

OPENING DOORS

By
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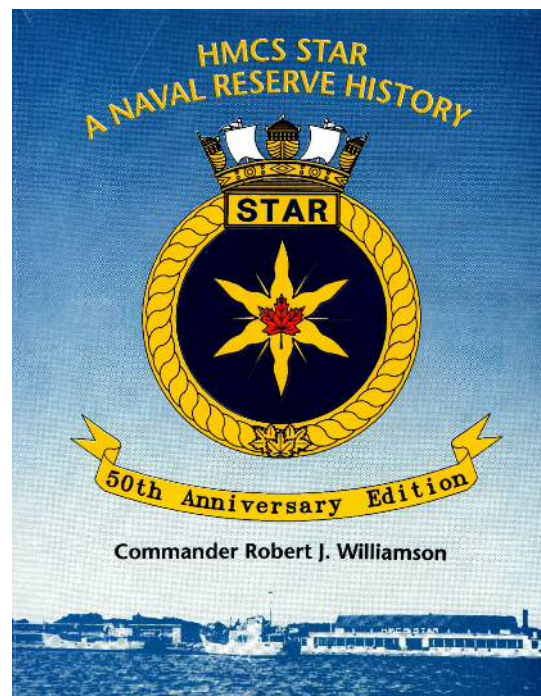
HMCS STAR Commanding Officer 1985-1988

Finding Ways To Deal With The
Nation's Maritime Blindness.

INTRODUCTION

As one of HMCS STAR's former commanding officers, I appreciate having the opportunity to speak about my role in dealing with what I believe is a primary mandate of the Naval Reserve; Dealing With Canada's Maritime Blindness.

Over my thirty years of service in the Naval Reserve, it was a subject I had to come to grips with, sooner or later. It was one of the reasons why I wrote the 150 page picture history of Hamilton's Naval Reserve Division. In reality, without a recorded history or our understanding of who we are and what we do, we all suffer from a form of blindness. So with this lecture, let me open your eyes.



“OPENING DOORS”

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CONTENDING WITH THE
NATION'S MARITIME
BLINDNESS



How do you make people recognize the value of something they cannot see? How can a continental nation as big as Canada learn to appreciate the importance of a navy? Its no wonder that Maritime Commander, Admiral McFadden, claimed during the Centennial of the Canadian Navy in 2010 that, “Canada Suffers from Maritime Blindness”. If that is true, then we, as Naval Reservist, have not been doing our job.

When Rear Admiral Walter Hose, Director of the Naval Service created the Naval Reserve in 1923, his plan was to create a “**naval presence**” in every major population centre across Canada. His intension was to win the hearts and minds of every citizen. But this just does not happen intuitively. It must be taught and admired. People must be drawn in by example and a belief in the value of maintaining our naval heritage.



When appointed to the position of Executive Officer of Hamilton's Naval Reserve Division, in 1982, I realized that I had inherited the mandate of Vice Admiral Hose. My naval world had expanded and suddenly there were many things to do and a **lot of doors that had to be opened**. The first one happened to be the closet door of my assigned office.

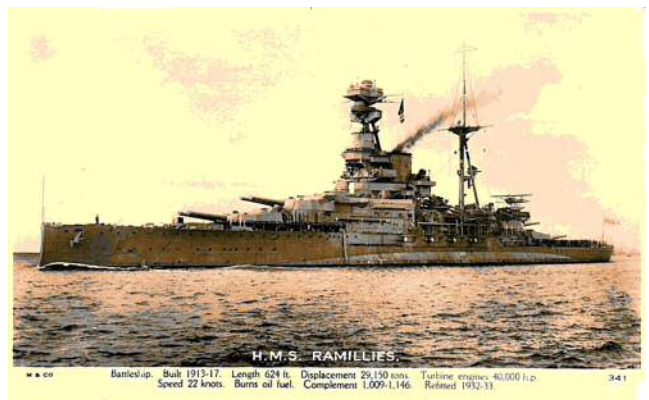
There, buried beneath a collection of closet detritus was a 180 pound bronze battleship bell. This was no “ding-a-ling” either! At 60 centimeters in diameter and inscribed HMS RAMILLIES, **it demanded my attention!**

My investigation led to a University Naval Training Division graduate of HMCS STAR; Lieutenant Bob Morris RCNR. As a former Navy League Sea Cadet at Delta Secondary School, he became one of 25 senior sea cadets from across Canada selected to attend an exchange program with England in 1947. While in Portsmouth the cadets were accommodated in HMS RAMILLIES a decommissioned British battleship.



