

1994

Steve Logos, a shipmate and fellow survivor of the Ottawa was in town and came around for a visit in the afternoon. We hadn't seen each other since 1943 so had a lot of catching up to do and reminiscing. We remembered former friends who were lost that night and talked about some of them who were saved. Steve left the Navy after the war and seems to have done very well. He lives in Calgary and travels quite a lot with his friend Del. Nice to see him again. As a result of his visit I have had a letter from another survivor, Al Underhill, who lives in Halifax. I will write to him in the near future. Steve also sent me a letter from a survivor of a merchant ship that we picked up following the loss of his ship. He was in the Army and was part of the guns crew on the ship and I remember him quite well because most of the gunners on those merchant ships were from the Navy. He wanted to get in touch with any former Ottawa crew members so I have written to him at his home in Nottingham, England. I remember him telling us that the reason he was serving on a ship was that he wasn't tall enough to stay in the Artillery and was given the option of leaving the Army or going to sea, and he chose the latter. We told him how lucky he was to be picked up by a destroyer as he would be safe and sound and soon back on dry land. So much for our bragging.

1995

A former Ottawa shipmate and fellow survivor, George Grivel, died November 9th and I attended his funeral at the Chapel in Naden. We weren't friends and it had been many years since I last saw him, but felt that I should attend as I am the only other survivor living here in Victoria.

While speaking of the Ottawa, my friend Steve Logos, another survivor, is trying to arrange for the survivors of her sinking to be guests at the Commissioning ceremonies of the new Ottawa scheduled to take place in August or September in Cornwall, Ontario. Apparently there are only about fifteen of the seventy-six survivors still alive and he feels that we should be present on the occasion. We have been advised that arrangements will be made to fly us to Cornwall for the ceremonies so it is something to look forward to and the last official occasion in which our dead shipmates can be remembered and honoured.

1996

The big highlight of the year for me was a trip to Cornwall for the commissioning of the new Ottawa, and a reunion of some of the survivors and former crew members of the first Ottawa that was sunk September 13th, 1942. I have never attended any of the Navy reunions that are held in various parts of the Country as I just wasn't interested. I see a number of former Navy friends during the year and we swap stories of how we are doing and how some of our friends are making out. Inevitably I hear of someone who has died, suffered a stroke or is having other problems, many associated with their

age. All of the Navy veterans that I know are now over seventy and with the advancing years some of the problems are associated with ageing. At times it is rather discouraging to hear of others' misfortunes and perhaps that is why I have avoided attending any reunions. When I first heard that the Ottawa would be commissioned in Cornwall and then come to the West Coast I felt that it would be nice to be part of the ceremonies. My friend and former Ottawa shipmate, Steve Logos of Calgary, decided to try and get all the survivors together and any other former ship's company and have a reunion in Cornwall and attend the commissioning. He did a lot of work getting touch with as many former crew members that he could locate, made arrangements for accommodation, etc. in Cornwall, organized the reunion and helped in many ways to make the undertaking a very successful one for all concerned.

On Monday we left Ottawa by bus bound for Cornwall, arriving there at 1850 where we checked into the Ramada Hotel which was to be our headquarters for the next five days. Details of this portion of our trip are in the pages headed "Commissioning of H.M.C.S. Ottawa." On completion of the commissioning ceremonies in the afternoon of September 28th we returned to Ottawa by bus. We both enjoyed the entire trip. I had some misgivings originally about the reunion but they were soon dispelled. Except for Steve Logos of Calgary and Al Wedmark of Burnaby I hadn't seen any of the other survivors since 1942 and of course wouldn't have recognized any of them. One of the survivors was Roe Skillen of Nipigon and he was on the same carley float that I was clinging to after we abandoned ship. I remember quite well that he had a broken leg and we were trying to make him as comfortable as possible under very difficult circumstances. His leg was badly injured by the time we were picked up and had to be amputated in the hospital in St. John's. He has had an artificial limb ever since and manages very well. We may see him in February as he has relatives in Brentwood and plans to visit them.

