

The Navy at Shelburne during World War II

By Spurgeon G. "Spud" Roscoe VE1BC

My father joined the Navy in 1942 and was sent to Shelburne, Nova Scotia as a Blacksmith 5th. He did his new entry training and then operated the blacksmith shop at the shipyard there. During the war if one had been a school teacher, bank teller or similar trade they were made an officer. My father had grown up in his father's blacksmith shop so was a trained blacksmith. He went up through the ranks in a few months and was promoted Chief Petty Officer in about seven or eight months. They started one with a trade out at the bottom so they could demote them if necessary. My father drank a little too much during the war like so many. They claim the best warriors are the ones with access to the best dope or booze. The officer in charge of father's blacksmith shop was one of the above noted characters and did not know a blacksmith shop from an outhouse, two holes at that. Father had a liquid lunch one day and when he went back to work he and this officer had a difference of opinion. Father lost his cool and decked this guy stretching him out alongside his anvil. This is one of the first things my father told me when I joined the navy with him roughly fifteen years after the incident. He felt his naval career had terminated right then and there. This was not the case and I believe he was demoted to cool off for a while. He did not tell me that part but he showed up at home for a few days back as a Blacksmith 5th or in the round rig as it was known, the one with the bell bottom trousers and the large collar. When he returned from this leave he was sent to Bay Bulls, Newfoundland and soon had his Chief Petty Officer rank back and retired with that rank as the navy's only blacksmith. He was one of the first to be elevated to the new rank of First Class Chief Petty Officer created after the war. He and the Chief Painter are the only two I know of who were not issued branch or trade badges. The Chief Plumber had them and why those two were not issued them is a mystery. They were all part of the field of the shipwright branch and had to wear that badge on occasion.

Shelburne was a busy spot during the war with the naval base and shipyard and of course lots of ships needing repair. It had its own naval radio station with call sign CKK and probably had a PV500 transmitter, an MSL5 receiver and a CSR5 receiver all from the Canadian Marconi Company in Montreal, Quebec. The PV500 probably had a leaky filter capacitor in the power supply because that transmitter hummed quite loudly when on the air. At least those sailing around Shelburne knew it by the hum when it was transmitting. The Shelburne station was known as a Port Wave Station and operated with the navy on 425 kilocycles as it was known back then. The station did not use a coded call sign, like the rest of the naval stations around the coast, simply CKK when transmitting.

Shelburne actually had its very own naval fleet based there during the war. The Canadian Navy had 80 little ships known as a Fairmile Motor Launch. These little ships did not have a name but were simply numbered from 050 to 129 inclusive. They were 112 feet long with a wooden hull of diagonally planked mahogany plywood. They were built in a number of small boat yards around Canada. Many were built in the boat yards on the Great Lakes with a few built on the East and West Coasts. Their

proper names were HMC ML050 and so on up to HMC ML129. They were divided up into Flotillas of around six vessels in each flotilla. The name broke down to His Majesty's Canadian Motor Launch. In addition to this each vessel was assigned the letter Q as part of their pendant number or name. This was painted on each vessels bows and stern as Q050 to Q129 inclusive. They were soon called Q boats and that is the same as calling a Corvette a K boat because the letter K was the prefix in a corvette pendant number.

The following is the 82nd Fairmile Flotilla based at Shelburne on February 24th, 1944. The vessels name, international call sign or signal letters and the commanding officers name.

HMC ML112	CYQQ	Lt. R.C. Denny, RCNVR
HMC ML113	CGZC	Lt. C.J. Holloway, RCNVR
HMC ML114	CGZG	Lt. R. Carfrae, RCNVR
HMC ML115	CYQC	Lt. C.R. Godbehere, RCNVR
HMC ML117	CYRC	Lt. G.E. Rising, RCNVR
HMC ML119	CYVC	Lt. J.J. McLaughlin, RCNVR
HMC ML120	CYWC	Lt. J.H. Stevenson, RCNVR

