonecutters Island in Hong Kong Harbour. The routine was "Over the side of the Pusser Motor Cutter, down the shot line and out on the distance line, complying with all signals given by the Diving Instructor". After moving out a way on the distance line by crawling through the harbour sludge (we used lead/canvas shoes then, no fins), there suddenly appeared immediately across my visor, about 3 inches away, a huge black and white banded sea snake (I swear it had to be a mile or more long) I did not move at all - I'm not sure even that I carried on breathing for a while! Anyway, the Instructor's signals came down; i.e. move left, move right, come back, go out, etc. and I answered every one perfectly - without moving - and being on O₂, there were no tell tale bubbles. Finally I got 4 Pulls, came up and was officially qualified thereafter as a Diver! When we finally returned to Canada, I used to do my dips at the Unit at NAD in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, until one day in 1957 when the Diving Officer, Mike Lafontaine, said he couldn't find any record of my having been officially trained on Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus (CABA). I informed him that I'd never been on a CABA Course, even though I had been diving since 1951, and Mike immediately put me on the next 4 week Course, which I completed in Feb 51 in Halifax Harbour - the bloody water temperature was always below 32°F that Winter! Other than the SALVUS and CABA gear, I also qualified with SABA (HMS VERNON), UBA-Free Diver (HMS SAFEGUARD) and SDDE (HMS SAFEGUARD). Some Divers I recall over and above those mentioned were Stan Stephenson (White Rock, B.C.), Ike Eisner (Chester Basin, N.S.), Art Rowse (Victoria, B.C.), Vern Melanson (deceased), Moe Coulombe (Black Creek, B.C.), Dave Pilot (Keremeos, B.C.), Keith Power (Florida), Ivan Cripps (Dartmouth, N.S.), Jim Balmforth (Richmond, B.C.), Guy Joudrey (Halifax, N.S.) and a host of others from my 32 years of diving. At one time, Bob Wigmore, now of Digby, N.S., had me down on my first dip in Standard Dress and he blew me to the surface, much to the amusement of all the Divers watching. When I was part of the crew of #8 Boat with Art Rowse, Dave Pilot, Leo Goneau, Ike Eisner, et al, we were doing dives in Louisbourg Harbour, Cape Breton, for Pullen's Museum and I can recall one hilarious dive in which I came across Leo Goneau lying on the bottom, face mask off, eyes open, pretending he had "koofered". On another dive, I found my stamina to be somewhat less than normal and with my strength flagging considerably I decided I would rest a bit by sitting on what appeared to be a large rock sticking up out of the sand. Upon sitting down, the "rock" moved, so I had a line sent down from #8 Boat and had the "rock" hoisted aboard. It turned out to be part of the gunwale from "LE PRUDENT", one of the French ships scuttled there in 1758. Once it was identified, we commenced clearing some of the sand around it, where we found and recovered a stacked pile of cannon balls - one is on my mantle to this day and it can be donated to a Divers Museum once I have passed on to my just reward.

Other heart-stopping experiences in my diving career occurred while at sea. When serving aboard the Royal Navy's Submarine HMS ANDREW, on transit from Singapore to the Persian Gulf through the Indian Ocean in foul weather, a hawser came loose from the casing and managed to wrap a couple of turns around the Starboard screw before it could be stopped. Since I had my diving gear aboard, I was "elected" to clear it, even though I had just partaken of "UP SPIRITS" shortly before. The job itself would not have been too difficult, as the hawser had not been wound taut. I stepped on the aft plane and could easily see how it was loosely wrapped, but....also a horrendous number of sea snakes swimming around! So, gathering my courage, and disregarding the Gorgonian masses therein, I dove in, unwrapped the hawser and surfaced with enough velocity to land back on the aft plane - it was probably the fastest dive ever made!!

