

The Royal Canadian Navy and the Battle of the Atlantic:
An Oral History

for

History 394 (FOI)

(Dr. Shawn *Cafferky*)

An Essay by

Cameron White
0232016



- Cdr (Ret.) Peter Chance -- Student Nick Debeck -- Student Cameron White
- Cdr (Ret.) Ted Semmens -- Student Marshall Horne -- RAdm (Ret.) John Charles & LCdr (Ret.) Hugh Gordon

13 April, 2005

The Battle of the Atlantic has been described by some historians as the most important campaign of the Second World War; indeed it was a campaign with ramifications reaching far beyond the admittedly vital supply of Britain with foodstuffs. The Battle of the Atlantic had an impact on literally all fronts of the greatest war in history. Without the victory of the convoys over the U-boats, Britain's industrial plants would stall for lack of oil and other vital raw materials. Without vital oil convoys, the North African campaign would have ground to a halt, giving Hitler access to the vast oil reserves of the Middle East and a new southern front against Soviet Russia by way of Iran and the Caucasus and preventing the Allied assault on Europe's soft Italian underbelly. Without the supplies delivered to the Soviet Union by the arctic convoys on the dreaded Murmansk Run, most notably the thousands of American made trucks which the gave the Soviets a vital advantage in mobility over their German adversaries, Stalin's Red Army would have been hard pressed to throw back the invaders. Without the successful campaign against Doenitz' fleet, Operation Bolero, the build-up of American forces in Britain would never have succeeded and given birth to Operation Overlord, thereby giving the Western Allies a foothold for democracy in Europe. Even the Asia-Pacific campaign was affected by the Battle of the Atlantic, its successful prosecution preventing the transport (by specially altered cargo caring U-boats) of raw materials and technology between the Axis powers, an exchange which was of greater importance than its small tonnage might suggest.'

Perhaps inevitably, a campaign of such great scale and importance has generated more than its share of controversy among historians. Among the greatest of such controversies has been the role of the Royal Canadian Navy in the battle for the North Atlantic sea-lanes and more specifically, the quality of its contribution. This paper will seek to analyze the nature of this

¹David Syrett, "Communications Intelligence and the Sinking of U-1062: 30 September 1944," *The Journal of*

contribution and more specifically, it will seek to determine the utility of oral history interviews in improving our historical understanding of this contentious topic. Beginning with a brief historiographical summary in order to clarify the origins and the nature of the historical debate over the performance of the wartime RCN, this paper will then employ three oral history interviews conducted with Captain G.H. Hayes RCN Midshipman/Lt. RNR/RCNR in wartime), Lt. Commander Hugh Gordon RCNVR (then Sub Lt./Lt.), and Commander Edmund (Ted) Semmens RCN (wartime Able Seaman/Sub Lt. RCNVR) in conjunction with secondary sources with the aim of determining the utility of such sources in the investigation of one the most often mentioned but ironically, least analyzed factors regarding the RCN's wartime performance: basic training, in addition to a contrasting examination of ASDIC training. Lastly this paper will examine the seldom investigated issue of discipline in the wartime RCN in the light of oral testimony. This paper will close with an overall evaluation of the value of oral history in the dissection of the wartime RCN which will conclude that such sources are a valuable asset to historians that shed light on minor details that official records and histories often omit as inconsequential, provide a valuable real-life context for secondary sources, and which can at times serve to expand upon, or even correct official records which are at times either incomplete or incorrect.

The wartime performance of the RCN has been roundly criticized by many post-war writers, perhaps most notably by Captain Donald Macintyre RN who (in what Marc Milner identifies as the "first critical discussion of the wartime RCN"²) describes Canadian corvettes as "ill-maintained ... travesties of warships" that "were units with which to make a show on the

Military History 58(4) (October 1994): 685~86.

