



A *Starshell* Book Briefing by Laurie Farrington

An Appropriate Book Launching for RCN History...

NO HIGHER PURPOSE

The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943, Volume II, Part 1

By W. A. B. Douglas, Roger Sarty and Michael Whitby, with Robert H. Caldwell, William Johnston and William G. P. Rawling. Vanwell Publishing Limited, 1 Northrup Crescent, St. Catharines, ON, L2R 7S2, hardcover, 624pp., 7 x 9 3/8 in., B/W and colour photos, fold-out maps, ISBN #1-55125-061-6, SRP: \$60.00. Also available in French. (See advertisement on page 20.)

It was highly appropriate that the Ottawa launching of this book in early May 2003 coincided with the 60th Battle of the Atlantic anniversary ceremonies related to the turning of the tide in 1943. This eagerly awaited volume could ironically be regarded as being sixty years in the making. Its arrival will be welcome news for the survivors of that battle and a fitting testimonial to the men and women of the RCN and RCAF whose day of duty is done and who are now at rest.

This official history of the RCN in the 1939-1945 period is the first part of a volume which will be followed by a second part covering the period 1943-1945 (*A Blue Water Navy*) scheduled for publication in 2004. It was in April 1943 the RCN assumed responsibility for Canadian Northwest Atlantic Command, the only operational area to be run by a Canadian Commander-in-Chief during the war. This volume describes the RCN's long and challenging journey from the beginning of the war in September 1939, through the testing and difficult times of the intervening years until the turning of the tide in the Spring of 1943.

This impressive volume of nearly 700 pages, contributed to by professional historians and scholars, some with NOAC connections, will be of interest not only to those who study Second World War events and who wish to bring their knowledge up-to-date, but also to the general public searching for an informed introduction to the influence Canadian naval affairs have had on both the Canadian and world scene. It is extremely readable; indeed, it is difficult to put down, once the impact of the excellent photos, reproductions and maps have whetted the

appetite for closer reading.

The book is divided into two main sections: Section 1 – Evolving A Role, with five chapters covering Planning, Mobilization and War, September 1939 to May 1940; Responding to the New Challenge, May to December 1940; The RCN and the Anglo-American Alliance, January to July 1941; Implementing Anglo-American Convoy Agreements I, July to October 1941; and Implementing Anglo-American Convoy Agreements II, October to December 1941. Section 2 – Crisis and Response has six chapters ranging from The Pacific Coast and Alaska, December 1941 to July 1943; *Paukensschlag* and the Caribbean, January 1942 to August 1942; The Battle of the St. Lawrence, February 1942 to December 1943; North Atlantic Convoy Operations I, July to September 1942; North Atlantic Convoy Operations II, October to December 1942; to The Creation of Canadian North-West Atlantic Command.

The design of the book is reader-friendly. The contents include a useful list of maps and diagrams, almost essential to understand the convoy actions and various theatres of war, some outstanding wartime colour plates, and a very meaningful glossary and abbreviations with cogent explanations for the reader who has not been nurtured in a military environment. The index system is thorough, it is difficult to find a well-known name which does not receive specific comment, and there is a separate and comprehensive index of ships. A listing of the many black and white illustrations, many rarely seen before from National Archives Canada, would have facilitated quicker access. The reader will also be grateful to the authors for

their use of footnotes on relevant pages rather than often irritating endnotes at the end of each chapter or at the back of the book. The multitude of footnotes reflects the reliable and considerable historical analysis of these events and the vast archives of national and international records which were used as source material in producing this official history. Those readers and reviewers who wish to subject any of these footnote resources to close scrutiny will need lots of time and patience. The footnotes are comprehensive, contain a mine of information, and a good balance has been kept between the necessity for brevity and clarification.

There are five very informative appendices: RCN Personnel Casualties 1939-1945; Senior Appointments within the RCN, September 1939 to April 1943; Canadian Navy Warship Losses, September 1939 to April 1943; Axis Submarine Losses to Canadian Forces, September 1939 to April 1943; and German Officer Ranks and RCN/RN Equivalents. Appendix I: Royal Canadian Navy Personnel Casualties 1939-1945 is of special significance. Not only does it list statistics of RCN fatalities by year of the war 1939-1945, but also by service component (RCN, RCNR and RCNVR). Losses while serving with the RN in merchant ships and in the Mediterranean, Far East and Pacific theatres demonstrate the global reach of Canadian naval personnel. Casualties of RCN Special Entries who fought the war at sea in RN ships and Canadian Raleighites who began their naval careers as Ordinary Seamen RCNVR, were not confined to the Atlantic theatre and their names are found on memorials in various parts of the world.



In the absence of this volume, readers have been compelled to rely on the very popular 1950 publication by Joseph Schull—*Far Distant Ships: An Official Account of Canadian Naval Operations in World War II*—for wartime operational matters. The latter is now being replaced by this workmanlike

and scholarly book which more than demonstrates the need of a critical and analytical official history. The arrival of this official operational history of the RCN in the 1939-1943 period should persuade us to turn off the television and encourage local public libraries to purchase copies so that a wider public

audience of readers will have a better understanding of the remarkable Canadian naval war effort some sixty years ago. Thanks to this book, it will not be forgotten.