Commissioning of H.M.C.S. OTTAWA

In September Bonney and I were privileged to attend the commissioning of H.M.C.S. Ottawa, the last of the new Halifax class frigates, in Cornwall, ON. Eleven of the original seventy-six survivors of the sinking of the first Ottawa - H-60, on September 11th, 1942, gathered for the first reunion and for the commissioning ceremonies. Also in attendance were other former crew members who had left the ship before our last trip, and quite a few former crew members of the second Ottawa, H31, which came into the Canadian Navy from the Royal Navy in 1943.

The H-60 group, as we became known, was organized by Steve Logos, also a survivor, who lives on Calgary. Our group consisted of:

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| Alex Fraser | Able Seaman | Bridgewater, NS |
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| Ed Fox | Able Seaman | Toronto, ON |
| Bob Jackson | Able Seaman | St. Thomas, ON |
| George Johnson | Stoker | Sundridge, ON |
| Steve Logos | Able Seaman | Calgary, AB |
| Doug Reeves | Able Seaman | Trenton, ON |
| Roe Skillen | Able Seaman | Nipigon, ON |
| Terry Terabassi | Able Seaman | Ferndale, Mich |
| Al Wedmark | Able Seaman | Burnaby, BC |
| Al Underhill | Able Seaman | Halifax, NS |

Al Underhill stayed in the Navy after the war and retired as a Lieut. Commander. Myself an Able Seaman at the time and after twenty-one years in the Navy, retired as a C.P.O. First Class.

It appears as though the A.B.s had the greatest survival rate among the survivors. Perhaps this is attributable to the fact that the Officers and Chief and Petty Officers were older than we were and have gone to their great reward. Unfortunately ill health prevented Commander "Yogi" Jensen, a Sub Lieut at the time of the sinking, from attending. He is the only surviving officer and lives in Hubbard, N.S. Also unable to attend was Bob Billard, Chief Shipwright of Calgary, Merv Owens of Pitt Meadows and Norm Wilson of Highsprings, Florida. If there are other survivors, Steve was unable to contact them.

One other survivor made the trip from England along with his wife, to take part in the reunion. He is Ernie Douglas, formerly a Gunner with the Royal Artillery who was aboard the tanker S.S. Empire Oil serving as a gunner as a D.E.M.S. rating (Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships). Most merchant ships during the war were armed with at least one gun, probably an old four inch of World War I vintage, normally manned by Naval ratings, whose job was to try and sink any German U-boat that surfaced nearby. I don't think there were many successes but it gave the crew some measure of security. Doug was one of twenty-two survivors of the sinking of his ship that were rescued by the Ottawa on the night of September 10th, the day that the attack on our convoy developed. He and a Galley Boy were the only two to survive the sinking of the Ottawa on the 13th.

A very special guest at the reunion banquet was the daughter of Sick Berth Attendant Alex McMillan who, along with Surgeon Lieut Hendry, was lost when the second torpedo struck the ship amidships destroying the ship's boat, killing them and the injured men they were caring for. At the time of the sinking she was just three years of age and of course, has no memories of her father and was anxious to hear anything that we could tell her about him. One of the tragedies of war, we knew him better than she did. I was able to tell her about his efforts in helping the doctor to administer to the needs of the wounded and injured. I am sure that it must have made

her feel that she knew something of her father's activities. In my opinion, and shared by others, both the doctor and Alex should have received some kind of posthumous award for their services.

Bonney and I started this trip with a flight to Edmonton by way of Calgary on September 11th and stayed with Fred and Norah until the 14th, when we flew to Winnipeg, once more by way of Calgary, and stayed with Brian and family until the 18th when we left for Ottawa by way of Toronto. We stayed with Isobell until the 23rd when we left by bus for Cornwall and checked into the Ramada Hotel, where the rest of the H-60 group would be staying. The accommodation was quite good and a hot buffet break-fast was provided daily.

The first official act in Cornwall took place on September 24th when the C.O. of the Ottawa, Cdr. Goulet, members of the H-60 group and the Mayor of Cornwall raised the White Ensign in front of the City Hall. During the day our group met at the Cornwall Naval Veterans Association club, which the members put at our disposal, and we arranged a display of memorabilia, newspaper clippings, old photographs, a lifebelt, etc., and items for sale such as ball caps and golf shirts with the Ottawa and her number depicted, and some very nice crests. Most of these items sold very quickly.