² Marc Milner, "Canada's Naval War," *Acadiensis*, 12(2) (1983): 164.

operations room maps...but little more.³” Beyond general condemnations however, such early literature provided little qualitative analysis of the issues that impeded the efficiency of Canadian escorts, instead simply noting that such problems of efficiency were the result of the rapid wartime expansion of the RCN, an expansion which in terms of manpower approached a ratio of fifty wartime recruits (to the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve RCNVR) for every one pre-war RCN and RCNR) sailor.

There were of course earlier works dealing with the wartime RCN, some official, like Gilbert Tucker's *The Naval Service of Canada*, others popular, as in the case of Joseph Schull's *The Far Distant Ships* and still others (certainly the greatest body of literature) in the form of memoirs or autobiography. Nonetheless, none of these sources present an academic analysis of the operational difficulties of the wartime RCN. *The Naval Service of Canada* certainly meets the standards of scholarly research, but provides little in the way of critical analysis. Tucker's exhaustively researched tome is better viewed as an official administrative source for future analyses than as a critical analysis in and of itself. The academic shortcomings of popular histories are readily apparent. Memoirs and autobiographies provide primary source material, not objective analysis. As Marc Milner, perhaps the most prominent modern scholar of the RCN, notes on the equipment difficulties faced by the RCN,

Although *The Naval Service of Canada* contains scattered evidence of this problem in its discussion of technical liaison and fleet maintenance, nowhere...do the grave consequences of Canada's inability to support the Navy qualitatively emerge.⁴

The first specific analysis of the RCN's operational difficulties emerged not in RCN specific works, but in books covering Canada's war effort generally. C.P. Stacey's *Arms, Men and Governments* provided the first academic analysis of the wartime RCN, focusing particularly on

³Captain Donald Macintyre RN, *U-boat Killer*; (New York: W.W. Norton, 1956), 104~105.

the impact of limited and outdated technology upon the efficiency of the escort forces, a theme expanded upon in W.A.C. Douglas' popular yet academically vigorous *Out of the Shadows*. These works outline clearly for the first time "an equipment crisis of major proportions,"⁵ most notably a lack of gyrocompasses and workable radar (although at first RCN corvettes and minesweepers lacked it altogether), the hesitance to adopt the latest antisubmarine weaponry, and the consequences of *this* crisis.⁶ These issues would form the basis which would be the basis of most of the later academic RCN literature (which curiously would not emerge in its own right until the early 1980s) including the work of historians such as Marc Milner and William Rawling.⁷ *Out of the Shadows* even presages the administrative/institutional histories of historians such as David Zimmerman and Richard Mayne when it notes that,

...even after the Admiralty authorized innovations, there were long delays in processing them through Naval Service Headquarters in Ottawa, (these appear to have been caused by the shortage of personnel, the inadequacy of staff training, and the absence of liaison with the Admiralty on technical matters.)⁹

⁴Marc Milner, "Canada's Naval War," *Acadiensis*, 12(2) (1983): 166.

⁵W.A.B. Douglas, *Out of the Shadows: Canada in the Second World War* (Toronto: Vanwell, 1995)

⁶Douglas, *Out of the Shadows*, 79-81.

⁷For a thorough examination of the consequences of the lack of gyrocompasses and the poor performance and late introduction of the Canadian designed and built SWI C, SW2C radar sets see: Marc Milner, "The Implications of Technological Backwardness: The Canadian Navy, 1939-1945," in *Canadian Military History: Selected Readings*, ed. Marc Milner (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1993), 298-312. For an analysis of the reasoning behind Canada's decision to adopt the Squid ahead throwing ASDIC linked ASW system on only an extremely limited scale consult:

William Rawling, "The Challenge of Modernization: The Royal Canadian Navy and Anti-Submarine Weapons, 1944-1945," *The Journal of Military History* 63 (April 1999): 355-378.