Sea cadet exchange 1947. Photo by Bob Morris

Their Divisional Officer, LCDR Moffat, recognizing that the ship's bell was about to be salvaged, arranged to have it brought to Canada. When he passed away, the bell was presented to HMCS STAR on permanent loan, provided it would be suitably displayed in his memory. The bell sat forgotten through a series of administrative changes awaiting an active heritage patron like myself.



I learned that the bell was a rare naval artifact of a Royal Sovereign Class British Dreadnought that played a significant role in defending convoys from enemy battleships like; Gneisenau, Scharnhorst and Bismark during the frightening and forgotten German “surface-raider phase” of the Battle of the Atlantic in 1940-41. Adding its 15 inch caliber guns to Halifax convoys helped keep the enemy surface raiders at bay and later in Normandy it was the largest bombardment support ship at the Canadian Invasion Beach on D-Day.

I think it is safe to say that no other Naval Reserve Division in Canada has such an impressive Battle of Atlantic naval artifact. Thus in 1984 I had the bell mounted and dedicated as

HMCS STAR's RCN 75th Anniversary memorial project.

Bob Morris, age 94, may be the last surviving member of that 1947 sea cadet exchange. But most importantly, because of that sea cadet exchange we have a magnificent artifact mounted on STAR's quarterdeck to remind us and visitors **every day of the importance that the navy served in the Battle of the Atlantic and D-Day.**

Photo by R. Williamson



Then I opened another door. It was also associated with the Admiral's concept of "**naval presence**". It revealed the valuable resources in the halls of Naval Veteran Associations. That is where I found the **living memorials** of the navy and the Battle of the Atlantic. My task was to find a way to put that experience to work in winning the hearts and minds of young Canadians.

We all know how reluctant veterans are to stand up in front of a large audience and speak about their war experiences. But as a teacher, I wanted their stories for a Remembrance Day project. Through private interviews with many veterans I put a series of illustrated teaching programs together for schools. The programs proved so successful that many community groups called upon me as a Remembrance Day speaker.

One of my programs featured Alex Tennant a young carpenter who joined the RCN at HMCS STAR in 1940. His story proved to be very popular. While projecting this image of him in uniform at a senior women's club meeting, one of the ladies let out a whoop and started to giggle. As it turned out he was her first boy friend.



Tennant family photo

Signalman Tennant joined the destroyer HMCS Iroquois, sister ship of Haida and Huron, on escort



in the north Atlantic. He participated in the rescue of survivors from a torpedoed troop ship on its way to the Mediterranean.

In December 1943 the Canadian destroyers were assigned to Convoy JW55B on the Murmansk Run to northern Russia. This Battle of the North Atlantic convoy route was infamous as the most dangerous combination of weather, land based **air** attacks, submarines and pocket battleships hiding in Norwegian fiords.

On duty in Iroquois' radio room on December 25, 1943, Alex received a code breaker's warning that the battle cruiser Scharnhorst had come out of hiding and was tracking the convoy. He was never so frightened in his life. The destroyers feigned torpedo attacks in the dark, keeping Scharnhorst at bay until a shadowing British Task Force including the battleship Duke of York caught up as the brief daylight in the high arctic faded. The enemy battle cruiser was sunk by torpedoes and long range 14 inch shells. There were only 36 survivors out of a crew of 1,200 men.

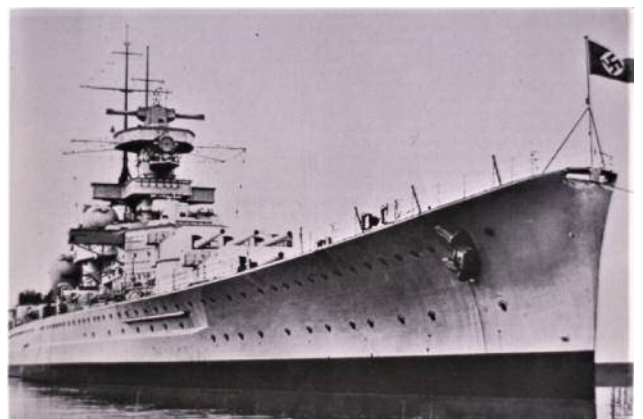


Photo credit; Fighting Ships of World War II



The primary reason for telling Tennant's story is to illustrate the importance of recognizing a Naval Presence. Although several thousand Canadians served in the North Atlantic, the Canadian government failed to acknowledge any service medal for that most dangerous theatre of the war. This medallion was struck in England by the Royal Navy Association for arctic service.