A word about the Club and its members. They were very helpful during our stay, providing meals, space for displays, and for meetings, transportation from venue to venue and generally very helpful. Their cooperation went a long way to the success of our activities.

On the 26th we were transported by bus, at no cost to us, to Ottawa, just over an hour's drive, to participate in the March "Freedom of the City" by the Ship's Company of the Ottawa. Following a welcoming speech by Her Worship Mayor Jaquelin Holzman, the Ship's Company, led by the Stadacona band, marched past followed by the H-60 and H-31 groups. It was a proud group of veterans that kept pace and in step with the young Navy types and "Hearts of Oak" brought a spring to our step and with heads held high, bodies erect even a parade G.I. would have found little to complain about. A round of applause greeted us as we passed the reviewing stand and I'm sure we all felt about fifty years younger for a brief time. Following the march past a reception was held in the City Hall and the Ship's Bell of the third Ottawa, which had been presented to the City of Ottawa when she was de-commissioned in 1993, was presented to the C.O. of the new Ottawa. Paintings were exchanged between the Mayor and Cdr. Goulet- and then refreshments were served and sailors old and sailors new had an opportunity to mingle and exchange views. Memories of that day will linger with us for a long time. In the evening the H-60 and H-31 veterans were guests of the Captain at a reception on board at which time both groups made presentations to the ship and I was honoured to be one of the presenters.

On Friday the 27th a number of us went to visit Upper Canada Village. Ed Fox and his wife invited Bonney and I and Alex Fraser to join them as they had their car with them, and another group went in one of the vans and we enjoyed most of the day touring the Village which is constructed to resemble a turn of the century village and is most interesting. We had lunch there and returned to the Ramada Hotel in time for dinner. In the evening we gathered in the Dundas Room in the hotel for drinks and storytelling.

Saturday the 28th was commissioning day and the ceremonies were held on the Cornwall wharf. Unfortunately after enjoying very good weather for all of our trip to that time, nature conspired against us and we were greeted in the morning by rain which lasted for most of the day and during all of the proceedings. V.I.P.s and guests, which included us, were seated under cover but the band, guard of honour and ship's company were exposed to the elements and stood in pouring rain for the entire time and must have been soaked to the skin by the time it all ended. However they held their positions in fine order throughout and were a credit to the Navy. Quite a few female members and a few R.C.A.F. personnel were included. His Excellency Governor General Romeo Leblanc, Defence Minister David Collenette, in what was probably his last official act as the Minister [he resigned October 14, 1996], Admiral Mason, Commander Maritime Command, Mrs. Sonja Bata, the Ship's sponsor and Mayor Holtzman all addressed the assembly. Following prayers led by Brigadier General Pelletier, the Commanding Officer ordered H.M.C.S. Ottawa to be manned by her crew after which he was piped on board. On completion of the ceremonies receptions were held on board and on the wharf.

Everyone in attendance and those who had been on board for tours were very impressed with this lovely ship and I expect that many of us veterans were a little envious of those who will sail in her. There is no comparison between this modern ship and the old Ottawa and yet we were all proud to have served in the first one. The Ship's Company showed great pride in their ship, and they all appeared to be quite efficient and obviously very highly qualified to man this new and very complex ship. The Ottawa will be coming to the West Coast in December to join the other four frigates of her class.

This was my first reunion and I enjoyed it very much. It was in many ways a gathering to show our respect for our friends and shipmates of H-60 and we thought of them quite often during the week. Each one of us have their own personal memories of what happened the night of September 13th, 1942 and we had many opportunities to recall these events during the week. Although many of us had not seen each other for fifty-four years, we soon felt as though we had never been parted. It was quite obvious that we the survivors were a special group and we tended to stay together. This may

not have been fair to the others who attended, but that is the way it was. In view of our age, the youngest is seventy-two, it may be the only reunion we will have.

The success of our reunion and participation in the Commissioning was due largely to the efforts of Steve Logos of Calgary who tracked down former crew members, arranged accommodation and performed many other tasks too numerous to mention. A special vote of thanks has to be extended to the Canadian Naval Veterans Association of Cornwall who put their club rooms at our disposal, provided lunches, catered to our banquet, made transportation available and helped in so many other ways to make us feel welcome. Bravo Zulu to all concerned.
