

FreshWater

A JOURNAL OF GREAT LAKES MARINE HISTORY

Volume 6 Number 1, 1991 * Published by the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes at Kingston*



**Grant Macdonald's
Navy**

**A Special Theme
Issue of FreshWater.**

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The subject matter for articles and other submissions to **FreshWater** will reflect the broad interests of the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes at Kingston, an institution which seeks to preserve and interpret the marine history of the Great Lakes, including the hinterland waterways of Ontario and the historic routes to tidewater. Any aspect of this heritage—archaeological, economic, social, technological, political—is eligible for treatment. Topics external to the lakes, but which show a significant connection to the history of the freshwater marine, will also be considered for publication. The views expressed in **FreshWater** are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes at Kingston

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Editorial

The Grant Macdonald Collection at the Marine Museum is representative of Canadians from coast to coast. As the years pass the portraits of this "ships company" of men and women will become a very personal and eloquent memorial to them and the idea of service to one's country.

In an age when it is popular to denigrate anything military the profound impression I have, after meeting many of the subjects portrayed by Mr. Macdonald is that of concern, interest and continued friendships with fellow shipmates. Serving in World War II was a job that had to be done — can anyone now doubt this — and along the way life was lived as best one could. Most of the portraits are of ordinary men and women who joined up, "did their bit" then returned as quickly as they could to civilian life.

There are many who have helped to assemble the collection. They include members of two appeal committees, one west and the other east: Mr. W. Houston, Mr. Fred Stinson, and Mr. Oswald K. Schenk in Toronto; Mr. Alan Grant, Museum Chairman, Mr. F.A. MacLachlan and Mr. Bogart Trumpour in Kingston. In addition we had the support of Mr. George Vosper, a most generous patron, serving and retired members of the Royal Canadian Navy, our corporate sponsor ALCAN and the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Communications. Finally let us not forget those 400 Canadians from Coast to Coast and donors from the United States and Europe who contributed the funds needed to acquire the collection.

A special thanks to Frances K. Smith and Dr. W.A.B. Douglas who contributed their time and "art" to this special theme issue of *FreshWater*.

Maurice D. Smith
Curator
Marine Museum of the Great Lakes at Kingston

Grant Macdonald:

The Artist, the Protagonist and the War at Sea

by Frances K. Smith



Self Portrait - Grant Macdonald - 1909-1987. MMGLK 1990.03.269

When Grant Macdonald enlisted in the Royal Canadian Volunteer Reserve in 1943, the Directorate of Special Services commissioned him as an official war artist with the rank of Sub-Lieutenant. This enlightened appointment was fostered, in part, by the critical acclaim he had received for his drawings of theatre personalities in London and New York and, more importantly, by his one man show at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in February, 1943. This exhibition consisted of sketches of Canadian servicemen, many of them made for the *Montreal Gazette*, and covering all three services. Grant Macdonald had brought his undisputed skills as a draftsman out of the glittering world of international theatre into the harsher realities of a country at war. A review of this exhibition included these comments.¹

He sets down what he sees — though on occasion he has placed his models in warlike settings — and, knowing that the drawings would come under the most unrelenting critics, officers and men of the forces depicted, he has been meticulous as to details. Further, he has the faculty of making a rifle or a gun look like metal, bayonet and dagger are convincingly steel — and so it is with the simulation of all materials. What adds greatly to the value of the collection is his choice of types — they are individual portraits and, with due respect to many of his models, there are some that are, professionally of course, pretty ugly customers to tangle with.

His work at this time had been a voluntary and self-disciplined approach towards the war effort — a unique contribution honouring the servicemen. It was a natural starting point for his assigned task in the RCNVR — to record naval personnel, of all ranks, at their daily tasks, whether in training establishments, in ships, or on operational bases.

The naval tradition is one of discipline. Entering into the service entailed no fundamental change for Grant Macdonald; the self-discipline reflected in his approach to drawing permeated also his way of life, mingled with a warm sensitivity towards human relations and a rather gentle, puckish sense of humour. In 1968 he commented to Barry Thorne



1.

Albert Wesley Baker, Acting Commander (SB) R.C.N.V.R.

A native of Walkerton, Ontario, Commander Baker joined the Navy in January, 1943. He is Staff Officer for University Training with the commanding Officer, Reserve Divisions.

Description taken from "Portraits of the Officers in Charge of the 21st Officers' Disciplinary Course in H.M.C.S. Cornwallis and of the Twenty-three Members of the Class, Nov./Dec. 1943".

MMGLK 1990.003.200

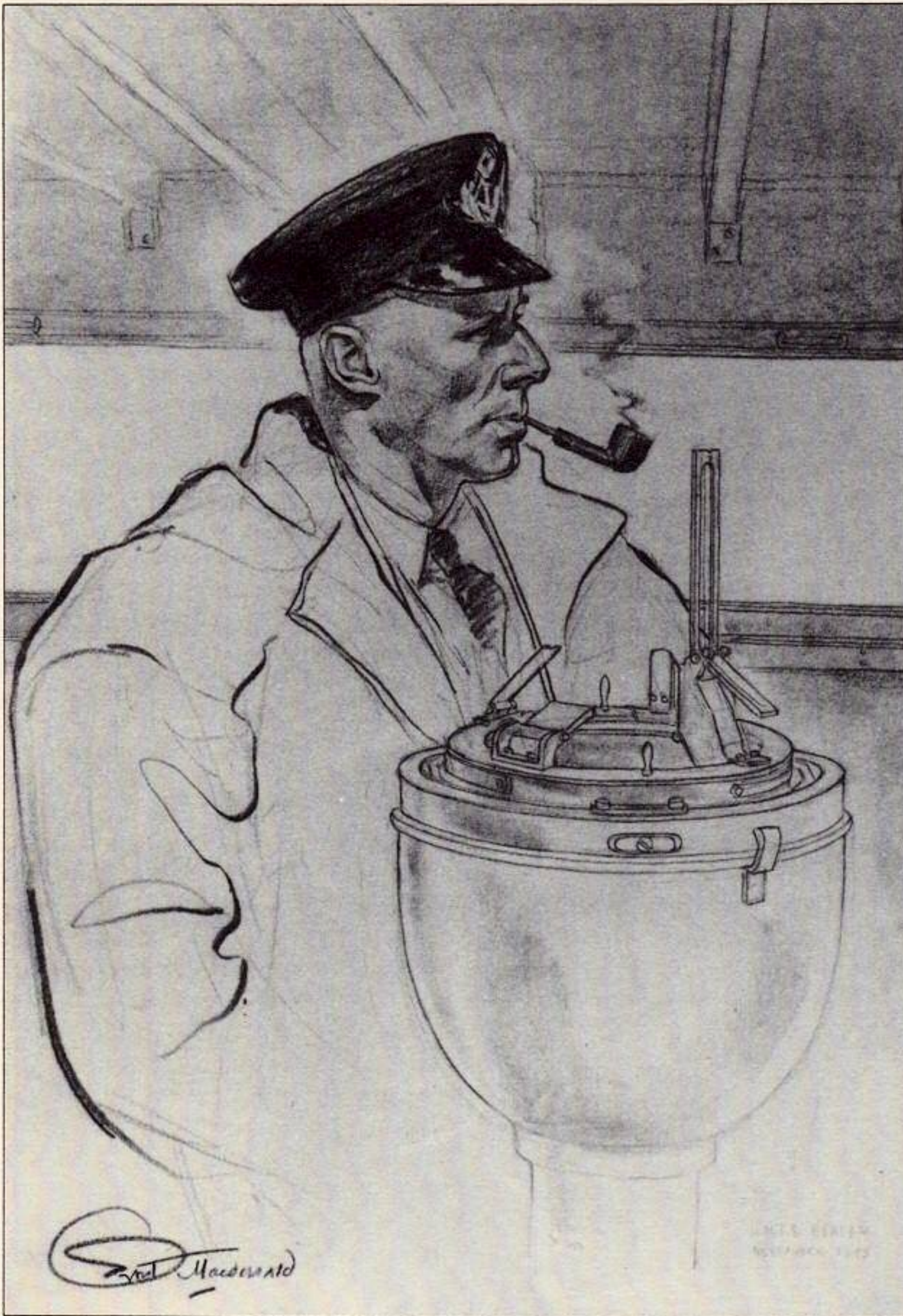
that "For a long time discipline was a dirty word, but I find my freedom through discipline."²

In this present exhibition, selected from over 300 sketches and coloured drawings made during his service with the navy, between 1943 and 1946, we find a gradual evolution and refinement of technique, a selective emphasis on the drama inherent in the situation depicted, and a subtle deepening of the characterization of individuals. A better understanding of Grant's significant achievement as a portrait artist — and these drawings are portraits — can be gained by looking at his training and experience, at his methods of working and its relevance in the historical context of the painted portrait.

In 1930, after some early training with Canadian artist Carl Ahrens, and some sessions at the Ontario College of Art, he

was ready for new challenges. He left Canada for London, England. There he quickly became known for his drawings of celebrities in the world of the theatre for London publications and he attended Heatherly's Art School, 1932-33. Until 1940 he commuted between the theatre and ballet worlds of London and New York and had drawings published in journals in both countries, and some in Canada. In New York, he had the opportunity, during the winter months, to study at the Art Students' League under the renowned anatomy teacher, George Bridgman. This experience was of inestimable value to his "obsession with the human form" as a subject for art.

We look back to the Renaissance to find similar concentration on anatomic analysis as necessary for the understanding and rendering of the human form, as we find in the studies of



2.

Hubert Charles Walmesley, Acting Lieutenant-Commander, R.C.N.R.

Deal in Kent, England, is the birthplace of Lt. Commander Walmesley. At sea from the age of thirteen years, he left the Merchant Service to serve in the R.N.R. during the Great War. Between the two wars he followed the sea in cable ships out of Halifax. Engaged in the supervision of anti-submarine defence on the East Coast until recently, Lt. Commander Walmesley is now Commanding Officer, H.M.C.S. *Beaver*, one of the training ships attached to H.M.C.S. Cornwallis.

Description taken from "Portraits of the Officers in Charge of the 21st Officers' Disciplinary Course in H.M.C.S. Cornwallis and of the Twenty-three Members of the Class, Nov./Dec. 1943".

MMGLK 1990.003.096

Leonardo da Vinci. The rise of the spirit of individualism in 15th century Italy was manifested in secular portraiture, particularly of males, by a forceful characterization, a sort of muscular energy and self-confidence, conveyed by emphasis on the bone structure and planes of the face and head. In the 16th century, Hans Holbein painted the sensitive portrait of the great humanist, Erasmus, now in the Louvre. He is depicted as the scholar in his study. Every line of the face and head, as he sits absorbed in his writing, is redolent of intellectual authority, earlier seen only in portraits of Fathers of the

Church. Such characterization can be achieved only when powers of observation and technique develop together, the eye and the hand, the one strengthening the other.

With this in mind, take some time to examine Grant's portraits of senior officers in the Navy. We can point to many examples, such as **Commander Baker, #1,*** (page 4) seated with his hat on the table so we see the full treatment of head and facial muscles; surely, also, we sense a rapprochement with the artist in the sensitivity of rendering the genial expression; **Lieut. Commander Walmesley, #2,** a veteran of the Navy

* Many of these portraits will appear in the exhibition "Grant Macdonald's Navy".



3.

HRH Countess of Athlone, Wife of the Earl of Athlone, the Governor General of Canada 1940–46. During World War II, she was the Honorary Commandant, Wrens, Royal Canadian Naval Service. MMGLK 1990.003.326



4.

Vice-Admiral G.C. Jones, C.B.,
R.C.N.

At the beginning of the war Admiral Jones served as the Commanding Officer Atlantic Coast. In 1944 he was promoted the Chief of Naval Staff.

MMGLK 1990.003.049

in the First War, is every bit the Commander; Princess Alice, #3, with subtle and delicate features which yet convey a completely mature and authoritative control through an eloquent, linear quality of draftsmanship; and the profile portrait of Vice-Admiral G.C. Jones of 1944, #4. In this latter portrait, a measure of Grant's success at visual characterization gains a further dimension by recalling some of William Sclater's personal comments about Vice-Admiral Jones.³

He was a seaman. One look at him made that obvious. His weatherbeaten countenance had been marked and tanned by the winds and waters of the seven seas. His look was keen and direct and he wasted no time in coming to the point...As we came to

know him we found him to be a richly human individual, with a quick appreciation and understanding of the difficulties which we brought to him for solution... Intensely practical, as befits a seaman, he knew, none better, the rough untrainedness of the human material that was his to direct and control. He did not seek to make them supermen. All he asked of any man was that he do his best within the compass of his abilities and he stood behind his men. He took what was to hand in men, ships and equipment and made them do.

If we look back again, this time to portraiture of the 17th and 18th centuries, we find characterization becoming secondary to the presentation of social position or of military rank; in



5.

Charles Lawrence Blickstead,
Lieutenant-Commander (SB),
R.C.N.V.R.

Lieutenant-Commander Blickstead was born at Montreal, July 28, 1907. After studying at St. Mary's College Seminary, Brockville, Ontario he saw service for two years with the U.S. Merchant Navy. In 1929 he entered the Montreal Fire Department where he attained the rank of Chief Instructor. While on loan for the duration to the R.C.N. he is responsible for the organization and training of naval fire brigades.

Description taken from "Portraits of the Officers in Charge of the 21st Officers' Disciplinary Course in H.M.C.S. Cornwallis and of the Twenty-three Members of the Class, Nov./Dec. 1943".

MMGLK 1990.003.254

England, particularly, the dominance of the fashionable court and society portrait prevailed. An offshoot of this was the "conversation piece", a society group portrait in an interior or landscape setting, in which the occasion for fashionable social intercourse rather than characterization was the theme. In 17th century Holland, the secular portrait developed to celebrate the autonomy of the mercantile classes as a symbol of prestige. In the hands of Rembrandt, however, the portrait developed into a psychological penetration of character through his handling of the physiognomy of the face, particularly of older people, that has never been surpassed.