While serving aboard HMCS NOOTKA, it was the normal routine to recover the MK VIII Torpedo using the Motor Cutter, often resulting in damaged planking. I had maintained that it would be safer for a Diver to assist in effecting the recovery, therefore I was tasked to jump in for the first one, snap on the towing hook to the nose ring and thereafter it was just towed away to be recovered by the ship. However, while recovering the second "fish", both I and the torpedo were pulled under the ship's hull, and I had one hell of a time even trying to move! What had happened was that one of the ship's Electricians, Charlie Donkin, had met with an accident, and the Captain wanted to go alongside HMCS ALGONQUIN to get their MO's assistance. He had called down from the Bridge to the XO at the torpedo tubes, "Is the Diver CLEAR of the water?" The XO thought he had said "Is the Diver STILL IN the water?". The XO answered "Yes", whereupon the Skipper immediately went astern, dragging the torpedo and me under the hull. EMERGENCY STOP got me out O.K.--thank God he didn't go ahead, or I would have been hamburger!

If anyone wishes to recover an RCN TBM Avenger aircraft, one went down in Lake Erie on a heading of 178° Magnetic towards Port Stanley, Ont. in the late 50's or early 60's. You would need a good echo sounder or sidescan sonar to locate it, although it is said on a clear day with calm water, it is rumoured to be seen(or it's shadow) when flying over it. The aircraft is in approximately 60 to 65 feet of water.

Tom retired from the Regular Force Navy as a Chief Petty Officer Electrical Technician on 18 Feb 72, joined the next day, 19 Feb 72, the Active Reserves at HMCS DISCOVERY, transferred to the Supplementary List later on and then retired from the Navy for good in Aug 91, at age 65, thus completing a full 50 years of Regular and Reserve service. His hobby during his time in the Navy was shooting Service weapons, that is until the new weapons were bought. He won the Service Rifle Championship in British Columbia when he was in the Reserves. He also wrote his MOT Masters Ticket successfully in 1974. Tom works with DND now as a Civilian Electrical Officer and is in charge of the electrical refits of HMCS TERRA NOVA and NIPIGON in St. Catharines, Ont. He and his good wife, Laine, now live at 318 Riverside Drive, Oakville Ontario L6K 3N4 Phone number(416)338-8060 should any of their friends wish to contact them.



The Morning That Halifax

On December 6, 1917, 75 years ago, two ships collided in Halifax harbor, creating the most violent man-made explosion prior to the one at Hiroshima. Two thousand were killed, 9,000 injured, and a third of Halifax was obliterated. Here's how it was . . . **BY VALERIE MARCHANT**

Ust after 8:30 A.M. on Thursday, December 6, 1917, a morning "long remembered for its singular beauty," a French munitions ship, the *Mont Blanc*, with 35 tons of benzene, 225 tons of TNT, 2,300 tons of picric acid, and 61 tons of gun cotton (cellulose nitrate) was proceeding into Halifax harbor, intending to continue later to France under convoy. At the same time the Norwegian tramp steamer *Imo* was outward bound to collect a relief cargo for Belgium. Apparently misunderstanding each other's intentions, despite what appeared to be appropriate signaling, the *Imo* hit the starboard bow of the *Mont Blanc* and crushed in the plating to a depth of ten feet. Although the two ships separated almost at once, sparks resulting from steel grating against steel set on fire the benzene stored on the decks of the *Mont Blanc*. The benzene acted as lighter fluid to the explosives in the holds. Half an hour later, the entire ship literally blew to the sky. It was the largest man-made explosion in the history of

the world up to that time and would be until the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima at the end of World War II.

The central question remains: Why did the two ships collide? Halifax was a very well-run harbor, both ships had Halifax pilots on board, and the visibility was excellent. Did Captain Aimé Le Medec of the *Mont Blanc* really decide not to raise the red flag that warns of ammunition on board because of the possibility of attracting German U-boats? Had they seen a red flag, the crew of the *Imo* might have been more careful, and many seamen who approached the *Mont Blanc* after it had begun burning might have fled instead. Did the *Mont Blanc's* English-speaking pilot misunderstand the orders of the French-speaking captain? Captain Le Medec correctly realized that it was not possible to

Was Blown to Smithereens

put out the fires on deck; nor could he drop the bow anchors to check the landward drift or even scuttle the ship. But surely he at least should have tried to take the *Mont Blanc* full speed out of the harbor, as the pilot wanted to do, so that water would enter the hole in the hold and dampen the explosives.