Consequently as Commanding Officer of STAR, in 1988, I was very pleased to be notified that the Russian Ambassador was coming to Hamilton during my appointment, to present our local naval veterans, including Alex, with a 1945 Murmansk Medal. He stated that it demonstrated how the Russian people will always remember Canada's role in protecting the vital Murmansk Convoys. Even though the Queen had sanctioned the medal, it still was not accepted into the Canadian Order of Precedence.



It took another twenty-five years before Governor General Johnston announced in 2012 that the British Arctic Star Medal had finally been gazetted in Canada. It was a little late for many Battle of Atlantic veterans like Alex who passed away in 2002, but better late than never. However it does make the point that we must constantly be on guard to prevent the pervasive spread of maritime blindness in Canada.

WEARING OF ARCTIC STAR APPROVED FOR CANADIANS

THE ARCTIC STAR, a Second World War medal created by the British government in 1912, has been accepted into the Canadian Order of Precedence. This means that eligible Canadian veterans may receive the award and wear it with their other medals.

The medal was accepted by Governor General David Johnston on the advice of Prime Minister Stephen Harper and published in the Canada Gazette. The change was announced April 30 by Veterans Affairs Minister Julian Fantino.

The first of the Arctic Star medals were presented to four veterans by Fantino May 22 in Victoria, 2014.

During the Second World War, Allied convoys sailed across the Arctic Ocean to deliver vital supplies to Russia through the ports of Murmansk and Archangel.

The Arctic Star is awarded for service of any length between Sept. 4, 1939 and May 8, 1945, recognizing the particular severity of the conditions experienced on the convoys. While the primary intent is to recognize those members of the navy and merchant navy who served on the Arctic convoys, eligibility is extended to include all who served north of the Arctic Circle during the war, including those in the army and air forces.

The Legion had written to the Governor General and federal government urging that acceptance be granted for this new award (Legion Urges Approval Of Arctic Star, May/June).

"There are some 200 veterans of this action still alive today and we are so pleased these brave veterans are now authorized to proudly wear the Arctic Star with the honour and recognition they deserve," said Dominion President Gordon Moore.

Applications can be printed online at veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/medals-decorations/campaign-stars-medals-1939-1954/arctic_star. They can also be received by calling 1-866-522-2122 or e-mailing awards-citations@vac-acc.gc.ca.



The Arctic Star has been accepted into the Canadian Order of Precedence.

PHOTO: JIM MANTON/LEGION

Being appointed to command gives one a different perspective. Entering training spaces during Rounds made me realize that one of the best tools that I had to promote a **naval presence** was right under my nose. What better P R can you get for all occasions than a military band! And what greater satisfaction could Walter Hose have than to see his dream of a Naval Reserve Headquarters established in the middle of the country with the creation of a Great Lakes Training Centre in Hamilton. While laying this corner stone in 1954



next door to HMCS STAR, he must have reveled in its significance. Certainly Commander J. H. Curtis, astutely recognized the prestige that had befallen his Naval Reserve Unit along with the inherited ceremonial requirements of a naval headquarters on one of the greatest lake systems in the world. He promptly established a military band program at STAR and recruited a local music teacher, Ralph Whetstone, with 20 years of music experience from Saltfleet High School.

The music program took on a very professional quality in 1957 when Joe Ward, a World War II naval veteran and Delta Collegiate music teacher, who would become the school system's music superintendent, took over as bandmaster. He added concert music to the march repertoire as well as a dance combo for social functions. It was about this time that the Staff Officer Bands in the Naval Reserve Headquarters (COND) began to assemble musicians from across Canada to create a Composite Band for the summer program at GLTC. Naturally it included many of STAR's musicians.



By 1960 and for the next several years under the direction of another Delta music teacher, CPO Murray Black and bandmaster CPO Bill Hodgson,

an ex-guardsmen, the band developed a very high performance level and won the Naval Officers' Association of Canada Trophy for Band Efficiency in 1964 and 1966. Such high standards attracted a great deal of public attention, the kind that Admiral Hose was looking for with performances in public venues such as Delta Collegiate's 800 seat auditorium, two weeks at the Calgary Stampede, and massed band extravaganzas at the C.N.E. and Ottawa.