All seven of these little ships were fitted with twin Admiral Sterling gasoline engines of 850 brake horsepower. The radio room in each had a CM11 transmitter receiver, MSL5 receiver and FR12 transmitter from the Canadian Marconi Company in Montreal, Quebec. During the war these vessels used a coded call sign; one that commenced with the prefix 4X and the two letter suffix was changed every couple of months. Each vessel had a crew of two Officers, one Chief Engineering Mechanic, two Engineering Mechanics, one cook, one telegraphist, one Leading Seaman Coxswain, two Gunners, two Ordinary Seamen, one Signaller, one Asdic Operator, and one Torpedo Rating. On occasion the size of the crew would be different for one reason or another. By the time this flotilla was created most of these vessels were fitted with radar and this would mean each carried one radar operator. One can tell the ones with radar by their radar antenna; a Yagi antenna on the top of their main mast. This antenna was identical to the old television antenna nearly every house had years ago. Some parts of these little ships were built from a kit and the kits for these Canadian built copies were manufactured here in Canada. My former neighbour, the late Camille Comeau, helped construct the Weymouth built vessels. He spoke of fitting the prefabricated bulkheads in place. These kits were shipped to Weymouth by the railroad. He and I used to talk about these little ships quite often. When it came time for HMC ML120 to sail out the Sissiboo River to St. Mary's Bay in January, 1944, the river was covered in ice. The local authorities decided to dynamite a path through this ice, which is as unfeasible as it is to tow a ship through ice. This dynamite killed most of the fish in the Sissiboo River and accomplished little else. Many in the area helped break a path or track out through this ice after that unfeasible performance.

All of these Fairmiles that were part of the 82nd Flotilla were completed and turned over to the Navy in 1943 and 1944. HMC ML112 on October 25th, 1943. HMC ML113 on November 20th, 1943. HMC ML114 on November 20th, 1943. HMC ML115 on November 16th, 1943. HMC ML117 November 16th, 1943. HMC ML119 on November 16th, 1943, and HMC ML120 on January 27th, 1944. HMC ML116, HMC ML118 and HMC ML121 would join this flotilla later in 1944 when completed and turned over to the navy.

The vessels making up this flotilla were constructed in various shipyards. HMC ML112 and HMC ML113 were constructed by J. J. Taylor and Sons, Toronto, Ontario. HMC ML114 was constructed by Greavette Boats Limited, Gravenhurst, Ontario. HMC ML115 was constructed by Mac – Craft Company Limited, Sarnia, Ontario. HMC ML116 was constructed by Hunter Boats, Orillia, Ontario. HMC ML117 was constructed by Grew Boats Limited, Penetanguishene, Ontario. HMC ML118 was constructed by Midland Boat Works, Midland, Ontario. HMC ML119 was constructed by Minett – Shields limited, Bracebridge, Ontario. And the only ones in this flotilla built in Nova Scotia were HMC ML120 and HMC ML121 at the John H. LeBlanc Shipyard, Weymouth. The LeBlanc Shipyard was the only shipyard on the east coast that built these little ships outside Ontario. The west coast Fairmiles that were constructed on the west coast remained on the west coast.

Jim Dowell said he joined HMC ML119 in September 1943 after graduating from signal school. He, with her first crew joined her at Collingwood or Penetanguishene and had always felt she had been built in that area. Their first job was to get HMC ML119 to Halifax before Lake St. Clair and parts of the St. Lawrence River were blocked with ice. They were caught in a very bad storm and the little ship took a beating and everyone experienced their first taste of sea sickness on this first voyage. They managed to get to Halifax and took up their patrol assignment patrolling the East Coast. While alongside at Shelburne in late December 1943 a fire broke out on the jetty. The fire began to spread very quickly along the jetty and their flotilla was docked three deep with most of the crews on Christmas leave. They managed to release the lines from the inside ship and move all three ships to safety, where they remained the rest of the night. In the meantime the fire was brought under control. The other three or four little ships must have been out on patrol.



Jim Dowell VE3PZP

This is the crew in HMC ML119.

On termination of the war these little ships received various owners in 1946. HMC ML112 transferred to and became RCMP FORT WALSH with international call sign CGMR and pendant MP33 until run ashore on Scatarie Island, Nova Scotia on September 28th, 1958. She was on a run from Burgeo, Newfoundland, to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and apparently was intentionally run ashore to avoid a hurricane. There were seven members of the Marine Division only on board and no radio operator. They learned the fate of the vessel after the seven crewmembers had contacted the light keeper at the Scatarie Island Lighthouse. A radio operator operating her Canadian Marconi CM11 on 500 kilohertz would have had no trouble working VCO North Sydney about 25 miles from their location. What is left of FORT WALSH, if anything, is still lying where she went ashore. These Fairmiles were good sea boats and it is hard to believe they would run one ashore just to get clear of weather. HMC ML112 is believed to have rescued some of the survivors from the British tanker ATHEL VIKING that was a part of Convoy BX-141 in January, 1945, and was sunk by a submarine in the approaches to Halifax Harbour.