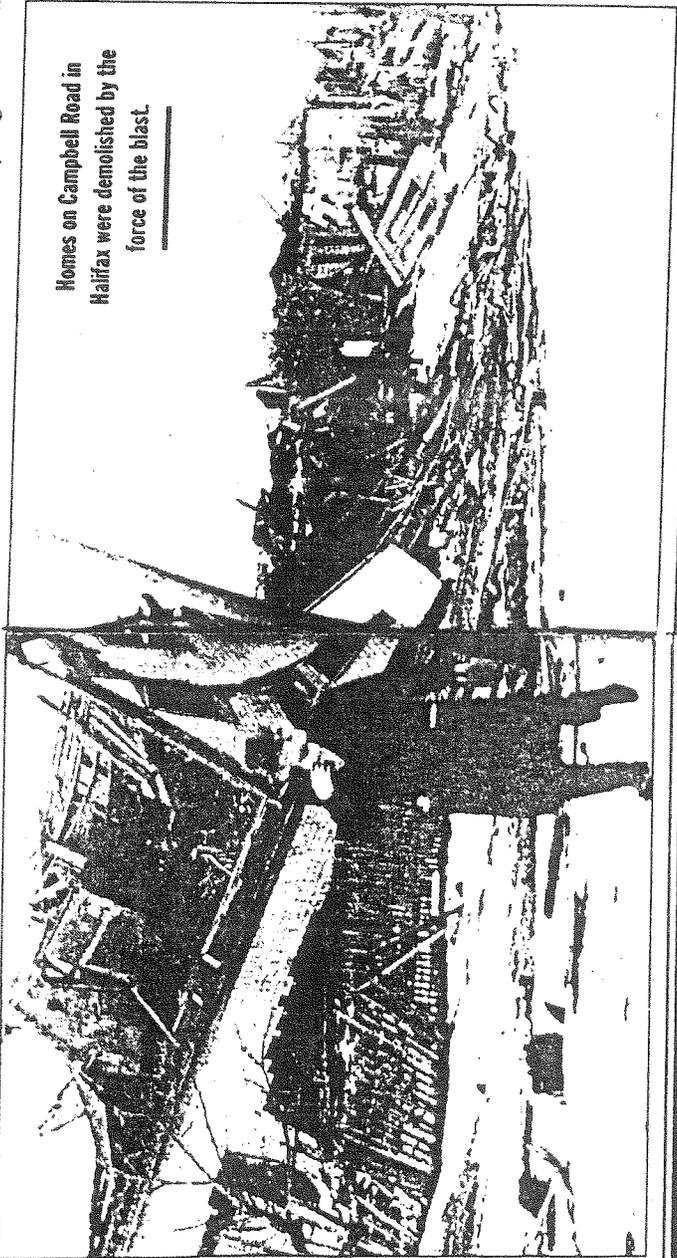
Within the first second of the blast, the *Mont Blanc* disappeared in a ball of flaming gases. The blast waves then struck out at Halifax and nearby Dartmouth. The ship was rendered into 3,000 tons of burning metallic fragments, which became deadly missiles as they hurtled through the air, falling on those below. Its half-ton anchor shank, for instance, was hurled to a spot two miles away.

In the harbor around the explosion, large ships were stripped and small ships

simply disappeared. In the city, concrete structures crumbled and wooden buildings were blown away. Acres of dockland were leveled. The freight yards were obliterated, with tracks torn from their beds and freight cars thrown out across the harbor. The railway station walls cracked, and its glass and iron roof fell in. Streets disappeared as schools, shops, factories, houses, and churches caved in, were shattered, or burst. All the glass within 20 miles of the harbor was shattered, and the glass then swept through the air as deadly blades and splinters. Huge rocks were scooped up from the sea and hurled into the air to crash back to earth. The city burned as millions of cubic feet of gas blazed and the toppled stoves in shattered houses released live coals. A three-mile column of smoke and gases mushroomed into the sky above the destroyed North End. Windows shivered in Truro, 60 miles away, and crockery rattled in Prince Edward Island, 125 miles away.

As a result of the explosion, the harbor bed opened and the sea rushed in to fill the opening. A monstrous wave 13 feet high crashed through the harbor, tearing from their moorings ships that hadn't already been obliterated and carrying tugboats far inshore.

Then, as if the unleashed elements of air, earth, water, and fire were not enough, the worst blizzard in years hit Halifax. Driving winds, bitter cold, and heavy snows fell upon the beaten city and its people. While many died far from the explosion, some



Homes on Campbell Road in Halifax were demolished by the force of the blast.