⁸For an investigation into the political and bureaucratic origins of the RCN's equipment crisis with a particular emphasis on the failure of the Canadian-made RXIC 10 centimeter radar set see:

David Zimmerman, "The Royal Canadian Navy and the National Research Council, 1939A5," *Canadian Historical Review* 69(2) (1988): 203-221.

David Zimmerman, *The Great Naval Battle of Ottawa*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989.)

For an account of the *wartime* investigation into this issue (limited more to bureaucratic than technical problems) see:

Mayne, Richard Oliver. "Bypassing the Chain of Command: The Political Origins of the RCN's Equipment Crisis of 1943." *Canadian Military History* Vol.9, No.3 (Summer 2000): 7-22.

⁹Douglas, *Out of the Shadows*, 80.

Curiously, while training had been the focus of the RCN's wartime and immediately post war critics it had largely fallen off the historiographical map by the time detailed academic analyses of the RCN had begun to emerge in the 1980s. Captain Macintyre's criticisms of the RCN had focused almost exclusively on training noting that "this sudden expansion...meant that officers and men were going to sea with only the sketchiest training." Notes on equipment are few and limited typically focus not on its quality or quantity, but rather its maintenance (or lack thereof.)¹⁰ By the late 1970s and early 1980s this trend had reversed, equipment was the dominant theme and training the sidebar.

What little reference to training that does exist in contemporary analytical literature has tended to focus upon operational training (or lack thereof) to the detriment of our understanding of the readiness of sailors as they left port for the first time. Marc Milner for instance in his seminal *North Atlantic Run* devotes almost no space to predeployment training, noting only the difficulties of housing the influx of recruits,¹¹ and making only one reference to the shortage of shore side training personnel.¹² This is one area that oral history can certainly shed light upon, but first it is essential to spell out a few ground rules for the use of oral testimony in this paper. This will be followed by examination of basic training facilities, instructors and the curriculum of pre-deployment ASDIC training (not in all cases as a part of basic training) and what seems to be the most neglected aspect of basic training, seamanship, in the light of oral testimony.

This paper largely utilizes Valerie Yow's method of transcription as outlined in her book, *Recording Oral History*. As such, the three dots of an ellipsis followed by a period represent a sentence left unfinished, while a simple ellipsis (as is traditional in the Chicago style of citation)

¹⁰ MacIntyre, *U-boat Killer*, 104-109.

¹¹ Marc Milner, *North Atlantic Run* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 27.

¹² Milner, *North Atlantic Run*, 16.

indicates text omitted by the author for the purposes of relevance or brevity. Additionally, pertinent information may be added in squared parentheses to quotations by the author for the purposes of brevity and clarification; however such additions are in all cases representative of statements made at other points in the interview and not the result of editorial zeal or secondary sources. A dash indicates a digression (typically for the purposes of contextual clarification) in mid-sentence. "Uhms", "uhs", "Hmms" and crutch words such as "well" and "you know" (these are just examples and by no means represent a comprehensive listing of such verbal mannerisms) are omitted except in cases where they indicate hesitation on the part of a troubled speaker or to illustrate a recurrent speech pattern. Non-verbal gestures are included in parentheses.¹³

Unlike Yow, however, this paper utilizes a more conservative approach to the treatment of "false starts." Yow notes that, "advice to date in manuals has been to leave out a false start if it conveys nothing significant," this is the approach which has been employed in this paper.¹⁴

The exhaustive *Naval Service of Canada*, despite its early pedigree, focuses little on the specifics of shore side training and even less upon basic training. indeed those portions of the book which deal with training facilities area spending more time discussing the administration of expanding barracks¹⁵ than on describing what actually physically constituted such a facility or what was being taught to their occupants.

The difficulties of obtaining proper facilities and training aids is confirmed in interviews with Commander Semmens and U. Commander Gordon. When queried as to the state of the facilities at the Calgary Naval Division (also known as HMCS Tecumseh) where he undertook his basic training (as an enlisted person) Commander Semmens noted that they were,

¹³Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History*, (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 1994), 229-233.

