

CDR

Canadian Defence Review

THE ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY
Feature Interview
Vice-Admiral Mark Norman

**CANADA'S
SUBMARINE FORCE**
100 years of silent service

REGIONAL REPORT
Atlantic Canada's
Defence Industry

Volume 20/Issue 4 Price \$11.95

Publications Mail Agreement Number 40792504

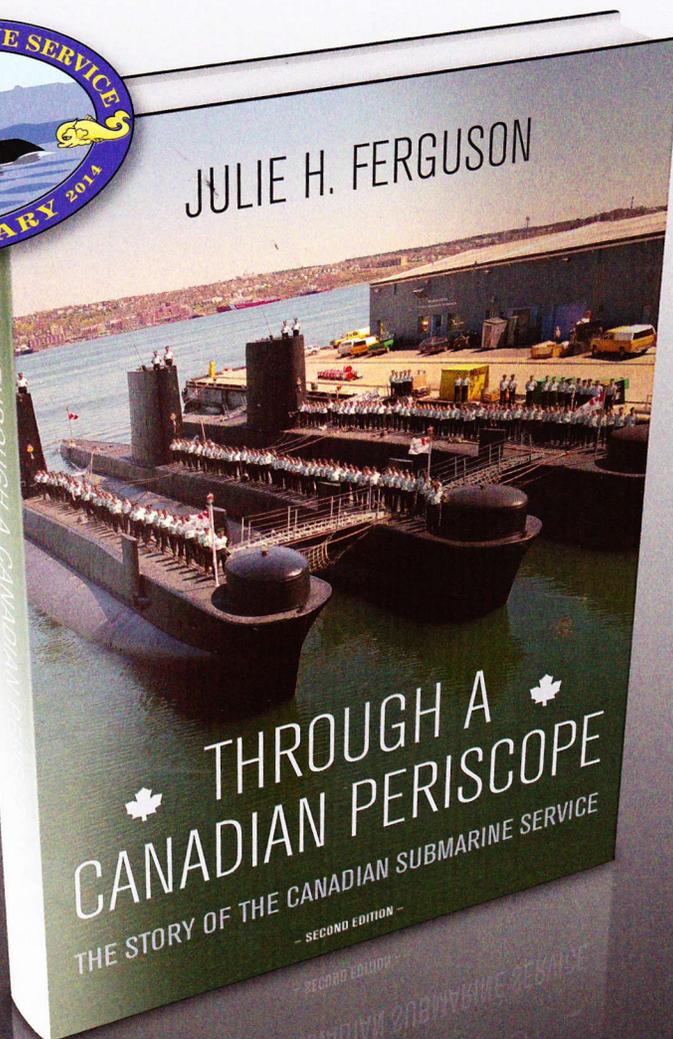


0 74470 85451 7

INDUSTRY FOCUS
Thales Canada



CANADA'S SUBMARINE SERVICE



CELEBRATING THE CENTENARY OF CANADA'S SUBMARINE SERVICE

The following is an excerpt from the book, *Through a Canadian Periscope*, by **Julie H. Ferguson**, published by Dundurn Press, which documents the story of The Royal Canadian Navy's intrepid submariners. The Centenary emblem, developed specifically to recognize the impressive 100 year milestone, is courtesy of SAOC (The Submariners Association of Canada).



CC2 at the time of its purchase in 1914. (Ferguson collection)

Two small vessels crept slowly into Canadian waters before dawn on a summer's morning. It was 0445 on 5 August 1914 – warm, calm and hazy. The vessels were submarines, arriving secretly after an escape under cover of darkness from their American shipyard.

At that moment the Canadian Submarine Service was born.

Its conception had not been planned by the Royal Canadian Navy, and its delivery turned out to be precipitate and furtive, unheralded by the usual naval ceremonies. Like all unexpected events, the acquisition of the submarines was surrounded by urgency and confusion.

The Canadian Submarine Service began not in Halifax as one might assume, but in the middle of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the seaway that separates Canada from the United States on the Pacific coast. Astonishingly, it was the Province of British Columbia, not the Canadian government, that had taken the initiative and acquired the twin submarines at the outbreak of the Great War.

The two vessels appeared insignificant as they made their way into Esquimalt Harbour that morning, around breakfast time. Many people saw them; few paid any attention. But

those on board the examination vessel, MV *Malaspina*, took one look at the unusual craft, failed to challenge them, turned tail, and ran at full speed for the harbour entrance. They “went round the corner off Fisgard Light, [and] bloody near skidded,” signaling, “Two German torpedo boats approaching the harbour.”