DIVER STORY!

lived who were amazingly close to it. We learn from writer Archibald MacMechan, whose account of the event was later published in *The Halifax Explosion*, that boxer Bernie "The Kid" O'Neil's house was directly opposite the point at which the *Mont Blanc* blew up. After the explosion O'Neil found himself pinned down by the burning kitchen stove. Only he and his wife, Annie, remained alive of the 18 people who were living in the house. Weighing only 105 pounds and injured herself, Annie managed to lift the heavy, burning stove off her husband. Freed but unable to walk, he begged her to leave him to save herself. Her answer: "I'll never leave you, Bernie. If I can't save you, I'll die with you." Annie then dragged the Kid, his legs over her shoulders, to the harbor, where she bathed him in sea water and covered his naked body with her skirt. A policeman helped them to the infirmary. As the Kid said, "She ought to have been a prize-fighter herself."

The bravery of those who survived helped many escape horrible deaths. When the explosion occurred, John Gammon, Chief Master-at-Arms, R.C.N., of the depot ship *Niobe*, was supervising two divers who were climbing down a ladder to work underwater on a concrete foundation for a crane. The explosion carried Gammon 20 feet and threw him violently to the ground. Regaining his feet, he realized, horrified that the divers would surely die because they were no longer receiving air. The building holding the pump was demolished, the pump had stopped, and the sailors who had been manning it were dead or beyond help.

Gammon therefore commanded Able Seaman Walter Critch to man the pump. Critch did so by holding the roof of the fallen building with one hand and turning the handle of the pump with the other, a job that ordinarily took four men. As twisted metal and shattered concrete fell about him, Gammon ran to

the ladder. The water had receded in the first phase of the tidal wave, and half-suffocating, the two stunned divers staggered about below in chest-high water. Gammon knew he had to get the men to safety before the sea rushed back to kill them. Somehow he managed to untangle the lines and guide the men, weighed down by their equipment and fainting from lack of air, back to the ladder. He then helped them to the top of the ladder as the tidal wave struck the pier. For this he received the Order of the British Empire. But that was no consolation for the loss of his two youngest children, who were never found.

Sinking in the ice-cold water, he was sucked farther and farther down into a whirlpool.

Chief Petty Officer William King, an instructor in the Royal Naval College, was in the chemistry lab looking out the window at the fire on the *Mont Blanc*, when it exploded. When King was brought out of the ruins, he was thought to be dead and was taken to an improvised morgue. On Saturday, two days later, King regained consciousness, but was unable to see, move, or even speak. He was horrified to realize that those above him were removing the cloth from his face to identify him before burial. He finally forced sufficient strength into his fingers to grab a passing soldier, who screamed upon feeling the hand of a dead man.

Able Seaman William Becker survived continuous encounters with death. Becker was one of the crew of the *HMS Highflyer* on Atlantic escort duty. Lieutenant Commander T. K. Triggs, R.N., and Lieutenant James Rayward Ruffles, R.N.R., set off with Becker and four other sailors in the

ship's whaler to try to get aboard the *Mont Blanc* during the initial deck fire and drop her anchor so she wouldn't set the pier on fire. Arriving too late to do so, Commander Triggs decided that the *Stella Maris*, which was alongside, should try to tug the *Mont Blanc* into the shipping channel, where the fire boats could control the flames.

Triggs ordered Becker and the others from the *Highflyer* to set off in the whaler for the *Imo*. Seconds later, the *Mont Blanc* exploded. Triggs was killed instantly. The whaler was lifted intact 30 feet into the air and hurled across the channel. Seconds before the boat struck the sea again, Becker fell clear. Sinking in the ice-cold water, he was sucked farther and farther down into a whirlpool.

Seconds from death, Becker popped back up to the surface as the whirlpool disappeared. His strength ebbing and his spirits failing, he doubted he could reach the shore. Yet somehow he did. He was found and revived beside an open furnace. He then was rowed back to his ship and put into sick bay where he eventually recovered, the only man to survive of those who had set off in the whaler.