¹⁴Yow, *Recording Oral History*, 232.

Pretty basic, they had drill floor and some stanchions arranged at one end so you could learn to sling a hammock and sleep there overnight and get used to hoisting yourself into a hammock and preparing your clothes and your spreaders. Basic, not much in the way of training aids. You had to imagine a lot of these things.¹⁶

It should be noted however, that Commander Semmens undertook only his basic training (the curriculum of which will be discussed later) at this facility before receiving theoretical (at the University of Toronto) and practical (in Halifax) training as a submarine detector. His basic training experiences can, however, be looked upon as typical of the experience of an unspecialized Able Seaman hailing from the prairies.

Lt. Commander Hugh Gordon provides an RCNVR officer cadet's view of basic officer training facilities at HMCS Stadacona in Halifax circa early 1940:

It was known as the mousetraps, we were the only class that went through the mousetraps- that's before Kings had started, it was early in the game-.... the mousetraps was a building that had been constructed, a H-shaped hut, on the grounds of Admiralty House...we were right next door to Admiralty house, we ate all our meals at Admiralty House. But after that, King's had started up, so we were the only class that went through the mousetraps.¹⁷

Further probing as to the nature of training facilities reveals that unlike Commander Semmens, who undertook all of his basic training at one location, officers trained at Halifax, even "early in the game," were often able to take advantage of the existing naval infrastructure, but not in all cases,

lets start with navigation...our training was in the basement of a church. Early in the game there were no training setups- no places properly setup for training- except for one...Gunnery was in the Gunnery School, that was in the dockyard...Signals, all we learned was Morse code- by light- and semaphore by flags, and it took place at Camp Hill Hospital, a location that wasn't being used...Anti-submarine took place at the Torpedo School in the dockyard.¹⁸

¹⁵~~~~Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada Its Official History Volume II Activities on Shore During the Second World War* (Ottawa: King's Printer), 1952, 125-126.

¹⁶ *Commander* Edmund Semmens RCN (ret.), *personal* interview, 3 March 2005.

¹⁷ *Lt Commander* Hugh Gordon RCNVR (ret), *personal* interview, 12 March 2005.

¹⁸ *Lt Commander* Hugh Gordon RCNVR (ret), *personal* interview, 12 March 2005.

Gordon further notes that his seamanship training, the location of which he does not recall, did not include any time aboard a ship.

Much like the facilities in which RCNVR men trained, their instructors varied widely. Tucker's *Naval Service of Canada*, in its section on "instructors and instruction" provides more useful details than it does on facilities. Tucker provides details on the background of the RCN's training staff; noting the difficulties of bringing active personnel ashore to serve as instructors and the resulting reliance on older ratings, WWI vets, and men unfit for sea duty. Tucker does however note that "this dependence lessened with time."¹⁹ Interestingly, while both Semmens' and Gordon's accounts of their basic training instructors largely mirror Tucker's account, both also recall individual instructors who were highly qualified and specialized. Commander Semmens recalls his instructors thusly:

We had a Chief Gunner's Mate [possibly RCNR) who was doing the drill part of our basic training at *Tecumseh*, and he was a hard-nosed devil may care type. In essence he was good, but sailors learned to hate him because he was so domineering, so tough on us...but he must have instilled something in us- that we were tough enough to do it later on- so I've got no complaints...and then we had an old Torpedo Bosun from the RN...and he took us aside and gave us lectures on torpedoes...and then they took us into classrooms and made us do the Naval Educational Test, which we all passed thankfully, but that was due to- they had an instructor Lt. [RCNVR] who was a very good teacher.²⁰

This account, from a minor prairie Naval Division, suggests that reserve personnel (seemingly fit personnel one might add) may have been more prevalent than Tucker suggests.

The recollections of Lt. Commander Gordon likewise call into question Tucker's analysis of training personnel (an analysis which notably, in an otherwise footnote laden work, is not cited),

¹⁹Tucker, *The Naval Defence of Canada*, 306-307.