The situation also alarmed the militia who were manning the shore-based guns on the first day of World War I. “My God, what are we going to do now?” groaned one officer when he heard the news. But at the Black Rock gun battery the gunners had no doubts about what to do – they rammed home their shells and trained the twelve-pounders’ barrels on the submarines. As soon as the boats were within range, they would fire.

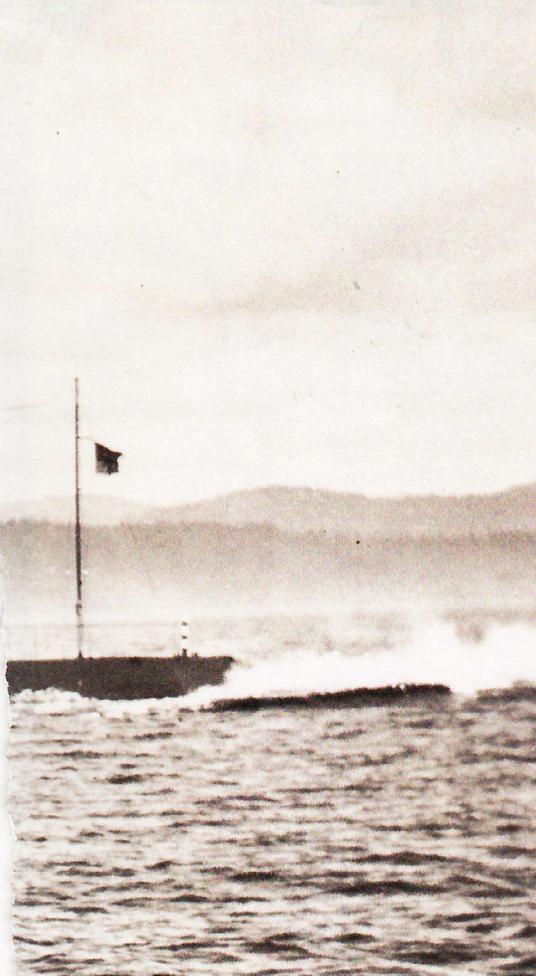
Fortunately, the infant Canadian Submarine Service got a reprieve. The officer in charge of the Black Rock guns looked again through his telescope and stopped to think. The submarines were on the surface in plain sight, not submerged as an enemy would be, and they looked like British C-class boats. His pause saved the submarines. At that moment they hoisted a flag: some say it was the Red Ensign, but rumour has it that it was a pillow case. The gunners held their fire and wondered why the

dockyard had not notified them to expect the submarines. Later they discovered that they had nearly blown Canada’s first submarines to kingdom come.

Meanwhile, the *Malaspina* had alerted the entire dockyard – she came into port “wailing like a banshee” with the lanyard of her siren tied to the rail. One confident civilian went to investigate. He was B.L. “Barney” Johnson, a master mariner and B.C. pilot, who had volunteered to assist the navy for one month with their navigation in the difficult coastal waters of B.C. Speaking later of the submarines’ arrival he recalled, “My naval career had commenced without my realizing it.”⁴ The boats changed his life irrevocably.

No naval band played “Heart of Oak” to mark the historic birth of the Canadian Submarine Service, no flags or coloured streamers fluttered in the breeze, and no crowd cheered. Only two men stood on the jetty in the sunshine to greet the new arrivals. They were Sir Richard, the premier of British Columbia, and Lt. Henry Pilcher, RN (Royal Navy), temporarily in charge of the naval base.

Although tired, Sir Richard took much pride in his accomplishment: he had secured the submarines for the Pacific coast in the nick of time,



The crew of CC1 in 1914 in Esquimalt: Lt. "Barney" Johnson, RNCVR, (First Lieutenant) is seated with his dog and, on his left, Mid. "Jock" Edwards, RCN. (DND photo: PA-142539)

and he was relieved that his bold and hurried plan had succeeded. He was also anxious about the cost; he later took a man aside who had come with the submarines and asked him if he thought the price was fair. James V. Paterson was probably not the right person to ask; he

was the president of the shipyard that had built the boats. He assured the premier that it was.

Lieutenant Pilcher, on the other hand, suffered only anxiety at the scale of the events that had overtaken him while he was burdened with responsibilities for which he was too junior



Congratulations



Naval Support Inc.

