



# the Ensign

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[www.navalmuseum.ab.ca](http://www.navalmuseum.ab.ca)

## Our Cover

**HMCS *Wetaskiwin* (K-175)**, a Flower-class corvette of the 1939-40 program, and one of the corvettes named for Alberta cities or towns, is shown living up to her nickname of the 'wet-ass-queen,' as illustrated in her 'unofficial' gunshield art to the right. The photo is dated ca. 1943-44. Built by Burrard Dry Dock Co. Ltd., in Vancouver, BC, she was commissioned on December 17, 1940, and was the first west coast-built corvette to enter service. She patrolled out of Esquimalt until leaving March 17, 1941 for the Atlantic, arriving in Halifax on April 13th. She left Halifax for St. John's, Nfld. on May 23, and was one of the founding members of the Newfoundland Escort Force.

She escorted her first convoy, HX.130 to Iceland in June, 1941, and during the next eight months made six round trips there with eastbound convoys. Returning to Halifax on January 24, 1942, she commenced a major refit at Liverpool, NS. Following work-ups, *Wetaskiwin* joined Escort Group C-3, dubbed the "Barber Pole Brigade" as a consequence of the red and white bands painted on their funnels (a tradition which has survived to this day in the Canadian Navy). During this period she took part in two major convoy actions: SC.42 (September 1941), and SC.48 (October 1941). On July 31, 1942 while escorting ON.115, she shared with *Skeena* in the sinking of *U-588*. In mid-January 1943 she again arrived in Liverpool, NS for refit. In May 1943 she joined EG C-5, and that December sailed for Galveston, Texas, for a long refit which saw her fo'c's'le extended. Following its completion on March 6, 1944, she returned briefly to Halifax before proceeding to Bermuda for work-ups late in April. Returning northward she rejoined C-5 leaving Londonderry on September 23 for the last time to join EG W-7, Western Local Escort Force for the remainder of the war. *Wetaskiwin* was paid off at Sorel on June 19, 1945 and sold to the Venezuelan Navy and renamed *Victoria*. She was discarded in 1962.



Cover photo: MC-3102, ca. 1943-44, Ken Macpherson / Naval Museum of Alberta  
Above photo: ca. 1941-44, O-893-556, Department of National Defence

And with thanks to The Canadian Navy Heritage Project – [http://www.navy.gc.ca/project\\_pride/home/index\\_e.asp](http://www.navy.gc.ca/project_pride/home/index_e.asp)

## The Chairman's Bridge

By Tom Glover

First of all, on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Naval Museum of Alberta Society, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a belated but very Happy New Year.

The final touches to our exhibits are in progress as we begin preparations for the grand opening of The Military Museums on Saturday, June 6 this year. I am proud to say that all of the past ten years of effort by so many of our staff and volunteers has finally paid off and the Naval Museum of Alberta is now the finest in Canada. The opening of the new naval

museum on October 16, 2008, marked the beginning of a new era.

It is indeed heartening to see these efforts being rewarded by the significant interest being shown by the general public. The galleries are busy on most weekends as a steady stream of families, groups and individuals are touring the exhibits and taking advantage of the interactive technology. Of particular interest is the response from local schools and their classes who come to learn through their attendance at the museum during the course of the average week.

In early February a new Naval Muse-

um Education Program for elementary school students was held in the naval museum. It took place on three consecutive weekdays, and was enthusiastically received by all in attendance. Similar programmes for junior and senior high school students are currently being prepared.

The Calgary Military Museums' education department has an array of programmes throughout the year including tours for high school children to Vimy Ridge and other sites that have been featured in the development of Canada over the years. This programme began a number of years ago and mostly because of our previous location and a lack of appropriate resources, we were unable to develop it to the extent that it would provide the complete required learning tools

for the education system. Our new exhibits in The Military Museums now provide an excellent basis for the education of school children in Canada's military history. The scope of the programme will continue to expand as TMM educational concepts continue to expand.

As we turn the page to the future, we look back through our interactive displays at an important part of our history. The new Convoys and Battle of the Atlantic exhibit will be featured as the Naval

Museum of Alberta's contribution to the grand opening of the TMM in June.

The Convoys and Battle of the Atlantic exhibit conveniently provides us with an appropriate segue into the centennial year of the Canadian Navy in 2010. The naval community has begun the preparations to honour this important event and your Society stands **ready-aye-ready** to support worthy community initiatives.

**Tom Glover is the Chairman of the Naval Museum of Alberta Society.**

## In the President's View

By Glenn Hardie

**T**he past twelve months have been a watershed year for your Naval Museum of Alberta, and a lot has happened since my column was written in February 2008.

Of course the physical transition of the museum to become a component of The Military Museums was completed some months ago. The museum has become one of the five constituent naval museums comprising the Naval Museum of Canada in accordance with MARCORD 06-01, under the stewardship of the Department of National Defence.