²⁰ Commander Edmund Semmens RCN (ret), personal interview, 3 March 2005.

Let's start off with navigation; Benny Sivertz- originally from Vancouver- had an extraordinary background. He sailed as a kid- under sail- to Australia, he also took the teacher training course, so by the time the war came along he was well qualified to teach navigation because of his background and the fact that he was also a teacher... He taught navigation to the officers throughout the whole war, went to King's after...Benny Sivertz incidentally was a very clever man, he eventually became the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, so he w~ smart I thought the world of him, as did everyone.²¹

Certainly Benny Sivertz would seem to fall well outside of Tucker's description of "divisional officers... [who] were often without sea experience." ²²

In terms of the curriculum of basic training, *The Naval Service of Canada*, while providing more detail than any other source available, still falls short, placing greater emphasis upon "the procedures of modern pedagogy," "methods of instruction," and "the proper conduct of tests," than upon the curriculum itself, with the exception of Gunnery which is covered at some length.

The subject of seamanship training is seemingly neglected by Tucker in *The Naval Service of Canada*. In terms of the seamanship training offered to officers, Tucker provides no detailed description whatsoever. '[I]f *The Naval Service of Canada* makes only two mentions of seamanship training for officers at all, both of which are quoted below in their entirety. The first refers to the earliest wartime officer training program, intended for the much maligned "sunday sailors,"²³ of the Supplementary Reserve, "a section of the volunteer reserve which had been created in 1937 for men who were interested in yachting but could not join the regular reserve because of lack of time, and who could be called up as potential executive officers in an emergency."²⁴ Tucker notes only that "training at the Stone Frigate took eight weeks, and was

²¹Lt. Commander Hugh Gordon RCNVR (ret.), personal interview, 12 March 2005.

²²Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 306.

²³Milner, *North Atlantic Run*, 27.

²⁴Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 248.

devoted to squad drill, navigation, seamanship and signals."²⁵ The only other mention of seamanship training for officers is in reference to an alteration to the extended twelve week officer training course that was offered to RCNVR officers beginning in 1942 and notes that,

The seamanship course started in 1942 for C.W. (HMCS Cornwallis, a training facility) candidates was arranged so as to allow half the time for training given to leading seamen, and the other half specifically for officer's training.²⁶

It would seem then that an examination of Tucker's chapter on "Personnel and Training-Ratings," would provide the details the historian seeks, but to no avail.

The Naval Service of Canada devotes a mere two and half pages to the topic of seamanship training, half the space dedicated to topics such as ASDIC, *gunnery* and communications training. Admittedly these subjects were more technical, but certainly of less relevance to the grand majority of sailors than the basics of how to handle and, more importantly, survive aboard a ship. Tucker's description is nonetheless scanty, indeed he spends more time in a subsection ostensibly about seamanship training detailing the sea duties of a junior rating, the intricacies of the rank structure and a comparison of the facilities at HMCS Cornwallis and HMCS Naden than he does upon the details of the course itself, which he sums up thusly:

The normal course work comprised four weeks of gunnery, three of seamanship and one aboard a training ship. In seamanship, practical instruction was given in rigging, boat-work, semaphore, Morse, drainage control, and the duties of lookout and quartermaster²⁷

He further notes that upon the transfer of the seamanship school to Deep Brook (for which no date is given, but the cited document is dated 16 July 1945) that instructional facilities and supplies were much improved,

²⁵Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 248.

²⁶Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 250-251.

²⁷Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 284.

...a store of instructional equipment, especially for lifesaving, damage control and fire-fighting was built up. A ships water-tight bulkhead was also installed...to show the several kinds of water-tight doors; and full-scale examples of shored-up damaged ships sides were constructed as well.²⁸

A seemingly impressive setup, but the overall lack of emphasis on seamanship training would seem to support this notion that this facility was built in the closing months of the war.