Royal Canadian Mounted Police

RCMP FORT WALSH ex HMC ML112

HMC ML113 **was** sold to La Co-operative Transport, Isle de la Madeleine Quebec and renamed LAVERNIERE. HMC ML114 transferred to and became RCMP FORT SELKIRK but was never commissioned. She was sold to H. P. Leask and Roy Pyke, Halifax, Nova Scotia, and was renamed AMY MAE. George Drew in Clark's Harbour, Nova Scotia bought the AMY MAE and used her to haul lobsters out of Western Nova Scotia over to Rockland, Maine. On one trip she hit a bad storm crossing the mouth of the Bay of Fundy and managed to get oil and debris in among the lobster cargo. She limped back into Abbot's Harbour and they managed to save the lobster cargo by soaking it in clean salt water. HMC ML115 was sold to Upper Lakes and St. Lawrence Transportation Company, Toronto. HMC ML116 was listed in a naval call sign document dated June 8th, 1948 as HMC ML116 call sign CYQY. She became HMCS REINDEER in 1954, international call sign CYQY, pendant 716 and radiotelephone "Flashlight D". When sold she was renamed SUPERTRADE and POLAR CLIPPER. HMC ML117 was transferred to and became RCMP FORT STEELE but was never commissioned and was sold to L. A. Shackleton, Mount Royal, Quebec. HMC ML118 was sold to Frances Farwell, Hamilton, Ontario and renamed FRANLISS III. Paul Southall contacted us and said that the four HMC ML100, HMC ML102, HMC ML109 and HMC ML118 that were sold to Mr. Farwell were disposed of as follows. One was to be his personal yacht, one was sent to St. John's, Newfoundland to be fitted with freezers to carry fish to Toronto and the other two were laid up and simply rotted away. Apparently the financial assistance on the one to carry fish did not materialize and he did not know the disposition of this one.

HMC ML119 was transferred to the RCMP and became RCMP FORT PITT with call sign CGMM and pendant MP30. James (Jim) Slater bought FORT PITT when the RCMP had finished with her in 1959. The RCMP had replaced her engines with two 550 HP Vivian Diesels and a more modern radar unit. Mr. Slater named the vessel SONDRRA II after his daughter. Susan Marlaine Craig (Marni) and David R. Keller

bought SONDRA II from Mr. Slater in 1977 for \$50,000.00. The vessel had simply remained tied up at the end of Mr. Slater's wharf in Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia for about 18 years. Marni stated "Other than the dry wrought below deck from years of sitting unused and closed up, she was in great shape. She and David spent a year and nearly another \$50,000.00 "ripping out bunks, rebuilding and refinishing the whole interior down to the unpainted mahogany". "The Bay of Fundy crossing was a ride from hell but after that, it was smooth sailing and of course, she was the perfect boat for a life in the Caribbean – especially with a five foot draft". In June 1981 Marni transferred the ownership to David and went back to Ontario. In 1986 the SONDRA II was listed as a yacht registered at LaHave, Nova Scotia. Her official number was 193893 and she was listed as owned by one of those numerical companies as; 480997 Ontario Limited, 116 Seaton Street, Toronto, Ontario. During Hurricane Hugo in 1989 the unattended SONDRA II dragged her anchor, hit rocks and sank. David was still the owner.



Susan Marlane Craig

SONDRA II just before leaving for the Caribbean in 1978



David R. Keller

The SONDR II shortly before she was lost at Frederiksted, St. Croix, U. S. Virgin Islands.

SONDR II is now one of several vessels on the bottom and used as a diving park. Marni Craig has written a novel "Because We Could" (An unauthorized Love Story) on her experience with this vessel. Copies of this book are available at www.createspace.com/5098081

HMC ML120 was sold to Upper Lakes and St. Lawrence Transportation Company, Toronto and was renamed NELVANA II and OSCEOLA. Then THE LADY GALADRIEL and eventually became MV MARYLAND INDEPENDENCE.



The MARYLAND INDEPENDENCE alongside her berth at Baltimore, Maryland.