Supporting submarines globally,
continuously and affordably

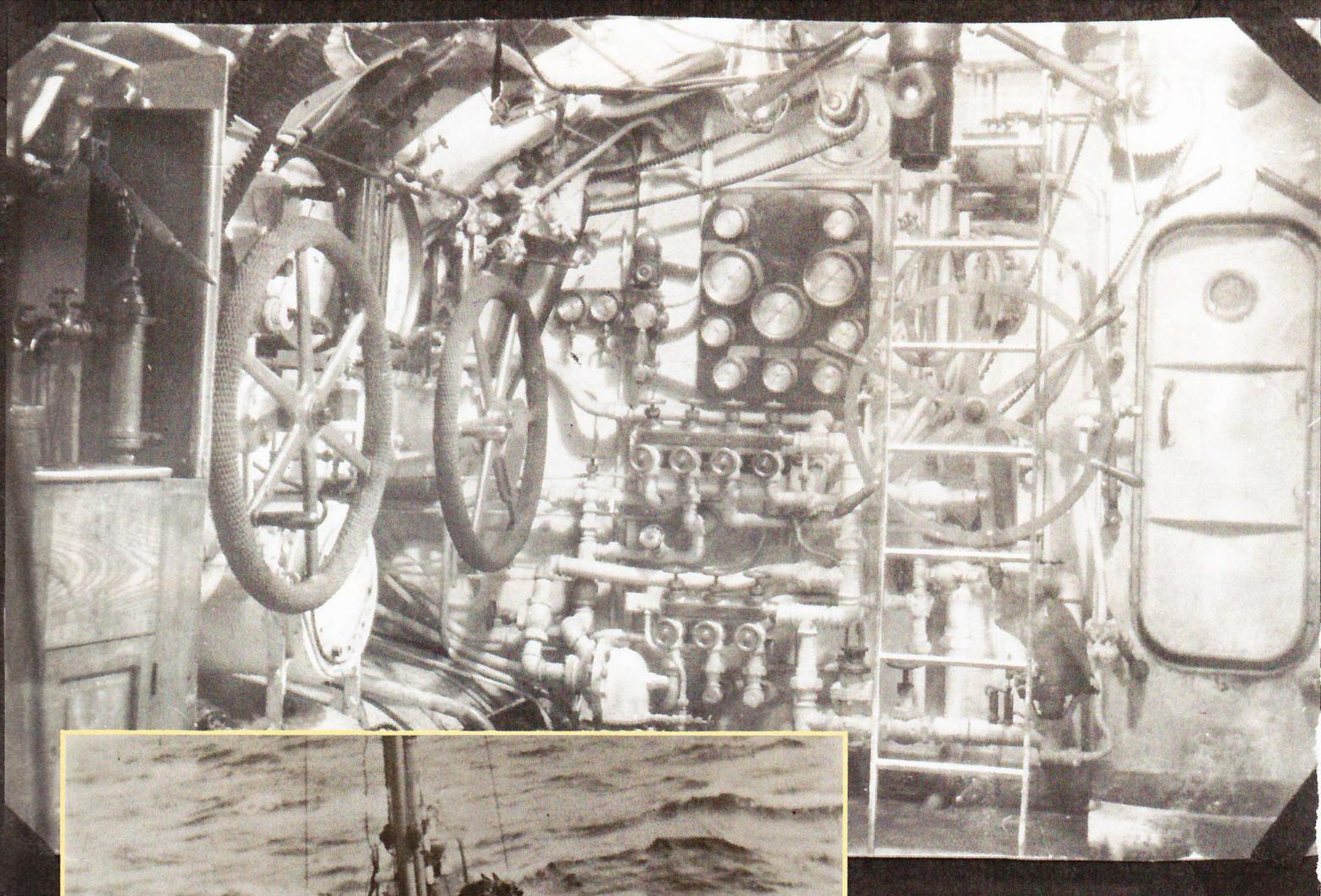
JSK Naval Support Inc., extends its warmest congratulations to The Canadian Submarine Service on its 100 year anniversary.

JSK Naval Support provides Canadian-made solutions that deliver reliable in-service support, innovative products and engineering services to the Royal Canadian Navy.

www.jsknaval.ca

P# (514) 505-1647 | 193 Brunswick Blvd. Pointe-Claire, Quebec Canada, H9R 5N2





Control room in the CC class with the search periscope raised. (Ferguson collection)



L-R: Lt. Arthur (Panther) Pitts, RNCVR; Midshipman J.G. "Jock" Edwards, RCN; Lt. Geoffrey Lake, RNR. (Pitts collection)

in rank – the senior naval officer having gone to sea and left him alone. He reacted to the event by issuing a stream of ill-conceived orders, which no one obeyed.