Seven-year-old Edith O'Connell had run with her aunt, cousin, and sister to the parapet overlooking Pier 6 to watch the *Mont Blanc* while it was burning. The explosion a few minutes later killed all those standing beside her; the little girl was tossed into the air and the clothes were ripped from her body. While she was lying on the ground unconscious, the tidal wave hit her, sweeping her along with a mass of wood and metal and throwing her back onto the wharf. When she regained consciousness, Edith could not see, an arm and a leg were smashed, and she was badly cut. Using her good arm and leg, she pulled herself through the debris, crawling over corpses on the way, but eventually lost consciousness again. A rescue party found her and rushed her to the

hospital, where she lay in a coma for six days. Her father, who had been granted compassionate leave from the Royal Flying Corps, found on arriving in Halifax that his mother, brothers, sister, wife, and younger children were dead. He was told that Edith could not possibly have survived. Sadly, he went away. Edith recovered, but never was able to locate her father.

In any catastrophe it seems impossible to explain why some live and some die. In Halifax, in so many instances it appeared to be chance alone that saved a person. In one house in the dockyard where many men were killed, one even beheaded by debris falling from the sky, a baby lay asleep on the second floor of the home. The explosion ruined the house, but the baby lived because a closet door fell across his cot, protecting him from the falling timber and plaster. On another street an 18-month-old girl was found alive in the smoldering debris of her house 26 hours after the explosion. Because she had been trapped under a stove, protected by the protruding ashpan, she was known afterward as the "ashpan baby."

On June 9, 1985, ten bronze church bells from the United Memorial Church of Halifax were transferred to a permanent monument in the Richmond area of town, the section most devastated by the explosion. The designer of the memorial, Keith Graham, intended the strong upthrust shape of the structure to symbolize the rebirth of the city. At the dedication ceremony, many survivors of the disaster heard the sound of the bells peal out over what was once their neighborhood.

Each year on December 6 at 9 A.M., a memorial service is held at the bell tower. The hymns sung for the unidentified dead in 1917 are sung once again, and the bells ring out "Abide with Me" all the way to Halifax harbor.

MATTISON, Albert Charles AM (Posthumous)
Acting Boatswain - Royal Canadian Navy (HMCS Niobe)

BEARD, Edward S. AM (Posthumous)
Stoker Petty Officer - Royal Navy Canadian Volunteer Reserve (HMCS Niobe)

DAVIS, Thomas N. AM (exchanged for a GC 18 July 1972)
Leading Seaman - Royal Navy (HMS Highflyer)

STONES, Robert AM
Able Seaman - Royal Navy (HMS Highflyer)

INCIDENT: 6 December 1917

Awarded Albert Medal (Bronze) for Saving Life at Sea.

On the 6th December 1917, the French steamer 'Mont Blanc' with a cargo of high explosives, and the Norwegian steamer 'Imo' were in collision in Halifax Harbour, Nova Scotia. Fire broke out on the 'Mont Blanc' immediately after the collision. The Commanding Officer of H.M.C.S. Niobe, which was lying in the harbour, on perceiving what had happened, sent away a steam-boat to see what could be done. Mr. Mattison and six men of the Royal Naval Canadian Volunteer Reserve volunteered to form the crew of this boat, but just as the boat got alongside the 'Mont Blanc' the ship blew up, and Mr. Mattison and the whole boat's crew lost their lives. The boat's crew were fully aware of the desperate nature of the work they were engaged on, and by their gallantry and devotion to duty they sacrificed their lives in the endeavour to save the lives of others.

Awarded Letters of Appreciation were the five crew members with Mattison and Beard: AB C.C. Wilson (RNCVR); AB A. Saunders (RNCVR); Stoker 2nd Class G.H. Yates (RNCVR); LS C.C. McMillan (RNCVR); AB F.P. Nickerson (RNCVR).

Note: Stoker Petty Officer Edward S. Beard, R.N.C.V.R. was part of the crew of H.M.C.S. Niobe's steam pinnace which went to the aid of the 'Mont Blanc' and he lost his life along with the rest of the crew.

Also awarded a Letter of Appreciation: Walter O'Reilly, Gunner, RCN.