All this, however, recalls a very different world from that of the 20th century and especially from the situation in which the artist, Grant Macdonald, found himself. The advent of the camera and the popularity of the photographic portrait had changed the direction of many artists away from representational genres towards impressionism, expressionism and abstraction. But there were occasions, as in the theatre, and in the conditions of war, when the artist could create a "visual chronicle", one of selective realism, portraying people and situations with a much more "subjective eye" than the camera. In other words, a portrait at its best is a participative creation, between artist and subject.



6.

William James Hill, Sub-Lieutenant (SB), R.C.N.V.R.

Born and educated in Montreal, Sub-Lieutenant Hill was there a Unit Supervisor of the Bell Telephone Company of Canada before his entry into the Navy. Meantime he was deeply interested in Sea Scouting in Montreal and area. Last year he became Commanding Officer of the Sea Scout Training Base Venture. It is to continue these duties, formerly voluntary, that Sub-Lieutenant Hill has been appointed Sea Cadet Liaison Officer.

Description taken from "Portraits of the Officers in Charge of the 21st Officers' Disciplinary Course in H.M.C.S. Cornwallis and of the Twenty-three Members of the Class, Nov./Dec. 1943".

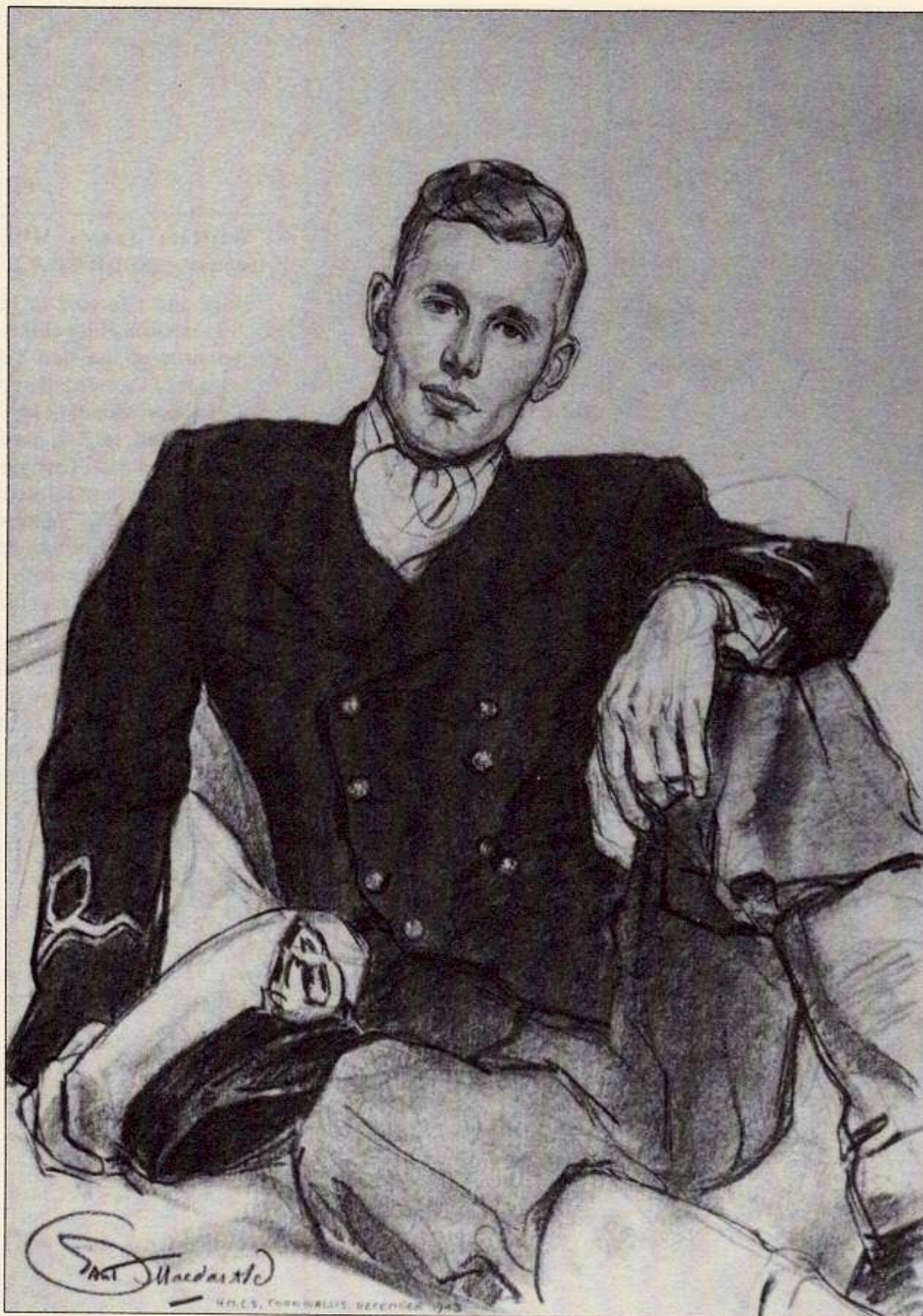
MMGLK 1990.003.259

Grant's indoctrination into the Navy was wide-ranging, from the armed yacht, *Beaver*, through the discipline of the shore establishment, HMCS *Cornwallis*, and so to daily routines and customs aboard frigates, corvettes, destroyers, minesweepers and submarines. He came in contact with Naval personnel of all ranks, from the cook to the Commanding Officer, including the latest recruits among the women of the WRCNS. There is an affinity, in his approach to the naval subjects, with his method of working when creating the theatre drawings. He always preferred to see the play in which his subject was appearing, and then arrange for a private sitting with the actor or actress, in costume of the role. Robertson Davies, in the

Preface to *Renown at Stratford*⁴ had this to say about Grant's drawings in that book — comments which apply equally to his earlier work in the theatres of London and New York:

In writing of these drawings I must make it plain that I do not look at them simply as pictures, but as powerfully evocative records of occasions which gave me keen pleasure...He has the power...to paint an actor in character in such a way that, even if we have not seen the actor play that part, we sense the truth of the portrait, and receive a strong impression of what the performance was like.

So, too, in exchanging the traditional theatre, the stage, for the theatre of war, the ship — both areas and events contained



7.

John Lawrence O'Neil, Constructor Sub-Lieutenant, R.C.N.V.R.

Sub-Lieutenant O'Neil was born at Ottawa. His naval experience began early: he joined the R.C.N.V.R. in 1934 and spent the summer of 1937, as Able Seaman and Acting Seaman Torpedoman, aboard H.M.S. *York*. After four years apprenticeship, he became naval draughtsman on the staff of German and Milne, Naval Architects. As would be expected, he will continue in the navy, to be concerned with naval construction.

Description taken from "Portraits of the Officers in Charge of the 21st Officers' Disciplinary Course in H.M.C.S. Cornwallis and of the Twenty-three Members of the Class, Nov./Dec. 1943".

MMGLK 1990.003.277

or bounded by the scene, by the occasion — Grant faced again a certain ambiguity. The protagonist, whether actor or sailor, was thrust into a situation where he took on the character of the role, whatever his own individuality. It is a tribute to the artist that his drawings of sailors in action stations or on daily routines, are "powerful evocative records of occasions". Having become familiar with the myriad situations in which the men and women of the Navy become involved in port or in action, in all emergencies from the sounding or sighting of enemy submarines or ships, to rescue operations and ship repair work, then he had to select men — and women — to "pose" in situations. But there is little suggestion of the sailors

being posed, so thoroughly has the artist entered into the situation, the physical attitude and even the thoughts of his subjects. They do not emerge simply as types. The best of them are testaments to the individuality of the person, taking into account his role in the Navy.

Let us look first at a few examples of the early drawings, of 1943, to note the artist's "selective realism", which, in Grant's case, is part of the characterization process. **Lieut-Commander Blickstead, #5**, had been in the U.S. Merchant Navy; he is shown not in "gold braid" but with sou'wester, jersey and pipe, as he was involved in training naval fire brigades; he has the far-seeing eyes of the sailor. The jovial laughing portrait



8.

John Anderson, Lieutenant (SB), R.C.N.V.R.

Lieutenant Anderson was born at Dundee, Scotland, but has lived most of his life in Montreal. During the Great War he served with the 148th McGill Overseas Regiment. He was Mentioned in Despatches. Having previously had experience in engineering, he accepted after the war, a position as Inspection Engineer with the Canadian Fire Underwriters' Association. His duties with the Navy will continue to be in the same type of work.

Description taken from "Portraits of the Officers in Charge of the 21st Officers' Disciplinary Course in H.M.C.S. Cornwallis and of the Twenty-three Members of the Class. Nov./Dec. 1943".

MMGLK 1990.003.271



9.

Survivors

When a ship picks up the survivors of a stricken vessel they are first of all given blankets and a hot drink. Among those believed to be pictured in this drawing are Seaman Yard, Walsh, Hart, Hooper, Gauthier, Denny, and Marentette.

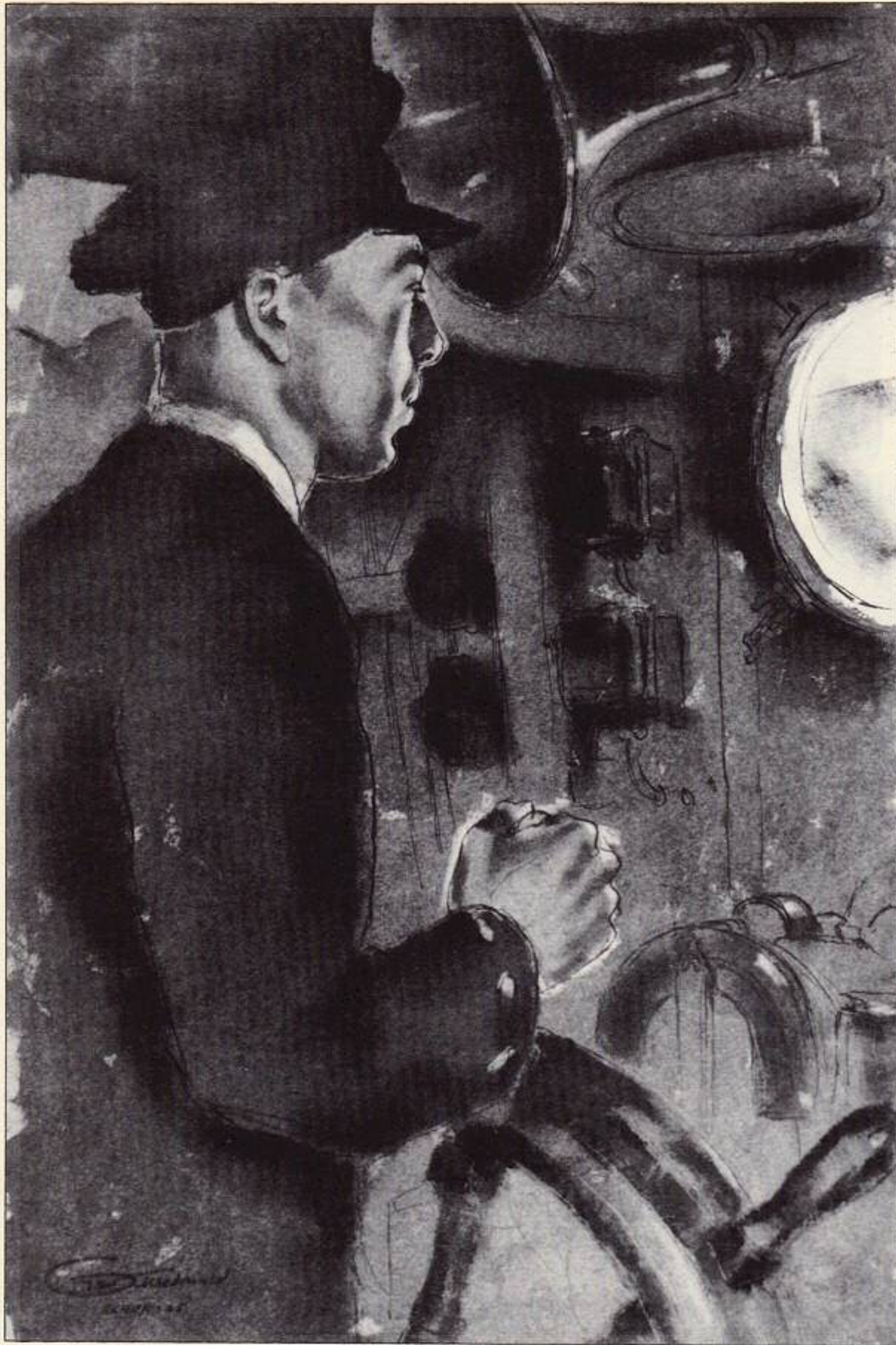
This drawing appeared in *Sailors* by Grant Macdonald published by The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1945.

MMGLK 1990.003.193

of **Sub-Lt. Hill**, #6, is reminiscent of Franz Hals — he must have been an ideal person in his role as liaison officer for the Sea Cadets. **Sub-Lt. O’Neil**, #7, a naval architect, is depicted with studied casualness of pose, as if conscious of being superior in intelligence; here is an excellent example of foreshortening in drawing, but a hint of mannerism in the hands and lips — all contributing to the characterization. **Lieut. Anderson**, #8, a veteran engineer of the First War, is not shown with “spit and polish” but in casual attire, capturing the rugged quality of this native of Scotland. In the drawing of the group of **Survivors**, #9, huddled in blankets, grasping mugs of hot drinks, the drama of the occasion is captured by the

exhausted lines of the shoulders, emphasized by the blankets, and reflected in the serious faces of the men. In such works one cannot help but participate in the mood of the occasion.

In early 1945 Grant was in Halifax making drawings in the destroyer *Restigouche*, lovingly known as “*Rustyguts*” and his work at that time shows a greater maturity of technique, of observation and of sensitivity towards his subjects. He used colour much more freely, emphasizing the drama of the occasions he selected. We are fortunate to have some personal recollections of this period by an artist who knew Grant as he made drawings on the *Restigouche*, and I quote from his letter of 11 July 1990 to Maurice Smith, museum curator:



10.

The Coxswain was at the Wheel

The Coxswain was usually chosen to steer the ship when demanding or difficult conditions were encountered. The steering position was not on the exposed bridge but usually below in a more protected part of the ship.