Half an hour later McBride and Pilcher returned to their respective offices for another long and taxing day preparing for war, which they both believed would soon be unleashed upon their city. When he was settled at his desk the first task that McBride undertook, and one that gave him great pleasure, was the composition of a press release for the Canadian and British newspapers. The *Victoria Daily Colonist* published it at noon in an extra and it caused a sensation. It read: . . . Sir Richard McBride, representing the Province of British Columbia, some days ago completed the purchase of two submarines, which are now lying at anchor in British waters ready for action . . . The submarines are newly built and said to be of the most destructive class.

Another version of events paints a more dramatic picture, but is probably less reliable as history. According to this account, two other men were scrutinizing the boats with intense



HMCS *Cornerbrook*, one of Canada's modern day subs, off Baffin Island


trusted to deliver™

A STRONG PARTNER MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

At Babcock, we are proud to be a trusted partner and a key provider of In-Service Support to the Royal Canadian Navy.

Delivering solutions in:

- Definition, Design and Integration
- In-Service Support
- Assets and Infrastructure Management
- Project Management
- Training

Committed to supporting the needs of the RCN now and well into the future.

Babcock, trusted to deliver™

Victoria | Ottawa | Quebec | Halifax

www.babcockcanada.com



Lt. "Barney" Johnson, RNCVR. (City of Vancouver Archives, CVA 582-003)

Photographer Wm. E Sherlock

interest. They had just been released from the naval prison, but were in fact there to join the submarines. Lt. Adrian St.V. Keyes, RN, had been appointed to command the flotilla and Midshipman John G. (Jock) Edwards, RCN, was shortly to become the third officer of the second boat.

The two had met in early July 1914, at a weekend house party at Georgian Bay, north of Toronto. In conversation over drinks, they discovered that they were former naval officers, and both wished to return to England if war broke out. The younger man, Edwards, aged twenty, had been invalided out of the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth before completing his training. Keyes at thirty-one was a pioneer submariner who had retired from the Royal

Navy two years previously. When they parted, they promised to keep in touch.

Edwards returned to Toronto. Then, the story goes, he impulsively decided to join the army. He continued to work at his clerical job, but was issued a rifle and uniform.

At the end of July, when war looked certain, the two men met again. Keyes asked Edwards to assist him with the enrollment of naval volunteers in Toronto, and the younger man did so, without bothering to arrange for time off work. His employer promptly fired him. Next, with a fine disregard for the fact that he had already enlisted in the army, Edwards volunteered for the Royal Canadian Navy. Several days later he and Keyes were on their way to the west coast and the submarines. Edwards felt guilty about

the fact that technically he was a deserter from the army, and preparing to leave for B.C. was a nerve-racking experience for him. He hid his rifle under his bed at home and concealed his army uniform by wrapping it in a parcel, which he planned to throw off the train into a river. He passed up the farewell party in case he was arrested as a deserter and crept furtively onto the train, avoiding Keyes's boisterous friends who were saying goodbye.

Toward the end of their journey, the two friends persuaded the train conductor to part with his gold braid. They applied it to the sleeves of Keyes's civilian suit so that he could make a suitable entrance to the Esquimalt dockyard. From here the story becomes more dramatic and is certainly apocryphal. The two men were arrested at the gate by guards armed with revolvers, then thrown into the brig — hardly a fitting end to their bold enterprise — and subsequently released in time to watch the submarines' arrival on 5 August 1914.

The historical record throws cold water on this tale. The evidence shows that these first Canadian submariners were never arrested and that they were not in Esquimalt to witness the submarines' arrival. Keyes and Edwards were still in Toronto on 5 August 1914, not yet having been appointed to the submarine service. That would happen on the 6th. McBride and the director of the Naval Service (DNS), who posted the pair, did not know of the availability of the boats until 3 August 1914, and without jet planes Keyes and Edwards could never have been at the dockyard on the evening of the 4th. Nor were they expected: no signal was sent. The origins of the story may lie in the fact that the naval prison had been hastily converted into officers' quarters, to accommodate the influx of personnel when war began. It is easy to see how the story became exaggerated over time — Edwards had embellished the story into a wonderful after-dinner yarn and it is recorded in full because it was the very first of the Canadian Submarine Service. ■

BOOK DETAILS:

Title: *Through a Canadian Periscope: The Story of the Canadian Submarine Service*

Publisher: Dundurn Press

Foreword: Rear-Admiral Dan McNeil, RCN (Ret).

100 illustrations, appendices, endnotes, bibliography, index.

Paperback - ISBN 9781459710559

Ebook - ISBN 9781459710573

Available: March 2014