TRIGGS, Tom Kenneth AM (Posthumous)
Acting Commander - Royal Navy (HMS Highflyer)
Awarded Albert Medal in Gold for Saving Life at Sea

BECKER, William AM
Able Seaman - Royal Navy (HMS Highflyer)
Awarded Albert Medal (Bronze) for Saving Life at Sea

INCIDENT: 6 December 1917

On the 6th December 1917 the French S.S. 'Mont Blanc' with a cargo of high explosives, and the Norwegian S.S. 'Imo' were in collision in Halifax Harbour, Nova Scotia. Fire broke out in the 'Mont Blanc' immediately after the collision, and the flames very quickly rose to a height of over 100 feet. The crew abandoned their ship and pulled towards the shore.

The captain of H.M.S. Highflyer, which was about a mile away, at once sent off a boat to see if anything could be done to prevent loss of life and Commander Triggs, volunteering for this duty, immediately got into the ship's whaler and pulled to the scene. A tug and the steamboat of H.M.C.S. Niobe were seen going there at the same time.

Triggs boarded the tug, and finding it was impossible to do anything for the 'Mont Blanc', decided to endeavour to get the 'Imo' away, giving directions accordingly to the tug. He returned to the whaler, and was pulling towards the bows of the 'Imo' which was about 300 yards from the 'Mont Blanc', to pass a line from her to the tug, when a tremendous explosion occurred.

Of the seven people in the whaler, one, Able Seaman Becker, was rescued alive on the Dartmouth shore, the remainder perished.

The above two and following two Albert Medals were not to Canadians but were awarded for an incident in Canada in association with the awards to Mattison and Beard. Trigg's medal is now on display in the Maritime Museum in Halifax.

Becker's medal was sold for \$9,500 in 1967.

INCIDENT: 6 December 1917

Both awarded Albert Medals (Bronze) for Saving Life at Sea.

On the 6th December 1917 the French S.S. 'Mont Blanc', with a cargo of high explosives, and the Norwegian S.S. 'Imo' were in collision in Halifax Harbour, Nova Scotia. Fire then broke out on the 'Mont Blanc', whose crew abandoned their ship and pulled to the shore. A few minutes later a tremendous explosion took place, and the tug 'Musquash' was seen to be on fire forward. The fire was increasing and there appeared to be a great danger of her getting adrift and being carried down to another vessel. As the 'Musquash' had a gun and ammunition on board there was a danger of a further explosion and consequent loss of life.

The captain of H.M.S. Highflyer hailed a private tug and asked her to take the 'Musquash' in tow, but as they were unwilling to board the 'Musquash' to get her in tow, the tug was brought alongside. H.M.S. Highflyer's Leading Seaman Davis and Able Seaman Stones immediately volunteered, and having been transferred by the tug to the burning 'Musquash', which had by this time broken adrift, they secured a line from her stern, by means of which she was towed into midstream. The line then parted, and Davis and Stones passed another line from the 'Musquash' to the pumping-lighter 'Lee', which had now arrived. They then both went forward to the burning part, and succeeded in getting to the ammunition, which was by this time badly scorched, pulled it away from the flames and threw it overboard. They then broke open the door of the galley, which was on fire inside, to enable the 'Lee' to play her hoses into it. They repeated the same thing with the cabin.

By their work they made it possible to subdue the fire and save further damage and loss of life. At any moment whilst they were on board the 'Musquash' the ammunition might have exploded.

The derelict ship 'Mont Blanc' drifted from the Dartmouth side of the harbour to the Halifax side and exploded near Pier 6. There was extensive damage to the city. Casualties to naval personnel were 20 to HMS Highflyer and Canadian naval personnel suffered 20 killed, 2 missing and 8 injured.

Two Canadians and a Newfoundlander were also awarded medals for their actions in the Halifax explosion.

Chief Engine Room Artificer 1st Class James Hay, RCN (Ammunition Ship Picton) was awarded the only Meritorious Service Medal (Naval) ever given to a Canadian.

Able Seaman Walter J. Critch, Royal Naval Reserve, from Newfoundland also received a Meritorious Service Medal (Naval).

Chief Master of Arms J.T. Gammon, Royal Canadian Navy was awarded Member, Order of the British Empire (MBE).