This drawing appeared in *Haida* by William Sclater published by The Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1946.

MMGLK 1990.003.004

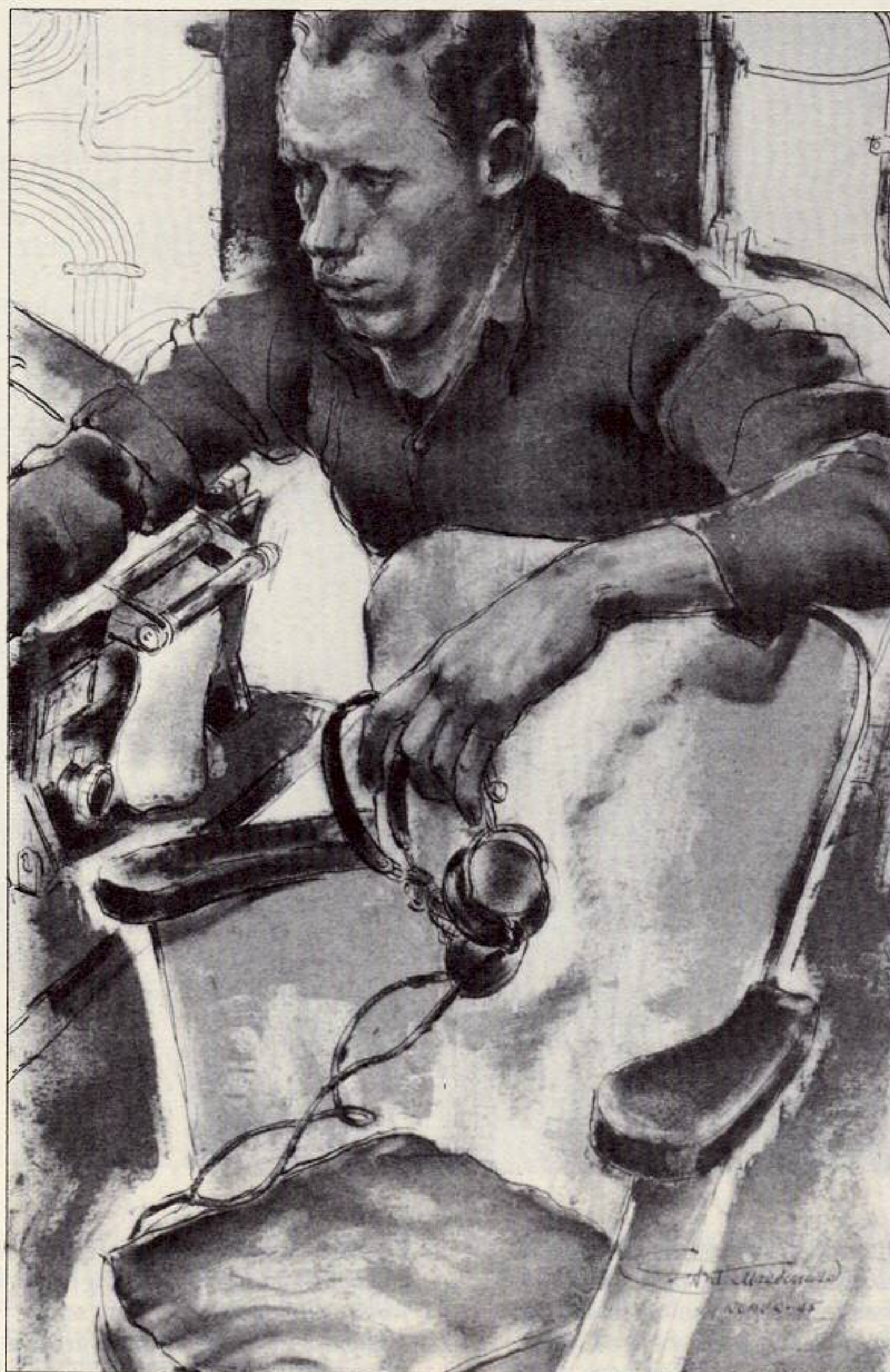
...they are tremendously true portraits, not only as regards facial likeness but the very feel of their personality and character. I have done portraits for the past 25 years...and I'm on my hands and knees before the talent that brings these men alive after 45 years.

The artist, Georges Marcil from Quebec City goes on to comment on Grant's method of working, as he saw him in action — even helping him to achieve the atmosphere of the naval situation:

...He used good quality, thick, rough, watercolour paper, perhaps 16" x 18", drawing with pen and Indian ink and probably some brush work. But then he made a masterly use of oil paint rubbed on with a cloth, perhaps erased in spots, even rubbed with

his finger, and working very quickly and broadly. He used blue greys and ochre greys, nothing bright, nothing bright since he was working in black rather than sepia.

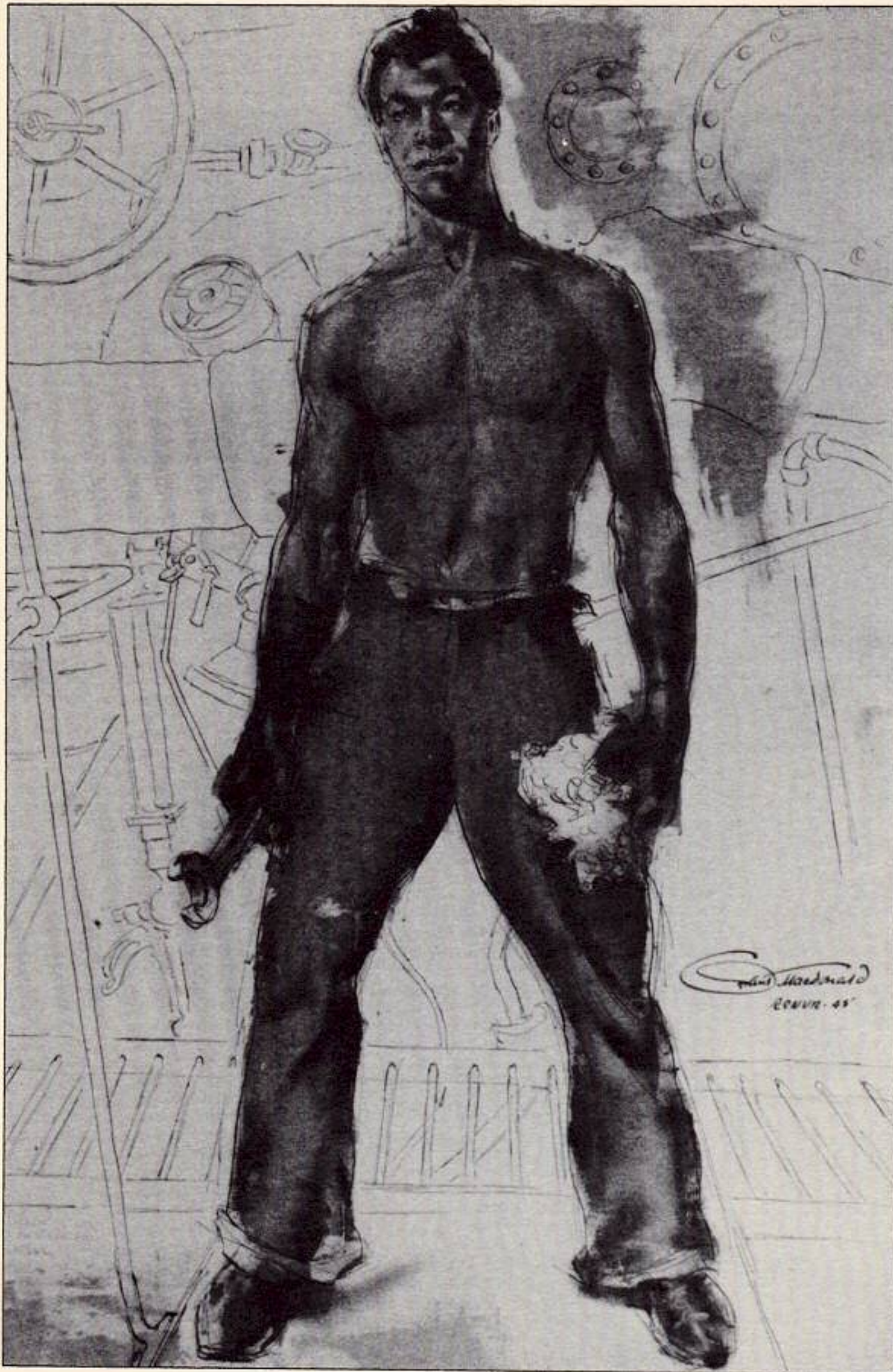
The use of cool and warm greys is dominant in the coloured drawings in the exhibition. This method of applying the oil pigments, then wiping or scraping off the colour — he often used a palette knife, also, at this stage — leaves a staining of colour which is remarkably translucent. Grant's skill in rendering volumes with this technique is, indeed, masterly. Look, for example, at the drawing of the **Coxswain at the Helm**, #10, the whole composition of the interior of the wheelhouse is in tones of grey, reflected light from the port-



11.

Whats the Buzz?

Rumours, stories, gossip (buzz) spread like wildfire through the ship often with embellishments along the way. In wartime when "mums the word" the sailors had a communications system all their own. This drawing appeared in *Haida* by William Sclater published by The Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1946. MMGLK 1990.003.208



12.

The Damage is Not Serious

This man is probably an E.R.A., an engine room artificer equipped with a spanner and the ever present wiper rag needed to remove oil from where it should not be.

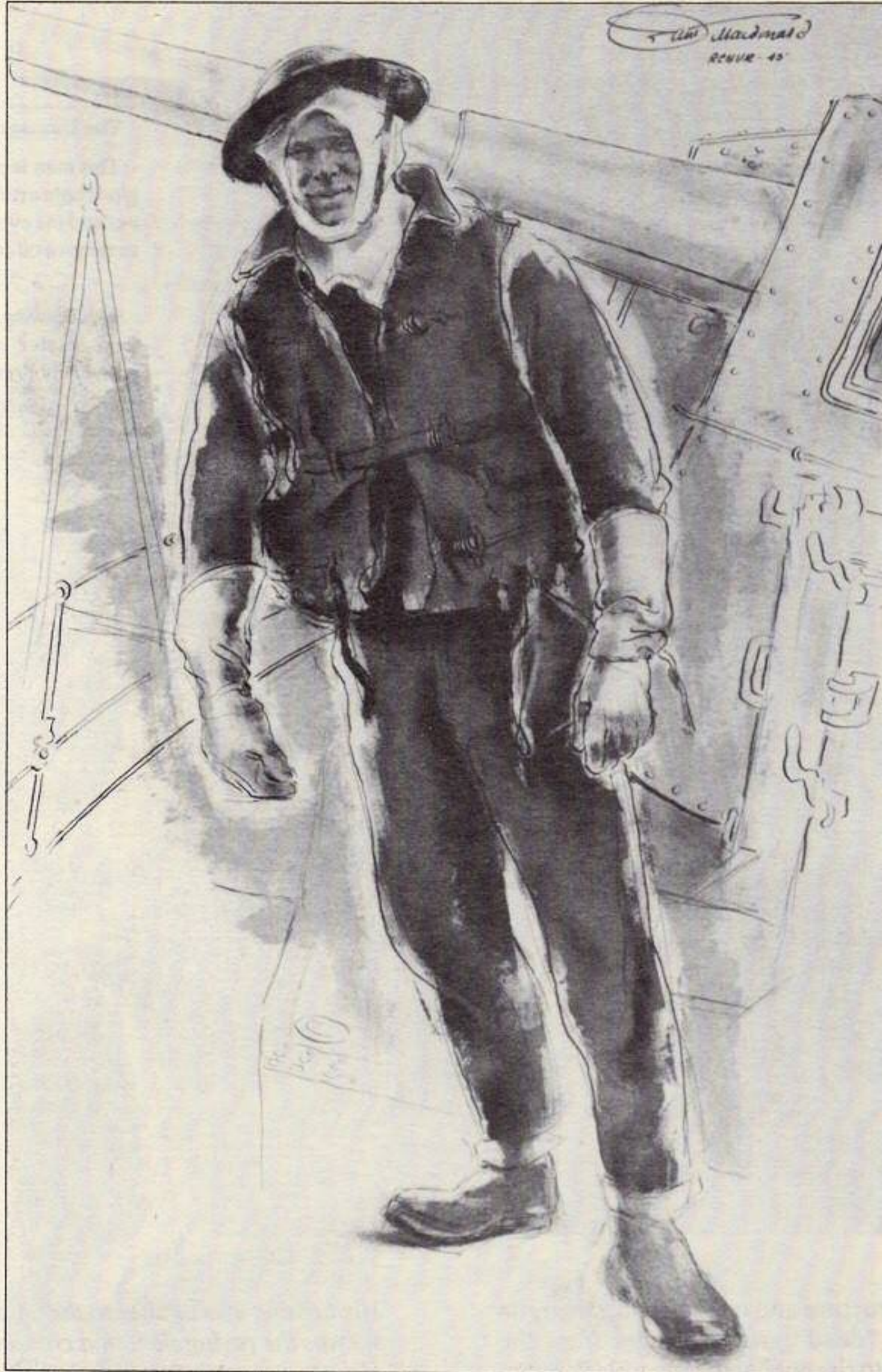
This drawing appeared in *Haida* by William Sclater published by The Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1946.