Furthermore, Tucker makes no mention of the scattered local Naval Divisions at which so many early recruits underwent their training.

An examination of oral testimony will however show that this lack of emphasis is not the result of a lack of interest on Tucker's part, but is in fact representative of the true state of affairs for the RCN's earliest students of seamanship. Commander Semmens describes his seamanship training at HMCS *Tecumseh* in Calgary:

The training was simply learning naval ranks, marching- group marches- basic seamanship, going out to Chestermere Lake and learning to use a whaler and the parts of a whaler and things of that nature. Ropes and splices, general basic seamanship training at *Tecumseh*.²⁹

When queried as to whether this seamanship training prepared him for life on the North Atlantic Semmens responded, "No (spoken quietly but preceded with an emphatic shake of the head). You learned to pull an oar, steer a whaler, that's about all it gave me.

Officers trained in Halifax did not fare much better according to Hugh Gordon, who barely recalls his brief seamanship training,

I can't remember where we had the seamanship, which was pretty basic....we went there in January, which was bloody awful weather, and we finished out course in April, but we didn't go out on a ship, there were hardly any ships around anyway. I know that other classes did, I know that Royal Roads did, I know that King's did, but we did not. We had to row- as part of our early morning exercises- we had to row a

²⁸Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 284.

²⁹ Commander Edmund Semmens RCN (ret.), personal interview, 3 March 2005.

whaler around the harbour of Halifax, amongst all the oil and debris that was floating around in the water. That was our only experience on the water during the training.³⁰

Lt. Commander Gordon's early unfamiliarity with the basics of seamanship is well demonstrated in practice by an incident which he recalls from his first ship:

Incidentally I got my watchkeeping certificate after about three months at sea, today it takes at least two years. They handed me one in a hurry because they wanted someone to take complete control of the ship besides the Captain...I didn't even know what a watchkeeping certificate was when they gave it to me, though I was glad to get it.

Given this testimony, Tucker's lack of emphasis on seamanship is understandable, ratings and officers alike were receiving basically none. Semmens and Gordon would find themselves serving aboard corvettes in the North Atlantic having never before set foot upon a warship or even a training vessel worthy of the term "ship"!

Historians must of course be sure to not to lend excessive weight such 9ra1 testimony. This statement is not intended to cast doubt on the veracity of the information gathered in such interviews, but rather to warn against the dangers of making broad generalizations on the basis of the experiences of just a few members of what was literally a cast of 100,000. For instance, it would be incorrect to, based on these two cases, draw the conclusion that RCN reservists were invariably lacking in seamanship training and ship-board training time. The poor seamanship training evidenced by Gordon and Semmens did not however extend to all RCN personnel.

Take for example the experiences of Captain G.H. Hayes, who although far from typical had a very different training experience, never underwent any naval training at all and found himself at war with little but civilian seamanship training. As a member of the RNR, Hayes was scheduled to return to England in order to undergo naval training once he had completed his

³⁰Lt. Commander Hugh Gordon RCNVR (ret), personal interview, 12 March 2005.

³¹Lt. Commander Hugh Gordon RCNVR (ret), personal interview, 12 March 2005.

merchant ticket, but war intervened. Hayes notes that despite his extensive seamanship experience, he had other problems on his first RCN assignment,

When I joined *Trillium* I'd never heard of an ASDC set- as it was then called- and I was made the ASDIC control officer when I stepped aboard. I didn't even know where the hell the set was, I had to go find the ASDIC hut and I got hold of the HSD and he taught me everything he thought that I needed to know.³²

In many cases it would seem that the limited but differing training afforded to different members of the wartime navy in some cases, with a little cooperation, could be combined to create an effective unit. This is borne out in the experiences of Commander Semmens who, despite limited seamanship training, received top notch specialized ASDIC training; first undergoing an extensive four month theoretical course at the University of Toronto followed by four months of practical training in Halifax which he recalls in great detail,

They [the ASW training facilities] were quite good. There was a room set up with so-called ASDIC sets and they could simulate going through an ocean and energizing the quartz crystal, getting an echo- you could hear the reverberations- you'd get an echo on your machine and then carry out the necessary mechanics to zero in on that echo and listen to the orders from the so-called Captain...They were quite good really and they had these attack tables- the very important part- sort of a Perspex table...on to which they could project from underneath the ship and the submarine, and you could see your echo going out, you got realistic noise, realistic echoes.