HMC ML120 met a fate the majority of our former naval vessels met on termination of the war. She was turned over to the Crown Assets Corporation and sold privately. Her owner in the 1970's turned her upside down and left her to dry out for nine months. Stephen Molz contacted me in June 2010 and stated that is wrong. I had received that information from a government brochure put out by the Maryland government. Stephen states that his step-father Herbert F. Molz bought the vessel around 1974 for \$33,000.00 if he remembers it correctly and he helped him fix it up. He said he got to do the fun stuff like sanding the hull for fibre glassing. He said they put ten layers on, alternating matte with weave and he felt he had to sand after the weave layer only. He stated he sanded the hull at least six times alone. He said he became a strong little bastard that summer from all the work. He said he believes they put on five tons of fibre glass to a pretty good sound hull and once it dried out the damn thing was unsinkable. This was accomplished at Port Credit, Ontario, after she had been lifted out of the water and sat on a large steel cradle. They also added a bow thruster while the vessel sat on that cradle. After Stephen's mother and father separated Herbert took the LADY GALADRIEL, as she was then named, down to the United States and ran charters with her for a while. Stephen went on to add that Herbert was a talented and meticulous man and he was proud to have helped him. He said Herbert Molz deserves all the credit for transforming the vessel from pretty much a wreck to a fine yacht. Stephen stated that around 1973 Tolkien's Lord of the Rings began a huge resurgence in popularity, hence his mother's choice of The Lady Galadriel. As Galadriel is the epitome of grace, beauty and power. Stephen still feels it the best by far of her names. I have found several yachts with that name and was wondering where it came from. The state of Maryland bought her in 1986 and renamed her MARYLAND INDEPENDENCE. She became the State's flagship and traveled the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries promoting the unique characteristics of the State. She was powered by twin 260 HP Volvo diesel engines and had a cruising speed of twelve knots. She was operated and maintained by three full-time and one part-time personnel. She had a carrying capacity of 35 passengers and could accommodate 70 passengers while dockside. The vessel also had 3 guest staterooms, main and dining salons, 2 guest heads, galley, crew quarters, sundeck and fly bridge. She was the sailing ambassador for the state of Maryland like the sailing vessel BLUENOSE II is for the province of Nova Scotia. Robert Ehrlich was elected Governor of the State of Maryland in 2003. One of his election promises was to sell MARYLAND INDEPENDENCE. He claimed the vessel was an unnecessary expense for the state. The state put the vessel up for sale on December 11th, 2003. Governor Ehrlich was hoping someone would donate a smaller yacht to serve the state in the same way. One that is not as expensive to operate as MARYLAND INDEPENDENCE. MARYLAND INDEPENDENCE was sold via the Internet on E-Bay for \$275,100.00 on December 21st, 2003, to someone in Rochester, New York. Her international radio call sign at the time of her sale was WCY9690. Whoever purchased MARYLAND INDEPENDENCE on E-Bay did nothing with her and she was sold again in 2006. Captain Douglas Blakeslee was Captain of MARYLAND INDEPENDENCE in December 2006 and they were trying to get her registered as a tour vessel to carry passengers. They intended to retain the MARYLAND INDEPENDENCE name with hopes it would assist in their charter work. This vessel is still MARYLAND INDEPENDENCE and can be found on the internet by that name although she is no longer available for charter.

HMC ML121 was listed in a naval call sign document dated June 8th, 1948 as HMC ML121 with call sign CYXC. HMC ML121 became the INSHORE FISHERMAN and then DENIS D and was broken up in March 1972. The Museum in Weymouth, Nova Scotia now has a nice model of HMC ML121 and this model is fitted with a Y gun for depth charges.



Captain Hubert Hall

The DENIS D ex INSHORE FISHERMAN shown at Shediac, New Brunswick

One of the Weymouth Fairmiles built in 1943 was named the INSHORE FISHERMAN and then DENIS D. This vessel was registered at Hamilton, Ontario, on November 17th, 1950, and was transferred to Saint John, New Brunswick, on January 30th, 1953. On October 19th, 1955, this vessel was transferred again to Grindstone, Magdalen Islands, and her registration was closed on April 11th, 1972. She became DENIS D on February 29th, 1956, but her records do not identify her Fairmile name/number. We believe HMC ML120 is MARYLAND INDEPENDENCE and Stephen Molz states it was definitely HMC ML120. HMC ML111 was HMCS MOOSE when the DENIS D was in service. The only other Fairmile built at Weymouth in 1943 was HMC ML121; therefore the DENIS D has to be the former HMC ML121. When she was first registered on November 17th, 1950, she was fitted with two new Cummins Diesel Engines built in 1950. Each engine had six 5-1/8 inch cylinders with a stroke of 6 inches. These engines were rated at 350 brake horsepower. The records claim this vessel was capable of making 12 miles per hour with these engines. I have no idea why they read miles per hour instead of knots but it is probably because she was registered in Ontario. They operate in miles per hour rather than knots on the Great Lakes. The records of this vessel as INSHORE FISHERMAN and DENIS D (I have three different sets) do not list any signal letters where it states Signal Letters if any. Therefore one has to assume she was fitted with a small radiotelephone with a two-letter prefix and four digit suffix call sign and would not appear on these records. Note the wire antenna between the masts in the above photo. This was the most popular small

boat antenna at that time and it was known as a Marconi or Inverted L antenna. She was not listed with the International Telecommunication Union. This vessel was broken up in March 1972.

As one can see the Shelburne World War II fleet went on to some interesting experiences.

The End

January 23th, 2017