MMGLK 1990.003.243

hole playing on the facial structure and on the hand, steady on the wheel. But it is not a “dead” grey, it ranges from the warmth of the “ochre grey” to the cool of the blue-black greys. In the drawing of the asdic operator, *What’s the Buzz*, # 11, warm, brown flesh tones contrast with blues and greys; note, too, here as in all the drawings, the importance of the ink line — colour does not necessarily extend to the lines, but breaks off, allowing the play of light to emphasize the posture of the figure. Notably in this work there is a visually compelling *intentness* of listening which recalls some of E.J. Pratt’s lines on the asdic operator:⁵

*His hearing was as vital to the ship
As was the roving sight in a crow’s nest
His ear was as the prism is to light,
Unravelling meanings from a skein of tone.*

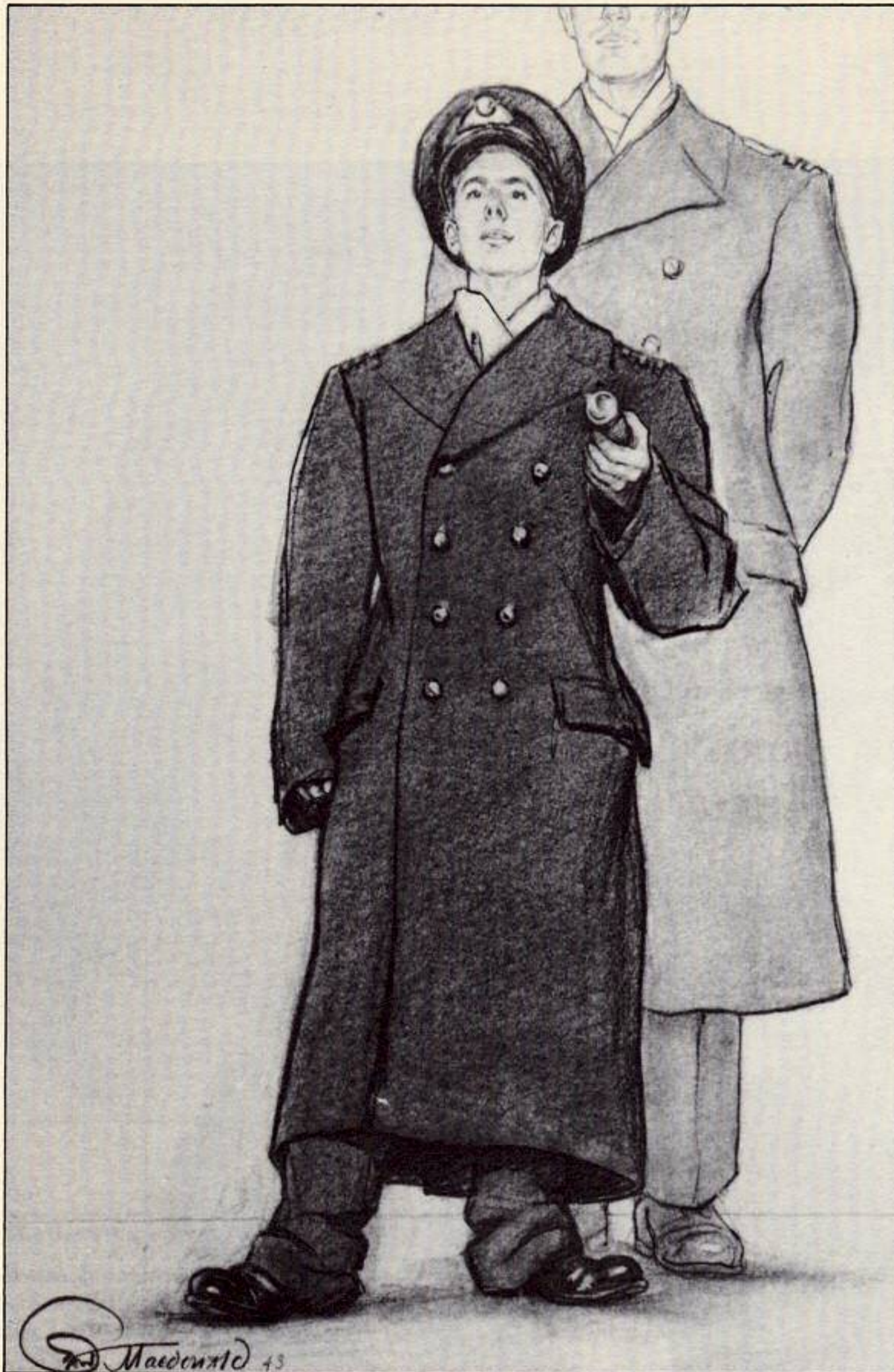
In the drawing of an engine room hand, *The Damage is not Serious*, #12, the artist presents a strong, rather proud figure, braced against the movement of the ship and shown against the line drawings of mechanical elements of the engine room. Every line of the figure is eloquent, reflecting the confidence of this sailor in his important role in the pulse of the ship. In one hand, the spanner — unquestionably metal, in the other hand, waste rag for wiping up oil as maintenance or repairs



13.

The Gun Crews Watched Her Go

"Then, as they watched, she (German ship *Elbing*) rolled to port. Her bows dipped, she slipped swiftly under the sea and the darkness closed down. From *Haida's* foredeck came the sound of hoarse cheering.... Flashing their fighting lights the Tribals formed up and stood away to seaward on course to England." The quote and drawing appeared in *Haida* by William Sclater published by The Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1946. MMGLK 1990.003.006



14.

Captain for a Day

“In the tradition of the Navy, on Christmas Day, the youngest rating aboard takes over command of the ship, donning the Captain’s complete uniform and fulfilling some of his duties, while the Executive Officer hovers in the background to redirect any mistakes. Stoker (2nd Cl.) Charles Ulch.”

This drawing appeared in *Sailors* by Grant Macdonald published by The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1945.

MMGLK 1990.003.036

proceed; the drawing of the waste rag evoked a spontaneous comment from the artist Marcil “...what fluffiness in the waste!”. There is a strong element of drama in this work, emphasized by the restriction of colour almost completely to the figure, and this in turn is part of the individual characterization. Colour, in the naval drawings, is never organic but is added for the desired effect, as we see in *The Gun Crew Watched Her Go*, #13. He is situated in his domain, the figure, and the gun in the background, angled to reflect the list of the ship. Grant was once asked how he could make his naval drawings, given the rolling of the ship. He had no problem, he responded, as he was also listing the same way as the subject!

The gun captain is depicted in full protective clothing, necessary for his assigned task. The look of satisfaction on his face could well be interpreted as watching the enemy sink – a job well done.

There were lighter moments in the Navy, as elsewhere. Throughout this exhibition we can point to delightful renderings of “off-duty” occasions. In *Captain for a Day*, #14, a tradition of the Navy – that on Christmas Day the youngest rating aboard takes over command of the ship, in the Captain’s uniform – is humorously presented. Quite purposefully and symbolically Grant has cut off the top part of the face of the officer, hovering behind the “captain” to help him along in

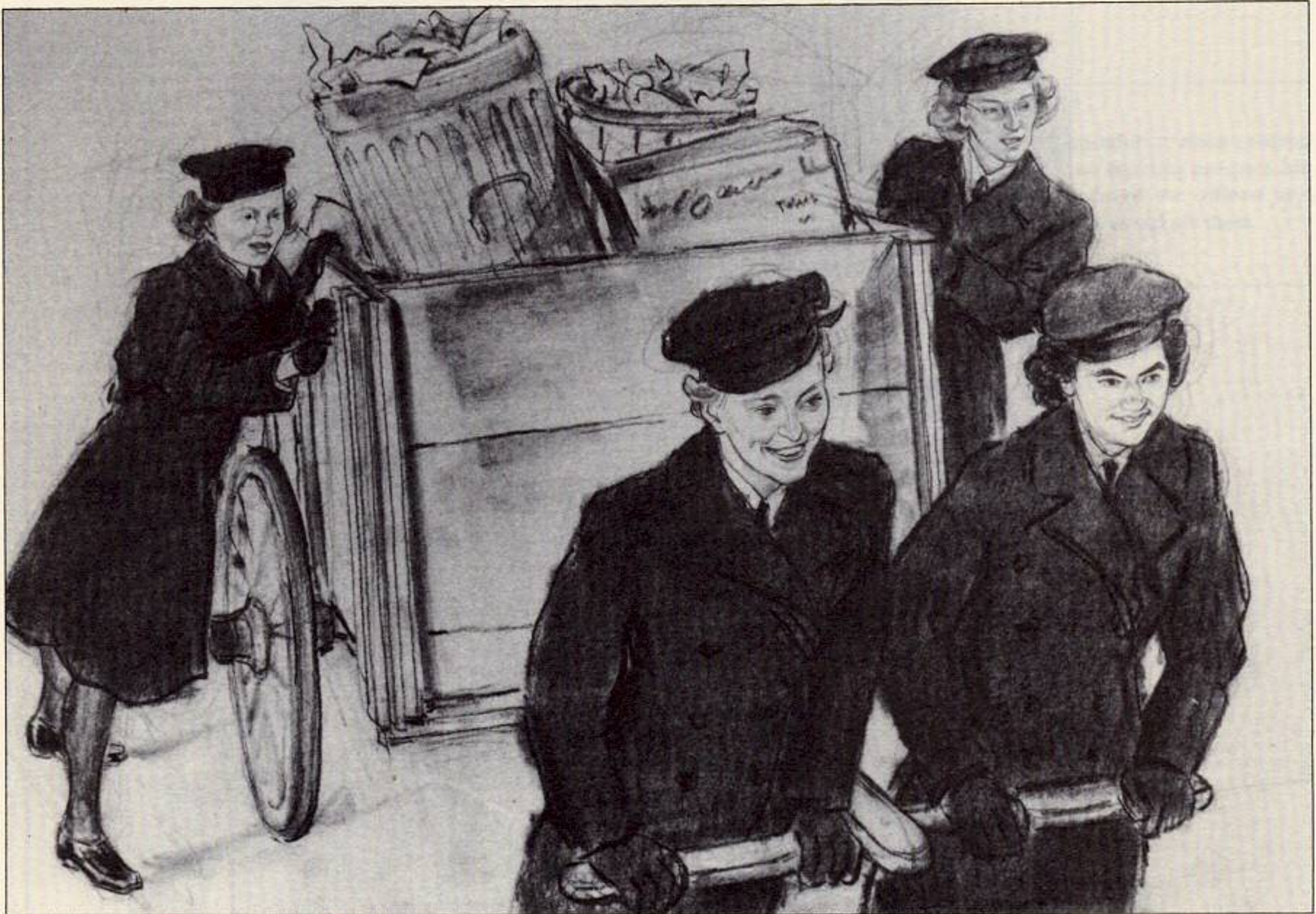


15.

Vanity - The Hard Way

Ldg. Sick Berth Attendant H.G. Elliott finds shaving in a rough sea a hazardous process unmitigated by the jeers of his bearded mess-mates, Leading Seaman H.F. Howes, Able Seaman L.W. Blackwell, and Coder T.W. Veysey.

This drawing appeared in *Sailors* by Grant Macdonald published by The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1945. MMGLK 1990.003.029



16.

The Gash Wagon

Wrens during their probationary period which includes among other duties collecting refuse in the "gash wagon", have sometimes felt, good-naturedly, that girls in this war are replacing horses rather than men. Left to right, Probationary Wrens, G.E. Webster, M.H. Struthers, M.L. Bean, and R. Anglin. "Gash" is an old navy word that means anything left over.

This drawing appeared in *Sailors* by Grant Macdonald published by The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1945. MMGLK 1990.206

case he's needed. **Vanity—The Hard Way**, #15, captures the teasing bonhomie that existed between mess-mates as three bearded sailors watch, with unconcealed glee, the hazardous process of shaving in a rough sea. In **The Gash Wagon**, #16, the artist brings a gentle humour to a real-life situation for probationary Wrens, that of collecting refuse in the "gash wagon." As he commented in *Sailors*, Wrens "...have sometimes thought, good naturedly, that girls in this war are replacing horses rather than men."

They Sang Every Song they could Remember, #17, is a fine "group portrait" of six sailors — and their dog mascot — joining whole-heartedly in a sing-song. Note the nervous

facility of the ink line drawing, delineating both posture and expression, with colour added to enhance the "off-duty" relaxed mood.

From humour to caricature is but a short step. The exaggeration of elements of a composition, of facial expression, to create a ludicrous effect, without malice, can be seen in **The Request**, #18, where a diminutive Wren, her stand "at attention" almost making her fall backwards, is dwarfed by the imposing presence of an Admiral, Captain and third Officer, as they consider her request. This is another dimension of the observation, wit and skill of the artist.



17.

They Sang Every Song They Could Remember

The crew of the *Halda* celebrated Christmas while anchored in lonely Vaenga Bay after escorting a convoy to Russia. German planes attacked but were driven away by anti-aircraft guns. New sailors were surprised to hear an officer, three times torpedoed, sing in a sweet, clear voice that completely belied the libellous words. **Bless em all, The Captain, the Jimmy and all, Bless all the seaman and gunners' mates too, Bless all the stokers and their dirty crew, For we're saying goodbye to them all As over the billows we sail. You'll get no Secure in this two-funnelled sewer So cheer up, my lads, bless em all.**

The quote and drawing appeared in *Halda* by William Sclater published by The Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1946. MMGLK 1990.003.231