When asked if this training prepared him for ASW operations, Semmens responded enthusiastically, "Oh yes, there's no question about it."³³

The final subject that this paper will examine is the issue of discipline in the RCN. This is an issue that has oddly been left largely untouched by historians of the RCN, particularly in light of the fact that it was among the issues touched upon by the influential yet scathing commentary of Captain MacIntyre who in an uncharacteristic display of restraint described RCN discipline as

³² Captain G.H. Hayes RCN (ret), personal interview, 25 March 2005.

³³ Commander Edmund Semmens RCN (ret.), personal interview, 3 March 2005.

weird and wonderful.³⁴” Indeed the oral testimony of Captain Hayes does support this notion of a somewhat informal disciplinary Structure,

Every ship had a bad hat, one guy who was always getting himself in trouble, mainly it was either booze or thoughtlessness or something. The ships companies were small, everybody had a job to do and when someone wasn't doing his job somebody else had to do it and therefore there was a lot of what we called mess deck discipline going on amongst themselves and as an officer you closed your eyes to that. You might even Suggest that "you guys might take care of 'Joe Doakes' yourself, I don't want to hear anything more about it."³⁵

It has as been suggested that in the wake of the July 1943 mutiny aboard HMCS Iroquois that the RCN developed a reputation among the RN brass for disciplinary problems,³⁶ but one interviewee argues that in at least one case, an act of mass disobedience aboard HMCS *Chebogue* in August 1944, officially attributed to "dissatisfaction with the ship's routine"³⁷ "was in fact triggered by the attitude of a British SOE (Senior Officer Escort) and his ill-treatment of RCN personnel,

He was RCNR, an Englishman, and his origin at sea was on the China Coast with the China Customs. I guess he was used to handling Chinese coolies, and he treated Canadian sailors something like Chinese coolies, which they didn't appreciate, as you can imagine...Chebogue went alongside [an oil tanker to refuel] and the Coxswain went to somebody, I don't think it was the Senior officer...and said "What's the rig of the day?" and whoever it was said, "Number ones,"..."Number ones for oiling ship sir?" "Number ones." Can you imagine sailors wearing their number ones to oil a ship? So they locked themselves below, they went on mutiny. Wouldn't oil ship under those conditions.

This version of events must however be considered in light of another incident in which the same orders of that same SOE prevented the interviewee, an ASW expert, from having the opportunity to make an. attack upon a U-boat, the only one said expert had ever encountered, and which would

³⁴MacIntyre, *U-boat Killer*, 105.

³⁵ Captain G.H. Hayes RCN (ret), personal interview, 25 March 2005.

³⁶Michael J. Whitby, "Matelots, Martinets, and Mutineers: The Mutiny in HMCS *Iroquois*, 19 July 1943," *The Journal of Military History* 65 (January 2001): 99.

³⁷Whitby, "Matelots, Martinets, and Mutineers," 100.

torpedo *Chebogue*. The bitterness surrounding this incident is evident in his recounting of his missed opportunity and the near destruction of *Chebogue*. When queried as to the reason that of all the ships present only his was prevented from pursuing the U-boat Gordon notes, "He was stupid." Furthermore, his version of events, that the *Chebogue* failed to zig-zag and deploy CAT3S is not corroborated in the official record (although it is worth noting that said record is lacking details of almost any kind.) This is not to say that this version of events is incorrect, but merely that it warrants further investigation. Michael Frisch notes the dangers of accepting such testimony without question, no matter how credible the source.³⁹

Another interview makes note of a similar incident that appears nowhere in the record, a mutiny aboard HMCS *Stratford* in 1942, ostensibly triggered by the domineering attitude of a Lt. Keeler.⁴⁰ These incidents suggest that oral history has a great deal to provide to the study of disciplinary problems in the RCN, distasteful a topic though it may be.