However, by the end of the decade in 1970, all the naval presence achieved by Vice Admiral Walter Hose was wiped out for the next dozen years by the self-serving, ill-conceived Armed Forces Unification policy introduced by the Liberal Minister of Defense, Paul Hellyer. GLTC and several Reserve Divisions closed, COND moved back to Halifax, training ships disappeared from the Great Lakes, distinctive service uniforms were taken away and morale plummeted. Hellyer's promise of "More defense for less money," was nothing more than political propaganda.

When the Progressive Conservative government returned to power in 1980 after an absence of two decades, the slow process of **de-unification** began, encouraged by the 70th Anniversary of the RCN and the return of naval traditions with the Nova Scotia Naval Tattoo in Halifax. As XO I asked the Band Chief to outfit STAR's band in traditional navy blue uniforms for all public performances.



When the Maritime Commander, V-Adm. Wood, directed that all celebrations for the Canadian Navy's 75th Anniversary in 1985, be directed to show that the naval service was alive and well, I organized a one-of-a-kind waterfront tattoo entitled "NAVY 75". From this point forward the band was given every encouragement to promote a **naval presence** in **c e r e m o n i a l s**, **a n n i v e r s a r i e s**, community concerts, dinner performances and parades like the Reserve Composite Band shown here with several STAR musicians including Band Officer LCDR. G. Falconi and Drum Major P. Williamson in downtown Montreal.



Following the Walter Hose theme one step further, as Commanding Officer of HMCS STAR in 1985, blowing the ship's horn, figuratively speaking, was my responsibility. Being so far removed from the ocean and Maritime Command in Halifax, promoting a **naval presence** meant being creative and exploring every opportunity.

I rationalized that being located on the Great Lakes provided an opportunity to think BIG! Why not have the last of our 30-year old post-war St. Laurent Class Destroyer Escorts, like HMCS Assiniboine shown here and being used in 1988 as a floating classroom, towed from Halifax to Hamilton? Then convert it into a training facility for sea cadets and a naval museum, preserving it as an example of one of the first naval destroyer completely designed and built in Canada. What better way to create a naval presence !



Photo credit: For Posterity's Sake, an RCN Historical Project

However, I must admit that I had an ulterior motive. Hamilton's naval base, built quickly during the austerity of WW2, was badly outdated and in need of replacement. A retired warship berthed at dockside would provide an ideal temporary facility during new construction. Thus a plan of action was sent to the Maritime Commander in Halifax and to the Heritage Minister in Ottawa. But with military budgets cut to the bone, the Admiral was not enthused. While I thought it was a **brilliant multi-use P. R. concept**, the Admiral viewed it as throwing money into a "hole in the water", and the idea appeared doomed to sink.

But if you plant a seed you never know what may grow. In 1990 Toronto, with great expectations, made a bid to host the 1996 Summer Olympics on their Ontario Place waterfront site. Their plan did not include HMCS HAIDA, a rusting WW2 memorial warship that had graced Exhibition Park

since 1970. This provided an opportunity for the Federal Heritage Minister to get on board. The fact that the Heritage Minister happened to be an opportunistic and outspoken Member of Parliament from Hamilton, named Sheila Copps, shown here with the PM, helped to make all the difference.



Being aware of my original museum plan, our perceptive Member of Parliament had to appreciate the advantage of HMCS STAR's bay front pier and with the involvement of Parks Canada, we inherited a stunning **Battle of Atlantic memorial** recognized as Canada's "**fightingest**" ship in the navy.



Haida alongside Hamilton's Naval Reserve Division

Recently designated "Ceremonial Flagship" of the RCN, HMCS HAIDA is the last of Canada's WW2 and Korean War Tribal Class Destroyers and the last of nine Canadian destroyers that were present at D-Day. Now, by combining the City's War of 1812 Naval Memorial at our Ontario Lakefront Confederation Park with our Ceremonial Flagship at STAR, we can present a two hundred year naval lineage on the Great Lakes.

Hamilton & Scourge National Historic Site of Canada



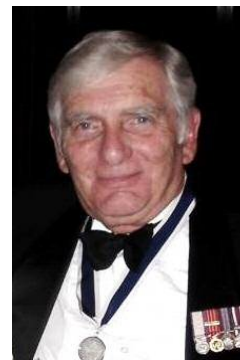
The annual memorial service for the fifty-three American sailors v

Confederation Park

These are examples of how the hearts and minds of fellow Canadians can be reached and how the mandate of Admiral Hose to promote a regional naval presence can be achieved. It is just a matter of perception and "Opening Doors".

Unless otherwise credited, photo sources are from HMCS STAR archives.

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1985-1988