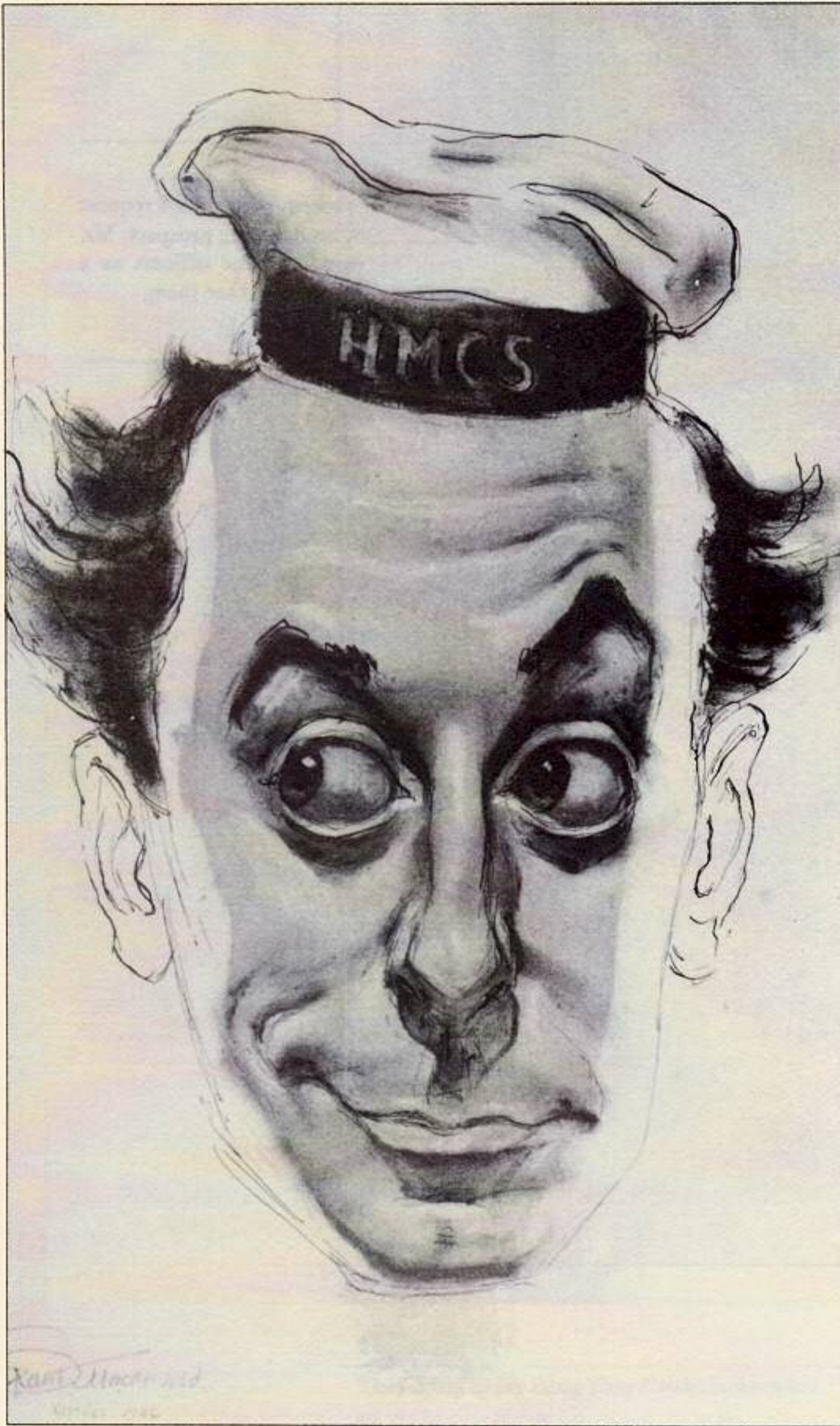


18.

The Request

Following procedure to make a request was for many an daunting prospect. Mr. Grant has rendered the officers as a "rating" or Wren would see them.

MMGLK 1990.03.251



19.

John Pratt

Mr. Pratt joined the "Navy Show" in 1943 and became an instant success, particularly with the song "You'll Get Used to It". At first the "powers that be" were not happy with a song that poked fun at them and wartime conditions. The troops loved it.

MMGLK 1990.03.153



20.

John Pratt in Uniform

The appearance of John Pratt, dressed in a boiler suit to represent the lowest ranks in the Navy was popular everywhere the "Navy Show" toured in North America or Europe.

MMGLK 1990.03.171



21.

Ivan Romanoff

Mr. Romanoff and his dancers appeared in the "Navy Show". Their popularity continued long after World War II.

MMGLK 1990.03.165



22.

Piercy Haynes

Mr. Haynes was a popular entertainer — a fine vigorous portrait.

MMGLK 1990.003.237



23.

Requestmen and Defaulters

Among navy traditions is the daily formality of inspecting "Requestmen and Defaulters". The Executive Officer reviews the men one at a time. The Requestmen form on the right to ask favours, usually "leave". The Defaulters, guilty of misdemeanors, form on the left, to be investigated for punishment.

Ordinary Seamen E.J. Dzendolet, D.E. Bradford, A.C. Wells, G.S. Hannon and J.A. Carrabre and Bandsman J. Wilcox (saluting).

MMGLK 1990.03.046

The well-known entertainer Pratt, #19, at Elstree in 1945, is presented almost as a caricature, in a portrait head, his long and funny face, with great eyeballs, the iris "dropped in", and a tiny sailor's cap, was only a slight exaggeration of his natural (stage) appearance. The full-length figure of Pratt in Uniform, # 20, in loose overalls, looking over his shoulder, is a lugubrious and hilarious impression of just how the entertainer, knowingly, appeared. Grant is here back in his familiar world of the theatre, and not averse to the humorous and dramatic element conveyed by line of both body stance and facial expression. The drawing of the Russian ballet dancer, Ivan Romanoff, #21, who also entertained the troops, is a

theatrical "tour de force"; the dramatic diagonal composition, with one leg outstretched, the other bent at the knee, arms folded, anticipates movement into a Russian dance at any moment. Another popular entertainer for the servicemen and women was Piercy Haynes, #22, a black piano player, in a fine vigorous portrait. Note the small figures in the background, ready to dance.

The artist, whose versatility and skill is so well documented in this exhibition, also left us a Self-portrait, on page three, drawn in December 1943. We see him in winter garb, a parka, with gloved hands, holding a drawing pad and pencils, symbols of his trade. He is looking directly into a mirror — in search



24.

Joan Jeffrey (Boyd)

"I was a Wren Motor Transport Driver - the best job during the war - always had a vehicle. As for the speeding ticket in Greenock, Scotland, I deserved it. We raced in big lorries, we drove right through Greenock and Gourock. Had we done this in Canada we would have lost our license."

MMGLK 1990.03.109

of himself. We see a serious, intent person, but the ultimate mystery of his personality, his character, remains concealed in the mirror. It is, perhaps, revealed much more through his work, through his sensitivity to people, through the imagination, insight and skill with which he had presented his subjects.

Recall, as we look at these drawings, that many of the young sailors came from the prairies, the farms and the cities; many had never even seen the sea before signing up for the navy. Something of the variety of types of ordinary seaman encountered by the artist is depicted, not without humour, in **Requestmen and Defaulters**, #23. A daily formality of inspecting these men is among the traditions of the navy. They

are reviewed, one at a time, by the Executive Officer. The "Requestmen" form on the right, wishing to ask favours, usually for leave; the "Defaulters", guilty of misdemeanors, on the left, anticipate punishment. Other seamen "graduated" from the sea cadet training camps and Grant captured their youthful eagerness in a number of drawings.

Women were also drawn into the RCNVR from the cities and farms and their role was often a supporting one, such as the Wren Transport Driver **Joan Jeffery Boyd**, #24. It was in that capacity, while stationed in Ottawa with HMCS *Bytown*, that she was introduced to Grant Macdonald who recognized her as a typical Wren. The very firm lines of the eyes, nose,

mouth and profile is not as delicately drawn as we see in the aristocratic **Princess Alice, #3**, and the rubbed technique in the facial shadows is stronger. He was, perhaps, more conscious in this work of depicting an ideal Canadian type, a confident, capable woman, proud of her role.

The disciplined training of the Navy, the long tradition of service and of dedication – all this is reflected in the faces and attitudes of these men and women so well portrayed through the eye and hand of Grant Macdonald.

2. Barry Thorne, "Grant Macdonald: Discipline Key Factor in Art, Life: Painter," *The Kingston Whig Standard*, 6 January 1968.

3. William Sclater, *Haida* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1950), Author's Note, 1946, p. xiv-xv.

4. Guthrie, Tyrone, and Robertson Davies, *Renown at Stratford* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company Ltd., 1953), p. viii.

5. E.J. Pratt, *Behind the Log* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1947), p. 20.

Notes

1. "Types of Canada's Armed Forces by Grant Macdonald exhibited," *The Gazette*, Montreal, 6 February 1943.

Language

The particular use of language by sailors in the navy is full of invention and imagination. Their workplace and their society aboard ship was unlike any experienced by "civies" confined to land. Their language was a code, a kind of "diplomatic lingo" that helped them survive each other during long stressful periods at sea. It was also a defence against the social and physical abuses that were occasionally heaped on them while ashore. Most of all their language was full of colour – and very often, poetry. To experience this language properly you must be in the messdeck or having a pint ashore with your shipmates.

Afters – What you have after a meal; the desert. Old sailors speak contemptuously of the modern navy and reflect that they never had "afters" in their days and they were damned lucky to even get "befores".

Adrift – To come aboard late. Also applied to one who is considered way out of line in his opinions

All for George – One who holds by his duties and carries them out to the letter. All for the King.

Bash – A chum.

Beating up – From sailing boat talk. A person putting on an extra spurt when an officer is in the vicinity is said to be beating up. Again it is meant as the risk one takes in his manners, i.e., "He is beating up to land in the jug."

Beef Bandit – The name applied to a supply rating. It is also attached to a man who is thought to be of a lecherous nature.

Bine – From the English cigarette, "Woodbines". To smoke.

Bottle – A blast. A reprimand.

Brow – The gangway.

Buffer – The commander's or Jimmy's right hand man. The foreman of all work on the upper deck. Usually a senior Petty Officer or Chief.

Bunker Hill – All persons named Hill are called Bunker. The reason is quite obvious.

Bunts or Bunting – A signal rating. The name is derived from the material from which flags are made.

Cargo Shifter – A merchant sailor

Catch the boat – When a man catches a social infection after using his life foolishly he is said to have caught the boat.

Chippy – The shipwright, or ship's carpenter.

Cleats – Ears

Crows, fowls, chickens, birds etc – Applied to all persons who are of a troublesome nature.

Crusher – A Regulating Petty Officer. Other nomenclatures to these ships' policemen are Body Snatchers, Sexton Blake, Famous Crimes etc.

Dicky – Any person named Bird is rechristened "Dicky" in the navy.

Dicky run – A quiet run ashore.

Dip – To fail an examination; to lose a badge or to be disgraced. "He was dipped from leading seaman to able seaman".

Dohbeying – From the Indian word for laundry. The operation of scrubbing clothes.

Doggo – Anyone who has been cheated by nature when handsome features were being handed out.

Flake – To lie down; to sleep or stretch out.

Flannel – Any person who is possessed with a generous amount of bull or bluff in his make up is said to be full of flannel.

Gash – Extra. Anything left over is said to be gash.

Gate – A derisive nickname given to those who are inclined to verbosity.

Gripppo – Something for nothing.

Guffers or Goffers – A soft drink

Halfers – A suggested offering of half of a tot of rum.
Hooky – A Leading Seaman. From the anchor badge he wears on his left arm. Hook being the corrupt word for anchor.
Jack – A sarcastic appellation directed to those who think they are old sailors. A man who acts the part of a sailor while ashore, yet cannot pull his weight aboard, is known to be a proper Jack ashore and a John aboard.
Jagged – Fagged out. Fatigued, beat.
Jaunty – The Master-at-Arms. The chief of navy police.
Lashing out – Do any job with gusto
Merchant or Client – Refers to anybody. Instead of using the word person or people or guy, i.e., “Who is the merchant over there?”
Moan or Drip – To Complain
North Easter – From N.E. on the compass card. The expression does not apply to direction however. N.E. also means “Not entitled”.
Number Ones – A sailor’s best go-to-Sunday-school suit.
Number Twos: An every day suit for going ashore in. **Number Eleven:** A degree of punishment, consisting of extra work and extra drill. **Number Sixteen:** Another degree of punishment, thought not as severe as Number Eleven. The expression, “What sort of job have you got?” A “Quiet” or “Soft” number means an easy duty.
Old Man or Owner – The Captain.
Paybob – The Paymaster.
Pongo – A soldier
Pusser – Any article pertaining to government issue. A person of harsh authority is said to be pusser.
Putty – The ships painter.
Rabbit – Loot. Any article, belonging to the Government, which is stolen is said to be a rabbit. Making anything in the company’s time for personal use is also a rabbit.
Rate – A lower deck rank. To pick up the rate is to be made Petty Officer. A seaman’s definition of the various ratings is

as follows: Ordinary Seaman; knows nothing and does everything. Leading Seaman; knows a little and does quite a lot. Petty Officer; knows a little more and does a little bit less. Chief Petty Officer; knows everything and does nothing.
Rattle – To “score a rattle” means you are bound to appear before the First Lieutenant as a delinquent.
Re-scrub – Given another chance.
Rocky – A naval reservist.
Rounds – A tour of inspection by an officer or the captain.
Seen off – To be cheated.
Shady Lane – By the same token that Millers are called “Dusty”, so all Lanes are named “Shady”.
Shell Backs – Old Timers
Slops – The department store of the navy. The clothing store.
Slosh – A cook.
Stopy – One who has too much cheek.
Tally – The ribbon worn around a sailor’s cap. A name. “What’s your tally? What’s your name?”
Taut hand – A good man both ashore and afloat.
Tidley or Tiddley – Neat and tidy. Seamen who have their best suit made ashore with tight jumpers and extra width to their trousers are said to be tiddley sailors.
Tiffy – From “Artificer” Any man who is an artificer is called “Tiffy”.
Troops – All ratings below the rank of Leading Seaman.
War spats – Gaiters. The legging seamen wear while marching. The phrase, “All gate and gaiters” means “It’s all mouth and parade”, all unnecessary.
Wet – A drink
Wet, Damp, Saturated – A condition of mental weakness. (ed: very much a pre Thatcher phrase).
Winger – A chum.

These expressions were collected by the late Chief Petty Officer Harry Catley, Gunners Mate for his book *Gate and Gaiters, A book of naval humour and anecdotes* published by the Thorn Press, Toronto, in 1949. Out of print but for those interested in a version of lower deck life in the Canadian Navy, well worth locating.

You Can Help Us Document the Collection

If you have been portrayed by Mr. Macdonald or if you know any of the subjects please contact the Curator of the Museum showing the exhibition “Grant Macdonald’s Navy” or contact the Curator, Marine Museum of the Great Lakes directly. It is important that Canadians next year or indeed in the 21st Century know about the accomplishments of those who lived before them.

Thank you.

A Choice of Three

Grant Macdonald's faces invite speculation. The customs and traditions of the navy, the environment of ships have produced attitudes, a sailor's point of view that is captured in the portraits. No doubt all occupations do this but somehow, the inner character of those who serve at sea invite identification with the subject very easily. Those familiar with the naval and merchant service find the portrayal authentic. Pride and vulnerability go hand in hand. Some occupations enhance character.