In conclusion, oral history can provide a great deal to the student of the wartime RCN. In the case of training staff; oral testimony casts doubt upon the official history and at least reminds us that generalizations such as those that Tucker puts forward will always have their exceptions. In regards to training facilities, oral testimony provides important details that official historians might deem irrelevant, but should nonetheless be recorded. A comparative study of seamanship and ASW training (both in contrast to each other and by comparing the experiences of different RCN personnel) casts light upon the priorities of the wartime training establishment and the wide disparities in training from one person to another and from one area to another. Perhaps most notably, the examination of issues of discipline reveals possible gaps or inaccuracies in the

³⁸LL Commander Hugh Gordon RCNVR (ret), personal interview, 12 March 2005.

³⁹Michael Frisch, "Oral History and *Hard Times*," *Oral History Review* 7(1979): 7~77.

⁴⁰Commander Edmund Semmens - RCN (ret), personal interview, 3 March 2005.

official record. Incidents which at the time may have seemed to sensitive or embarrassing to publicize are nonetheless essential to a full understanding of this period, oral history, carefully used provides an excellent opportunity to fill such holes in our understanding.

Bibliography

- Douglas, W.A.B. and Greenhous, Brereton. *Out of the Shadows: Canada in the Second World War*. Toronto: Vanwell, 1995.
- Frisch, Michael. "Oral History and *Hard Times*." *Oral History Review* 7(1979): 70~79.
- Gordon, Lt. Commander Hugh RCNVR (ret.). Interview by the author, 12 March 2005.
- Hayes, Captain G.H. RCN (ret.). Interview by the author, 25 March 2005.
- Macintyre, Captain (RN) Donald, *U-boat Killer*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1956)
- Mayne, Richard Oliver. "Bypassing the Chain of Command: The Political Origins of the RCN's Equipment Crisis of 1943." *Canadian Military History* Vol.9, No.3 (Summer 2000): 7-22.
- Milner, Marc. "Canada's Naval War." *Acadiensis* 12(2) (1983): 164.
- Milner, Marc. *North Atlantic Run: The Royal Canadian Navy and the Battle for the Convoys*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985.
- Milner, Marc. "The Implications of Technological Backwardness: The Canadian Navy, 1939-1945." In *Canadian Military History: Selected Readings* ed. by Marc Milner. Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1993, 298-312.
- Rawling, William. "The Challenge of Modernation: The Royal Canadian Navy and Antisubmarine Weapons. 1944~1945." *The Journal of Military History* 63 (2) (April 1999): 355-378.
- Semmens, Commander Edmund RCN (ret.). Interview by the author, 3 March 2005.
- Syrett, David "Communications Intelligence and the Sinking of the U-1062:30 September 1944." *The Journal of Military History*, 58(4) (October 1994): 685~98.
- Tucker, Gilbert *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History Volume If Activities on Shore During the Second World War* (Ottawa: King's Printer), 1952
- Whitby, Michael J. "Matelots, Martinets, and Mutineers: The Mutiny in HMCS *Iroquois*, 19 July 1943." *The Journal of Military History* 65 (January 2001): 77-103.
- Yow, Valerie. *Recording Oral History*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1994.
- Zimmerman, David. "The Royal Canadian Navy and the National Research Council, 1939A5." *Canadian Historical Review* Vol. LXIX No.2(1988): 203-221.

Zimmerman, David. *The Great Naval Battle of Ottawa: How Admirals, Scientists, and Politicians Impeded the Development of High Technology in Canada's Wartime Navy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989.