Laurie Farrington is a former NOAC National Archivist, and is a member of Ottawa Branch. He has made numerous learned contributions to "Starshell" over the years.

The RCN Official History: Some Comments

By W. A. B. Douglas

EDITOR'S NOTE: During the launch of "No Higher Purpose" on Battle of the Atlantic weekend in Ottawa in early May, Alec Douglas commented about the book. He has consented to include his comments in "Starshell" for the edification of all NOAC members.

This official history has a long and complex history of its own, and the NOAC, which has given us so much support, deserves to know something about it.

Gilbert Tucker, a professional historian who knew a lot about commercial relations with the United States in the nineteenth century, but not much about the navy, became the historian of the naval service in the Second World War. He educated himself and went to sea: he was present for example, with John Stubbs, Ralph Hennessy and Max Bernays when the *Assiniboine* sank U210 in 1942. After the Dieppe raid in 1942, the former Deputy Minister K. S. MacLachlan, now a Lieutenant-Commander deeply involved in the RCN's combined operations effort, shocked to find no historians recording the part the navy had played, persuaded NSHQ to create a historical section in London which had rather misty links to Tucker's office in Ottawa. The future diplomat, Jim George, and the future well known academics Maurice Careless, D. G. G. Kerr and David Spring, were outstanding scholars, but when Tucker visited England in 1944 he complained that they had become maids of all work serving five masters, last and least of whom was the naval historian.

As we say in our introduction, when Tucker came to write the RCN history he wisely said that an operational history was not advisable until we had access to enemy records. What I discovered about twenty years ago however, suggests he had other motives as well. Herbert Rayner, Director of Plans, commented on one of the preliminary narratives, "Reference 'Huron's' and 'Eskimo's' actions ... this account

does not accord with what occurred ... I consider that 'Huron's' report ... should be the basis of this account, and modified only in the light of remarks by C-in-C Plymouth, who analysed the action In other places the author takes on himself to criticise ships' actions, without indicating whether naval authorities agree with him. Presumably this is supposed to be a narrative and not an analysis. Therefore the author's opinions are not required." Harry DeWolf agreed there were many small inaccuracies, but with his usual balanced outlook he observed, "I am sure there is enough material from which to glean the facts of historical interest."

Eventually, Tucker produced the two-volume *Naval Service of Canada*, dealing with shore activities in the Second World War only, and Joe Schull, a former Public Relations officer who went on to become one of Canada's finest historians, wrote *The Far Distant Ships*. When Charles Stacey, the army historian and dean of military historians in Canada, read Schull's manuscript he was very impressed, and so were the thousands of people who read the book and who are still reading it. I share that admiration, but that book does not tell the story "warts and all." We have heard from a number of thoughtful veterans that they were distressed at the lack of analysis and the failure to point out the bad as well as the good things about the navy during the war, and when Marc Milner published *North Atlantic Run*, the reception in the naval community was very positive.

The navy has many historical buffs and enthusiasts—those of us who sailed under Hugh Pullen will remember how he told us we should subscribe to *The Mariner's Mirror* and made us read Michael Lewis' *The Navy of Britain*—but neither the navy nor the air force gave very much attention to 1964, integration and unification which brought about so many changes and so much unhappiness, had one good outcome: a single Directorate of History for the three services. True, neither Ted Russell the naval historian, nor Fred Hitchens the air force historian, were particularly pleased at being placed under a former army historian, but

C. P. Stacey and his successor Syd Wise, were able to create a very successful organisation and fill some of the serious gaps in our official history. We were all very conscious of a need to write an analytical operational history of the navy that dealt with the many issues that had arisen in the books that had been written since 1945, and in 1987 we began to prepare a one-volume history of the RCN in the Second World War.

We had embarked on major research efforts in the UK and Germany when I went on leave to teach in the US for a year in 1988. When I got back from that job, the new VCDS, VAdm. Chuck Thomas, treated me to one of his long interviews and a result was a decision to go for a three-volume history that would cover the RCN from 1910 to Unification, and to accomplish this we were given some additional resources. We were going great guns on that plan when there were certain upheavals in NDHQ, and the duties of the official historian tended to include rather a lot of turf war. But in spite of severe reductions in establishment in 1994-95, and thanks to the excellent work of Roger Sarty and Michael Whitby after my retirement, we once again got on track, found wonderful new documentary resources in Britain and the US, and were able to complete a much enlarged manuscript which has been turned into a two-part history of operations in the Second World War, one in which we have been able to confirm and amplify on the Canadian belief that the RN and USN could not have succeeded as they did without the RCN's contribution.

Why Volume II before Volume I? Quite simply, we were anxious to get it out while some of the 1939-45 survivors were still around. Why two parts for Volume II? We agreed, and so did the naval staff at NDHQ, we had to have a complete account incorporating all our new material.

It has been a labour of love, and I hope you will enjoy our book.

Alec Douglas' outstanding contribution as the Canadian naval historian of note, requires no further amplification in "Starshell." He is a member of Ottawa Branch.