We hope the three portraits on the pages that follow will, like the others in this issue of FreshWater invite speculation about their character on the part of you the viewer. Now I wonder.....?



Ldg. Naval Airman A.G. Clayton. Mr. Clayton is now a resident of in England. He writes in a letter to the museum in 1990 - "In 1941 I was a guest of the Canadian Government under the Empire Air Training Scheme and did my service flying for the Fleet Air Arm. One day an artist arrived to portray a typical flying trainee. I heard no more of it until in 1942 it appeared on the front page of the *Montreal Gazette* under the heading "Canadian Fighter of the Ocean Skys". This of course was a bit of journalistic license". Mr. Clayton served in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans until 1946 and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. MMGLK 1990.03.068



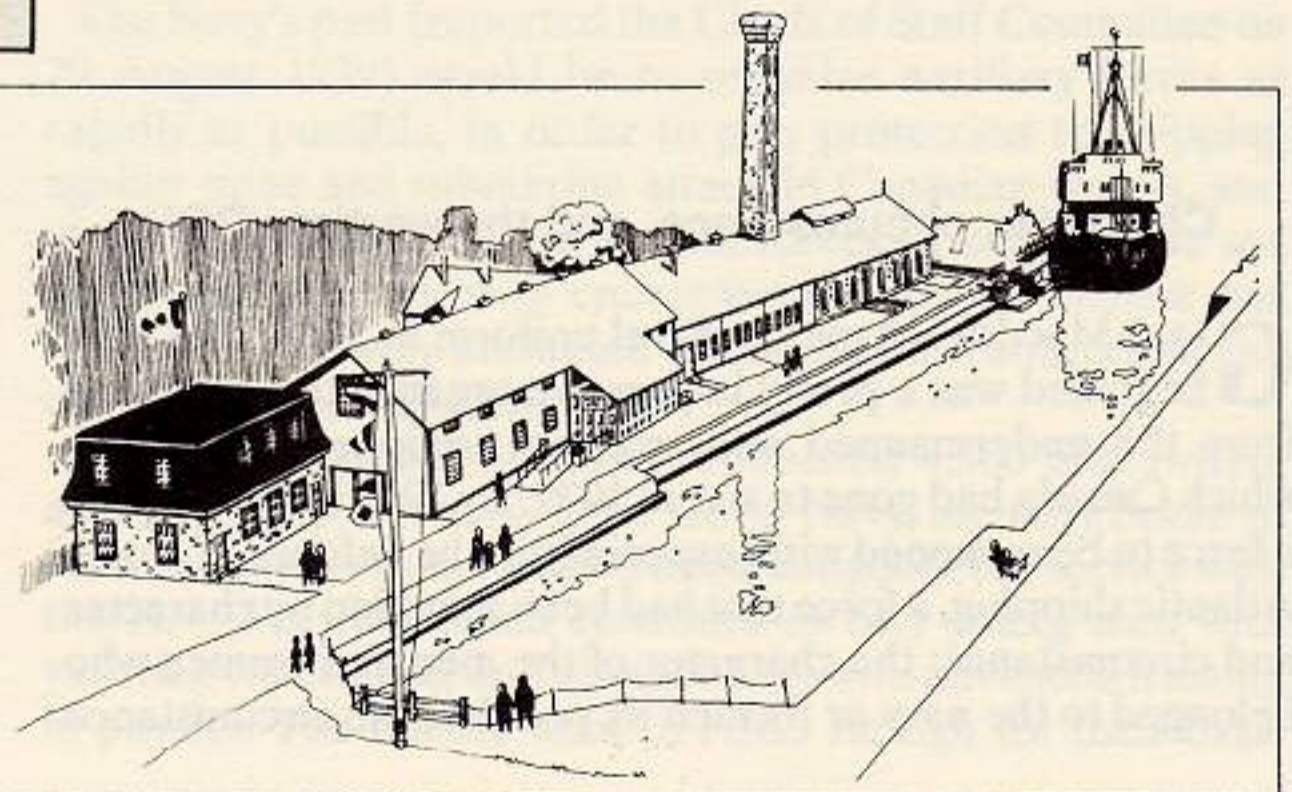
Commander George H. Stephen, RCNR. Commander Tony German in his recently published book, *"The Sea Is At Our Gates, The History of the Canadian Navy"* has this to say about Commander Stephen. "In a one-night battle around SC44 in mid-September (1941) the last of Group Markgraf sank four merchant ships and ripped the bow off HMCS *Levis*. *Mayflower* took her in tow but she sank with eighteen men. *Mayflower's* Nova Scotian captain, Lieutenant Commander George Stephen, RCNR, was an especially ebullient character who earned an Atlantic-wide reputation as a fine, intrepid seaman." MMGLK 1990.03.054



Liberty Boats - Perhaps the most welcome order aboard the ships of Canada's Navy is the call to "fall in for liberty boats" allowing off-duty seamen a few days or hours ashore to relax from their duties. Ordinary Seaman **D.B. Allan**. MMGLK 1990.03.080

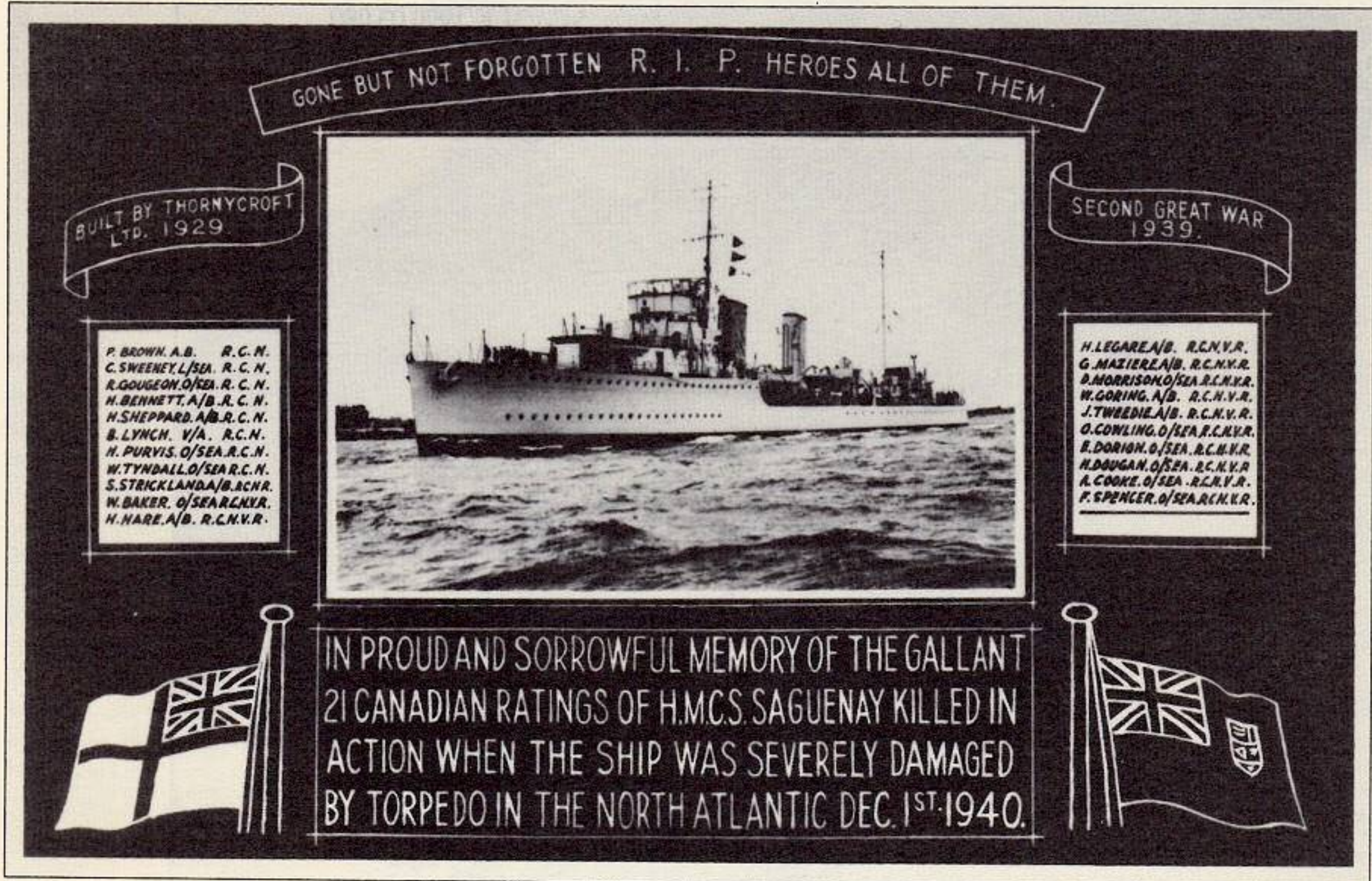
You can order photographic copies (for non commercial purposes) of Grant Macdonald's portraits by writing the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes at Kingston, 55 Ontario Street, Kingston, Ontario. K7L 2Y2. Please use the MMGLK number that follows each portrait when ordering.

If you would like to help us preserve our marine heritage **then please join us as a Member of the Museum**. Please write or call: (613) 542 2261 for details and a brochure.



Grant Macdonald's Navy

by W.A.B. Douglas



"Gone but not forgotten..." a memorial to the men lost in HMCS Saguenay, damaged by torpedo 1 December 1940. PA 105 916

Character, circumstance, and the wartime RCN

Grant Macdonald put on naval uniform in 1943. The navy he joined was a pretty impressive organization, a far cry from the undermanned and sparsely equipped RCN with which Canada had gone to war in 1939. By 1943 it had become a force to be reckoned with, especially in the defence of North Atlantic shipping, a force that had been moulded by character and circumstance: the character of the men and women who belonged to the navy or formed its policies; the circumstance

of a global conflict, one that shattered many of the preconceived notions about the employment of navies in modern war.

At the navy's core was a devoted handful of pre-war professionals, just under 2,000 (among whom the officers were distinguished by the straight stripes on their sleeves). They were sometimes out of step with their political masters, sometimes left behind by events, but always -- in senior and junior ranks alike, in the wardroom and on the lower deck -- imbued with a sense of duty.

Around the central core were many layers. First came the Saturday-night sailors. They were in some respects a holdover



HMCS Ottawa, seaman's messdeck, 1940. PMR 91 0051

from the Royal Naval Canadian Volunteer Reserve of the First World War, but to a much greater degree they were the product of Commodore Walter Hose's fertile brain. When in 1922 the Liberal government cut the naval estimates to \$1.5 million, Hose (as Director of the Naval Service), closed the Royal Naval College of Canada and gave up all the navy's ships except for two destroyers and a few trawlers. Taking a leaf out of the Royal Navy's book, he then formed reserve organisations across the country to keep the navy idea alive.

The Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (note the shift in emphasis from the First World War title), whose officers could be recognized by the wavy gold lace of their rank insignia, attracted young men passionately interested in ships and the sea. Some would have made the navy a career if the vacancies had been there; others saw the approach of war in the 1930s and preferred naval to other kinds of military service.

Members of the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve, who following British practice, came from the merchant marine (their officers could be identified by the criss-crossed gold lace they wore on their sleeves), provided another inner layer of the wartime navy. There were even fewer RCNR than RCNVR

men in the navy, but their seagoing experience was a precious asset.

At the outbreak of war the RCN, RCNR and RCNVR together had less than 3,000 men. The fleet consisted of six destroyers and five trawlers. Until December 1939 there simply were not the ships and establishments to absorb many more men into active service. Expansion, said the planners, would take place, but slowly.¹

The Navy's part (reported the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 29 August 1939) would be to organize auxiliary forces as rapidly as possible, in order to give protection to shipping against mine and submarine attack in Canadian waters, and at the same time to assist British forces in keeping the sea communications clear of enemy vessels. This assistance was to be progressively increased as the Naval resources of the country were developed.

When the number of reserves reached 4,500 and Britain asked for help in manning the Royal Navy, the navy began to send its new recruits to the United Kingdom for service with the RN. The first batch consisted of fifty young men with yachting experience, and about twenty with advanced training in physics. The former went to HMS *Raleigh* for their basic



Survivors from HMCS Clayoquot, the commanding officer Lieutenant Commander Craig Cambell is facing the camera lower left. PMR 83 368

training and were followed later in 1940 by another hundred so-called "Raleighites"²; the twenty young "boffins" became the van of 123 who became the first radar officers in British warships. Altogether during the war about 7,000 Canadians served in the RN.

Early expansion

Overcrowding was dreadful in the shore bases at Esquimalt, B.C. and Halifax, N.S., and every available ship was manned to its wartime complement. Also, before the first year of war came to an end, German naval activities had become such a threat to Allied and neutral shipping that the Canadian fleet grew beyond all expectations. Manning depots never seemed to have enough men to fill seagoing billets. Forecasts of future needs grew steadily in size: in September 1939 the naval staff estimated 7,000 men would be wanted; in January 1940 the number had grown to 8,438; in May 1940 as the phoney war ended, it was 11,450; in July after the fall of France, it was 15,000; and in October 1940 it became 23,000 after the windfall of six over-age American destroyers.

The destroyers, commonly called "four-stackers" because of their four funnels, had been acquired by Britain in the so-called "destroyers for bases" deal. Because the Royal Navy could not man all of them, Canada undertook to find the necessary ships' companies for the six, and later a seventh, allocated to the RCN. Besides, Canada had managed (under various pretexts in order to escape American neutrality laws) to procure a number of yachts from the United States which filled the gap until sufficient escorts had been built for the defence of Canadian coastal waters. Thus by January 1941 the actual size of the navy had already increased to over 15,000 men and 54 fighting ships.

The end of the phoney war had had an immediate effect on the role of the RCN, too. Even before the fall of France, planners at Naval Service Headquarters argued successfully that Canada's front line now lay in the eastern Atlantic; in response to British requests Canada sent its destroyers across the ocean to help defend Britain from German invasion. While serving in British home waters, in the last half of 1940, that *Fraser* and *Margaree* went down with heavy loss of life, and *Saguenay* barely limped into harbour with her casualties and under tow, after being torpedoed by an Italian submarine.