Two divers from HMCS Niobe were working on the concrete foundation of a crane bed off the dockyard pier with six men manning the diver's pumps, watched by Chief Master at Arms John Gammon, RCN. The explosion of the Mont Blanc killed at least 1,963 people, injured 9,000 and blinded 199 as well as levelling much of the north end of Halifax. At the time of the explosion one diver was in the water and the other was descending the ladder. The explosion killed five of the six men manning the pumps but both divers survived. However, the man on the ladder had been blown into the water, tangling the air hoses. The only survivor of the six, Able Seaman Walter Critch, RNR, realized that the immediate problem was to get air to the divers. He rushed to the pump, found it undamaged, but jammed under the fallen pump house 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 off 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 got their face masks open. The tidal wave that was created by the explosion was now on the way back and Critch and Gammon managed to get the air hoses untangled and both divers to the ladder before it hit.

THE SCREECH STORY

LONG BEFORE ANY LIQUOR BOARD WAS CREATED TO TAKE ALCOHOL UNDER IT'S BENEVOLENT WING, THE JAMAICAN RUM WHICH WAS EVENTUALLY TO BE KNOWN AS SCREECH WAS A MAINSTAY OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND DIET. SALT FISH WAS SHIPPED TO THE WEST INDIES IN EXCHANGE FOR RUM. THE FISH BECAME THE NATIONAL DISH TO JAMAICANS AND THE RUM BECAME THE TRADITIONAL DISH OF NEWFOUNDLANDERS.

NOT BEING OVERLY CONCERNED WITH ALCOHOLIC CONTENT, THE EARLY FISHERMEN TENDED TO DRINK THE RUM AT INCREDIBLY HIGH STRENGTH WITH NO ATTEMPT TO TEMPER THE TASTE. WHEN THE GOVERNMENT TOOK CONTROL OF THE LIQUOR BUSINESS IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY THEY PUT THE RUM IN A VERY SOPHISTICATED UNLABELLED BOTTLE, BUT FORTUNATELY DID NOT ALTER THE RUM ITSELF. THIS DELIGHTFUL PRODUCT MIGHT HAVE CONTINUED INDEFINITELY AS A NAMELESS RUM EXCEPT FOR THE INFLUX OF AMERICAN SERVICEMEN TO THE ISLAND DURING WORLD WAR II.

AS THE STORY GOES, THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE FIRST DETACHMENT WAS TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND HOSPITALITY FOR THE FIRST TIME AND WAS OFFERED A DROP OF RUM AS AN AFTER DINNER DRINK. SEEING HIS HOST TOSS BACK THE LIQUOR WITH NARY A QUIVER, THE UNSUSPECTING AMERICAN ADHERED TO LOCAL CUSTOM AND DOWNED THE DRINK IN ONE GULP.

THE LOOK OF SHOCK AND THE GLORIOUS SHADES OF COLOR ON THE AMERICAN'S FACE WERE OVERSHADOWED BY THE BLOODCURDLING HOWL MADE BY THE POOR FELLOW AS SOON AS HE MANAGED TO REGAIN HIS BREATH. SYMPATHETIC PERSONS FROM MILES AROUND RUSHED TO THE HOUSE TO ASSIST THE POOR CREATURE IN SUCH OBVIOUS AGONY AND OF COURSE TO SATISFY THEIR CURIOSITY AS TO WHAT WAS GOING ON. AMONG THE FIRST TO ARRIVE WAS A GARRULOUS OLD AMERICAN SERGEANT WHO POUNDED ON THE DOOR AND DEMANDED, "WHAT THE CRIPES WAS THAT SCREECH?" THE TACITURN NEWF WHO HAD ANSWERED THE DOOR REPLIED, "THE SCREECH? 'TIS THE RUM, ME SON."

THUS WAS BORN A LEGEND. AS WORD OF THE INCIDENT WAS PASSED AROUND, THE SOLDIERS, DETERMINED TO TRY THIS MYSTERIOUS "SCREECH" AND FINDING IT'S EFFECTS AS DEVASTATING AS THE NAME IMPLIES, ADOPTED IT AS THEIR FAVOURITE.

A NEWFOUNDLANDER IS A FRUGAL PERSON. HE WOULD EAT A CODFISH TO THE LAST BONE, VEGETABLE TO THE LAST LEAF. HE BELIEVES RELIGIOUSLY, "WASTE NOT, WANT NOT."

SO NOW I OFFER YOU A PORTION OF THE NECTAR OF NEWFOUNDLAND THAT YOU MAY DRINK IN THE TRUE NEWFOUNDLAND FASHION.

"LONG MAY YOUR BIG JIB DRAW"