Admiral P.W. Nelles, Chief of Naval Staff, 1934 - 1944. MMGLK 1990.03.074



HMCS Haida, (Commander Harry De Wolf) exercising with ships from Portsmouth Command in the English Channel, spring 1944. PA 163952

They were the navy's first war losses. In September 1940, although the fact only came to light long after the war in a review of German and Italian documents, that HMCS *Ottawa* (Commander E. Rollo Mainguy, RCN) shared in the destruction of another Italian submarine, the first Canadian success in anti-submarine warfare. In March 1941 Winston Churchill, faced by terrible merchant shipping losses, coined the phrase "Battle of the Atlantic". U-boats had enjoyed great success in British Home Waters in 1940, but improved defences, especially air patrols, forced the German submariners farther out to sea. Moreover, with their new lairs in French Atlantic bases like Lorient and Brest they were able to extend their patrols much farther westward. Until December 1941 Hitler forbade them to attack shipping in the western Atlantic, because he did not want to provoke the United States, but U-boats now threatened any vessel east of Newfoundland. The North Atlantic was now a battleground.

In consequence anti-submarine escorts based in the United Kingdom had to accompany convoys farther out to sea, and they needed bases much farther west than before. Accordingly in May 1941 the RN opened a base in Iceland and the RCN one in St John's, Newfoundland. "Newfiejohn"³ became the

headquarters of the Newfoundland Escort Force, (later called the Mid Ocean Escort Force), responsible for shepherding convoys from the Western Ocean Meeting Point, just south of Newfoundland, to the Mid Ocean Meeting Point just off Northern Ireland.

Newfoundland Escort Force

More than any other single event the creation of the Newfoundland Escort Force (N.E.F.), under the command of Commodore (later Rear Admiral) L.W. Murray, gave the RCN great strategic importance during the Second World War. Similarly, the RCAF, which now began anti-submarine air patrols from Gander, suddenly found itself with a major strategic role in the western Atlantic in addition to its important work with the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. It is worth remembering that the most disreputable ballad to come out of Newfoundland in the Second World War, "The North Atlantic Squadron", was an air force rather than a naval invention. Naval songs were surprisingly respectable, like Surgeon-Lieutenant W.A. Paddon's "Beneath the Barber Pole" (sung to the tune of "The Road to the Isles").⁴



The Operations Room, St. John's Newfoundland. PA 179889

*Drink a whiskey or a navy rum or drink a gin-and-lime
Should inebriation be your final goal;
Pick a lady you've selected for a short and merry time -
There's merry men beneath the Barber Pole! ...*

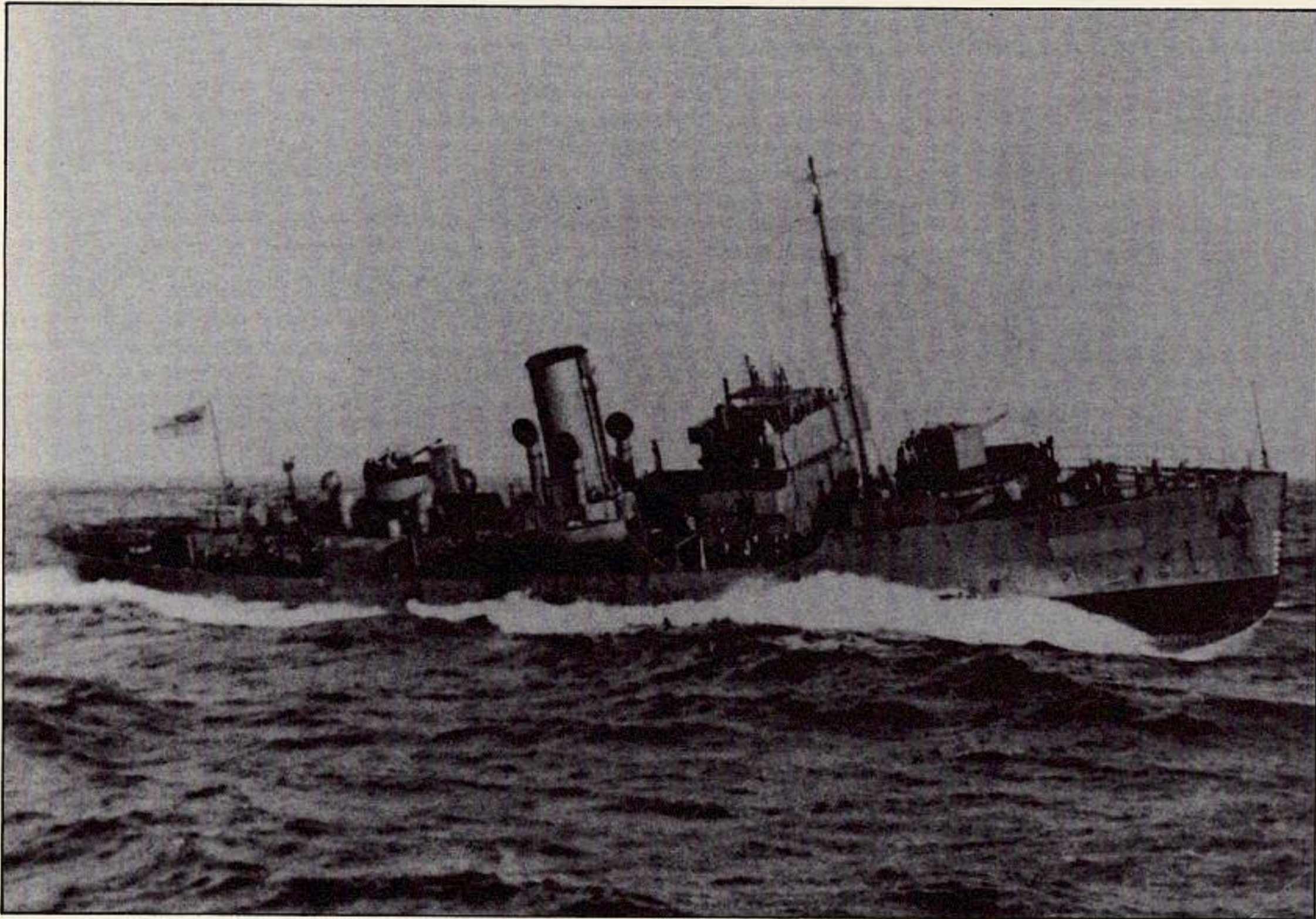
*From Halifax or Newfiejohn or Derry's clustered towers
By trackless paths where conning towers roll
If you know another group in which you'd sooner spend
your hours
You've never sailed beneath the Barber Pole! ...*

The responsibilities of the N.E.F. were more than anyone had expected to take on, and they gave Canada a certain degree of leverage in negotiations with powerful friends. They allowed Canadian ships based in St. John's, for example, to operate as a virtually independent force even though, from 15 September 1941, they were under the strategic control of a United States naval task force commander based at Argentia, just around the corner on the Avalon peninsula.

In May 1941 the strength of the navy had grown to about 18,000, and by December of that year it was up to nearly 25,000. The price of such rapid expansion was skimpy training. When Alan Easton sailed in his first wartime command late in 1941, the corvette HMCS *Baddeck*.⁵

"Of the three officers only the navigator had been in a ship before. He had been twenty-five years at sea in all sorts of small vessels. He had started to sea in fishing vessels when he was twelve, and had gone on from schooners to small steamers to become master of a small tanker. He was a rough and ready little man and a rule-of thumb navigator, I suspected; not that I was disinclined to be one myself. Of the fifty men, about five had been professional seamen or fishermen and, below, no more than six were experienced with engines and boilers. So with three-quarters of the complement as fresh to the sea as the ship herself, it was hard to perform our simple task; hard to keep steam up, avoid the shoals or even to steer a straight course. Had anything warlike occurred there would have been a shambles."

Ships of this kind, after whatever work-up training could be squeezed in, went off to join operational escort groups in



HMCS *Hepatica*, one of many Canadian corvettes that escorted convoys across the Atlantic Ocean. In late January, 1942, she escorted SC.64, the inaugural "Newfie-Derry" convoy. PMR 840237

Halifax and St. John's. There was constant war between the two bases over trained men. Commodore Murray in St. John's accused Rear Admiral G.C. Jones, the Commanding Officer Atlantic Coast in Halifax, of the piratical removal of key men from Newfoundland Escort Force ships visiting that port, in order to build up the ships' companies of newly commissioned vessels under his command. There was never any love lost between these two strong personalities, and Jones was in no less difficult circumstances than Murray, but there may have been more than a little truth in Murray's accusation. Larceny was not an unknown trait in the regulars of the pre-war navy. (As Chief Petty Officer Harry Catley, a shrewd RCNR observer, observed of one unnamed sailor, "It was said that he built his garage with bricks that he took home, one at a time, and this, no doubt, is what instigated the popular belief that if they ever piped "Return stores!", his house would fall down flat, and all its contents would double back to the dockyard guided by their own homing instincts".)⁶

A Global Conflict

The Battle of the Atlantic offered no respite, no chance to consolidate the navy's position. Angus L. Macdonald, the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, told the War Cabinet Committee on 4 December 1941 that he needed 13,000 more personnel in the next fifteen months, the government authorised even more, and three days later the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The Second World War had become a global conflict, and the thinly stretched Canadian navy had to react to one more pressure. By May 1943 Canada had taken over from the United States responsibility for a separate theatre called the Canadian Northwest Atlantic. By that time the RCN had grown to nearly 6,000 officers and 50,000 ratings.

It was an enormous influx, and it transformed the navy. Thousands of men had transferred from the RCMP Marine Division and the merchant service after war broke out. Men who had opposed participation in the war changed their minds after the fall of France, and some of these undoubtedly found their way into the navy. There were those who had been too



Lieutenant Commander **Sherman Hill**, Commanding Officer of HMCS **Cataraqui** (Kingston) in 1941. The reserve base was among those "across the country that helped keep the navy idea alive"

Grant Macdonald Collection, MMGLK 1990.03.292



Pre-war professionals in Plymouth, summer 1940: Lieutenant Commander "Jumping Jimmy" Hibbard, RCN, commanding HMCS Skeena; Lieutenant Commander Horatio Nelson Lay RCN, commanding HMCS Restigouche; Lieutenant Commander Harry De Wolf RCN, commanding HMCS St. Laurent. N33 (45)

young to volunteer when the war began, or who had waited to finish some phase of their schooling before joining up, brought ever younger people in ever larger proportions into the service. E.J. Pratt captures the flavour of the erstwhile student in his wonderful epic poem, "Behind the Log":⁷

"Say, Spinney, [says the officer of the watch on the bridge to a Seaman on the watch] what about

A mug of kye?"

"Yes, Sir".

Spinney had not

Yet found his legs. Less than six months before

He had been learning Latin and the class-

Room smell had not been kippeded from his system.

To him the ocean was a place of travel,

A blue-green oriental boulevard

Round unknown continents - up to this year;

And even to last night the illusion stayed,

When for his benefit the Borealis

Staged a rehearsal of the Merry Dancers

Before the blood-red footlights it paled

The myth upon a tracery of starshell

The poem describes Convoy SC 42, in September 1941, when U-boats (from Group *Markgraf*, a pack of sixteen) sank fifteen of 64 merchant ships escorted by a destroyer and three corvettes, later joined by a reinforcement of two other corvettes. In the process one of the reinforcements (HMCS *Chambly*) sank U-501, the first Canadian success in a year, and the first destruction of a German U-boat.

Sailors

If you were to examine the personnel files of the men on board those escorts you would see representatives of several "generations" of the wartime navy. Commanding the destroyer *Skeena* was Lieutenant Commander "Jumping Jimmy" Hibbard, a pre-war regular with very good tactical ability and a consummate seaman; commanding *Kenogami* was Lieutenant "Cowboy" Jackson, RCNVR, a Saturday night sailor from Calgary whose ship was barely out of the builder's yard; *Orillia* was under Lieutenant W.E.S. "Ted" Briggs RCNR (later a well known personality in the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation); Lieutenant Commander G.O. Baugh



Thisbe Schenk

She joined the navy in 1941 as a Wren. Near the end of the war she served in Halifax where she met **Grant Macdonald** since both of them were staying at HMCS **Peregrine**, a shore base where officers of all services stayed while waiting for new postings. She says "it was while on the way to the officer's mess to have a drink with **Grant** when the entire building shifted off its foundations, the (2nd) Halifax explosion".

Grant Macdonald Collection, MMGLK 1990.03.122

RCNR had *Alberni*. They were very much a reflection of the navy's inner layers, as were Lieutenant "Freddy" Grubb, RCN in *Moose Jaw* and Commander "Chummy" Prentice, RCN in *Chambly*. Prentice was a special case. A Canadian in the RN, he had retired to British Columbia (his home) in the '30s and like many of his kind brought his professional experience to the service of the RCN when war broke out. Famous for the monocle he wore, he was one of the more innovative tactical thinkers in the Battle of the Atlantic.

Serving under these men, besides the few experienced hands on the lower deck and their many neophyte seamen, were some very competent shiphandlers who would go on to command destroyers, frigates and corvettes in a remarkably short time. It is true that, for the most part, escorts in 1941 had been as unprepared as Alan Easton's corvette *Baddeck*, but by 1943 most of the officers who had stayed at sea were either in command or were the first lieutenants of small ships. Many of these officers were astonishingly young men to have such responsibility.

If the merchant marine had not always prepared seamen for naval service -- some captains were too old and set in their ways; others took refuge in the bottle, and they did not last long under the pressures of war -- the importance of merchant seamen is unmistakable from the numbers of RCNR officers in command of escorts throughout the war. James Lamb, in his delightful portrait of the Corvette Navy, pays homage to them, "the fellows with the twisty bands of gold lace on their cuffs, who imparted a distinctive character to the seagoing Canadian fleet, an ambience quite different from that of the shoreside navy".⁸

Lamb suggests that officers of the permanent force completely shunned the corvettes. That is misleading. "Chummy" Prentice was the corvette's strongest defender. It is true that not many other "straight-stripers" commanded corvettes, but that is hardly surprising when there was only a handful of such officers, relatively speaking, available. The same could be said of the Chiefs and Petty Officers. People with a professional naval background were needed for the more complex responsibilities of destroyer, armed merchant cruiser, cruiser and even aircraft carrier service, besides the training and staff duties that demanded the specialist technical knowledge and experience acquired by years of preparation. Only the permanent force provided the opportunity to gain such expertise in the years before the war.

Mind you, it also turned up some odd characters. "A dear old stick of an Edwardian naval officer, gallantly returned to duty after years of retirement", gave instruction -- largely useless -- in celestial navigation to RCNVR officers.⁹ Another extraordinary personality was Captain "Sam" Worth, cordially disliked by many of his opposite numbers in Naval Service Headquarters, affectionately served by a staff whose loyalty rested upon admiration of his unswerving professionalism.¹⁰ The wonder is that wartime sailors, in considerable numbers, were able to learn enough to take over many positions that allowed appropriate permanent force personnel to take up seagoing jobs.

The permanent force, whenever the pressure of other concerns eased off enough, was prominent in the thoughts of

Canadian naval planners. They had long term objectives that required participation in other phases of the naval war besides the Battle of the Atlantic. Put in its crudest form, the argument was that the navy should "build up a Canadian naval tradition and prestige which should be valuable to Canada in post-war years, as have been the traditions and prestige of the Canadian Corps, earned by hard fighting in the spearhead of the attack in the last war."¹¹

In other words, the naval professionals saw an opportunity at last to prevent a recurrence of the debilitating restrictions to their effectiveness, which had nearly destroyed the navy between the wars. This had a lot to do with the acquisition of heavily gunned destroyers, among which the Tribal Class had been the preferred choice since before the war, when naval rearmament got under way. By 1943 there were also plans to acquire cruisers and aircraft carriers. With wartime experience and battle honours, believed the naval staff, such ships could be more readily kept in commission when the inevitable cutbacks took place after the war was over. And the young men of the RCN would have the chance to prove themselves in the most testing forms of naval warfare.

The merits of these ideas are the subject of continuing controversy. The strongest argument in their favour is that they promised to give Canada a self-sufficient naval force that could keep up with the most advanced developments, and retain its autonomy in a powerful alliance. The strongest argument against them is that well trained and experienced seamen should not have been diverted from vital convoy escort duties in order to provide ships' companies for duty elsewhere.

For whatever reason, whether policy actually determined the acquisition of a balanced fleet or circumstance dictated it, the number of destroyers in the RCN increased during 1942, some to fill a desperate need in convoy escort groups, some designated specifically for operations with the British Home Fleet because they were not suitable for anti-submarine work. Besides, in the summer of 1942 fourteen Canadian corvettes went to the Mediterranean at Admiralty request in support of operations in North Africa. Then in the first three months of 1943, much to the chagrin of the Chief of the Naval Staff, Rear Admiral Percy Nelles, most Canadian escort groups of the Mid Ocean Escort Force were required to transfer for several months, from the Newfoundland-Londonderry run to convoy routes in the Eastern Atlantic, in order to bring them up to an acceptable level of efficiency. One way or another, the RCN was becoming a more balanced and diversified navy.

WRCNS

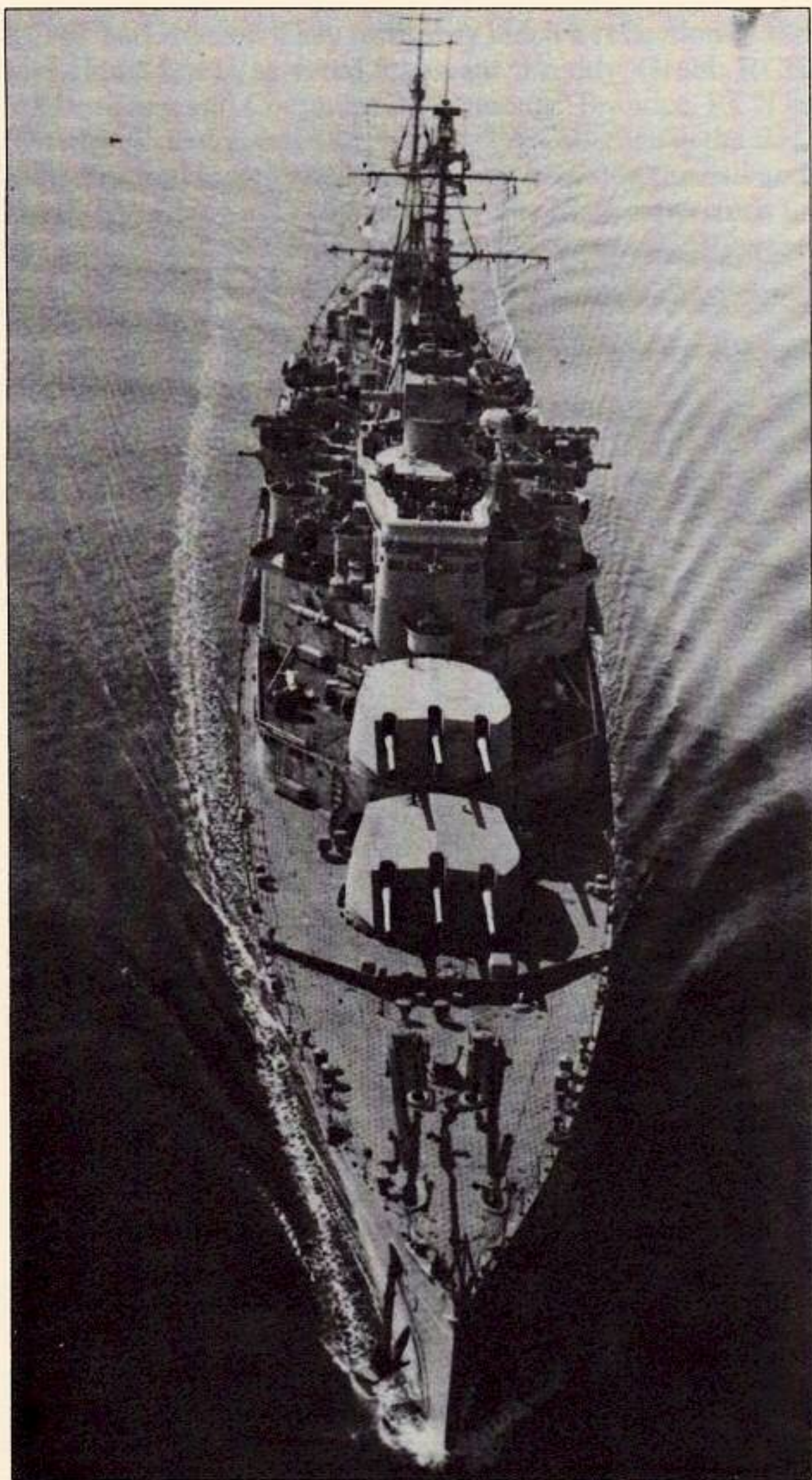
On 5 March 1942 Admiral Nelles announced the navy's intention to recruit women. Women in the Second World War were called upon to perform duties that would release men for other work, which in the navy as often as not meant going to sea. By late summer there were about 2,000 applications to join the WRCNS at a pay of ninety cents a day. On 29 August 1942 the navy accepted 67 of them, between the ages of 18 and 45, and in some cases older if they had useful qualifications, so long as they had no dependents under the age of 16. On 19



Commander Isabel Macneill

She was the commanding officer of HMCS Conestoga, Wren training establishment at Galt, Ontario, and the first woman to captain a ship in the Royal Canadian Navy.

Grant Macdonald Collection, MMGLK 1990.03.071



HMCS Uganda arrives in Esquimalt on return from the Pacific theatre, 10 August 1945. PA 145522

September a selection board selected the first 22 officers. About 6,000 more women joined the WRCNS before the war was over. Grant Macdonald's portraits provide a glimpse into their personalities. About thirty years later a bronze statue was unveiled in Galt, Ontario, the site of the wartime WRCNS training establishment. It portrayed "Jenny Wren", "slim and tiddley, standing five feet tall",¹² to commemorate the women whose remarkable enthusiasm and wide range of talents so often surprised the men of the RCN. Those men, one would have to say, held the Wrens in universally affectionate regard.

The work of the WRCNS was diverse - there were 39 different branches - and they were ubiquitous. 568 went to Newfoundland, many of them as radio operators engaged in

intercepting enemy signal traffic, and 583 to Northern Ireland, Scotland and England. Of those who remained in Canada a significant proportion were also employed in signals intelligence.

Grant Macdonald's Navy

The navy Grant Macdonald joined, therefore, already had an exciting if short history, a remarkable variety of personnel, and was believed to be on the threshold of great achievements. In mid-1943 it boasted an order of battle including 141 corvettes and minesweepers, fifteen destroyers for convoy escort duties, two fleet destroyers attached to the British Home Fleet and three converted merchant ships, *Prince Henry*, *Prince David* and *Prince Robert*, the first two of which were in the first half of 1943 being converted from Armed Merchant Cruisers to Landing Ships, Infantry, (LSI's) and the last to an auxiliary anti-aircraft cruiser. In June 1943 Rear Admiral George L. Stephens, the Chief of Naval Engineering and Construction, warned that the navy was reaching a saturation point. "With completion of the present programme" he pointed out, "a fleet will exist which will tax the full powers of the RCN to operate from an Engineering point of view".¹³

In June, 1944, when the Normandy landings took place, there were two auxiliary aircraft carriers with Canadian ships' companies, the three Prince ships, ten destroyers on convoy duties in the North Atlantic and five on offensive sweeps in the English Channel. There were 44 frigates (some of them replacing old destroyers), 160 corvettes and minesweepers, 35 of them involved in Channel operations, eleven anti-submarine trawlers, 73 ML's in Canadian coastal waters and sixteen Motor Torpedo or Motor Gun Boats in European waters, for a total of 323 fighting ships. This total increased to 375 before the end of the war, and included two cruisers. To support this fleet the numbers of personnel in the navy increased to over 97,500.

Grant Macdonald's navy, consisting as it did of layer after layer of new entries added with each new demand of war, was in a sense like a new wine poured into old bottles. These hundreds of ships, and tens of thousands of men and women, were British in form but not in fact. Canadian sailors were, like their counterparts the world over, happiest when griping. They accepted certain hardships as inevitable, like the incredible discomfort of a corvette, and the exhausting regimen of a small ship at sea.¹⁴

"We had to sleep practically fully booted and spurred ... the oil from the fuel tanks [worked] its way up through the cortisene and there [were] little pools of oil in your mess deck We used to put little pins in them and bet a pound [sterling] who was going to have the biggest oil field in the morning.... On North Atlantic runs you'd go twenty-one days without a shower, without [any more than] having just your face rinsed and maybe enough water to do your teeth with.... We got into Newfoundland one day and a guy walked into our mess deck ... and started to gag and ... said "How in Christ can you live in there?"

Canadian seamen, however, rebelled against forms of discipline that British seamen took as a matter of course. They



Commander Harry De Wolf.

A Canadian who showed "impressive efficiency in destroyer operations". He was later a Vice Admiral, CBE, DSO, DSC, CD and Chief of Naval Staff from 1956 to 1960.

Grant Macdonald Collection, MMGLK 1990.03.224

were exceptionally successful in coastal forces and performed with impressive efficiency in destroyer operations. Commander Harry De Wolf and his successor Lieutenant Commander Bob Welland in HMCS *Haida*; Captain G.R. Miles and his successor Lieutenant Commander J.H. Stubbs in the ill-fated *Athabaskan*; Lieutenant Commander Herbert Rayner and Lieutenant Commander Harry Groos in *Huron*, all these Tribal Class captains and their crews established enviable reputations for the RCN, just as the naval staff had hoped they would. HMCS *Iroquois* suffered a mutiny under her first captain, Lieutenant Commander W.B.L. Holms, in sad circumstances that reflect some of the pitfalls of operating under extreme stress with inexperienced hands. The ship had performed well in action, nevertheless, and under her new captain, "Jumping Jimmy" Hibbard, achieved very high standards.

It was difficult for sailors brought up to the harsh conditions of small ships to adapt to the "pusser" routine of a cruiser or aircraft carrier, with its bugle calls and impersonal relations with the "Jaunty" (Master-at-Arms). Notwithstanding such problems, it is noteworthy that Captain H.N. (Horatio Nelson) Lay and his ship's company, who had endured a lot of mutual recrimination and demoralising confusion about the differences between British and Canadian pay and shipboard conditions, demonstrated superb damage control discipline in August 1944. Against all odds, they brought the auxiliary aircraft carrier HMS *Nabob* back to harbour after being torpedoed in the North Sea.

It is equally noteworthy that when in the same month the ship's company of the cruiser *Uganda* was given the option of either staying in the theatre of war in the Pacific by volunteering for service there, or returning home, went against the wishes of their captain and voted to come home. A great many officers and ratings in other theatres of war refused to volunteer for the Pacific too, on the principle that they had already volunteered and expected to go where the navy sent them. It is hard to imagine the Royal Navy or United States Navy being subjected to such a difficult choice. It is equally hard to imagine such an independent state of mind among the personnel of those navies.

An Object of National Affection

The wartime navy was in some respects a passing phenomenon. The Navy Show, or as it was properly called "Meet the Navy", which began as a publicity effort in Canada, some time in 1943 and became a hit in London's west end in 1944, revealed a Canadian originality that British audiences found refreshing and Canadian audiences turned out in great numbers to see. It reflected, too, the impact of the war on Canadian sensibilities. The navy, for the first time, had become an object of national affection. Retaining that affection would be a continuing challenge, one that the naval profession has had some difficulty in meeting since the Second World War, but so long as the need to protect the sea lanes was obvious Canadian sailors enjoyed an unprecedented level of public notice. Whatever shape a Canadian navy would take in subsequent years, nothing would quite match the institution

brought about by such dramatic circumstances and such strength of character. Canadian war art provides a wonderful visual record of that phenomenon; none captures better than the portraits in this exhibition the extraordinary variety of personality, ashore and afloat, among the men and women in the wartime navy.

NOTES

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 Thank you.

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