Our newest major exhibit honouring Convoys and the Battle of the Atlantic has opened. These were all significant events in the history of our museum, and will ensure its ongoing survival for generations to come as Calgary's landmark, and as an outstanding educational and historical resource for all those interested in military history.

Our Society's Annual General Meeting was held on the deck of the new museum on November 18, 2008, and despite some rather chilly weather nearly thirty of our members were in attendance.

The Directors of your Society were elected (or re-elected) at that meeting,

and I'm pleased to congratulate Tom Glover on becoming the new Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Naval Museum of Alberta Society.

I am also pleased to welcome four new Directors to the Board—Ron Hallman, Marvel Evelyn, Carl Souchereau and Linda Bialek, and I look forward to working with them in the coming year.

Following a precedent set at previous AGMs, our Volunteers of the Year for 2008 were also officially announced, and I was pleased to present newly designed plaques to Barbara and Neil Murray as your newest award winners (**see p.5 of the Autumn issue of the Ensign**).

Our Volunteer Appreciation Brunch was held yet again at Royal Canadian Legion Branch 264 on December 14, 2008, with a very good turnout of our members.

I took the opportunity in my comments at the Brunch to again congratulate Barbara and Neil Murray, and I also had the pleasure of introducing Rod McLeod to those in attendance. Rod designed the original logo for the Naval Museum of Alberta some twenty years ago, and he recently upgraded his logo design to a more modern graphic presentation. Rod very generously assigned his artist's cop-

yright of the NMA logo to our Society, and I might mention that his newest logo design became the basis of the Volunteer of the Year plaques which were presented to the Murrays. On behalf of the Society, we're sincerely grateful to Rod for his very kind donation.

Looking ahead, we still have some work to do in the new museum to correct some discrepancies and generally spruce up the exhibits. That work is underway, and we're expected it to be completed within the next few months.

I'm advised that the **Grand Opening** of The Military Museums is now scheduled to occur on Saturday, June 6, 2009, with Her Royal Highness the Countess of Wessex as the guest of honour.

Some of you might recall that Her Royal Highness presided in 2006 when the name of the Museum of the Regiments facility was formally changed to The Military Museums. When Princess Sophie was last in Calgary, the expansion construction that later became our new museum had not yet even begun. It will be a proud day for all of us when Her Royal Highness and the official party have an opportunity to tour our new museum on that day.

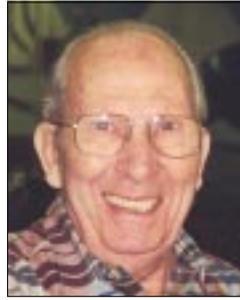
We also have plans in the works to develop a new submarine exhibit in the southwest corner, honouring our late Past President Wayne Holmes. More to follow on that in the coming months.

Finally, our next Casino fund raising event is scheduled for September 24 and 25, 2009. As always, we'll be seeking volunteers to assist when the time comes.

After having taken some weeks to rest and recharge after the hectic pace of 2008, I'm looking forward to the coming year as our new museum continues to evolve and find additional recognition in the community. Thank you to all of our volunteers who helped make 2008 such a great success!

**Glenn Hardie is the President of the Naval Museum of Alberta Society.**

# Museum Loses Dedicated Volunteer



**A**nother of the Naval Museum of Alberta's 'regulars,' Walter Trueman, crossed the bar on January 29 at the age of 93.

Walter was an electrician and freely gave of his time and expertise over the years. He was predeceased by his wife Verna, and is survived by his sons Douglas and Robert, as well as a number of grandchildren and great grandchildren.

As this is written, a celebration of Walter's life is to be held at the 264 Legion on February 21, 2009.

In addition to his time spent at the museum, Walter was also an active member of the Calgary Naval Veterans Association. We will all miss his company, and especially his ever-present smile.

tinue to own the collection with the exception of those artefacts that are on DND inventory. The society will continue with all of its fund raising initiatives, and will assist in providing volunteer support to museum programmes, events and other functions.

Henceforth, as an accredited DND museum, the NMA will continue to operate as before but the facility will belong to DND essentially acting as landlord and operator of the building, and relieving the NMA Society of the responsibility for the annual operations and maintenance costs for the facility.

On June 15, 2008, the MARCORD 06-01 came into effect and the Naval Museum of Alberta became an official member of the Maritime Command Naval Museum. This national organisation under the Department of National Defence has assumed responsibility for:

- The Naval Museum of Halifax, Halifax
- The Naval Museum of Québec, Québec City
- The Naval Museum of Manitoba, Winnipeg
- The Naval Museum of Alberta, Calgary, and
- The Naval Museum of Esquimalt, Esquimalt.

The Naval Museum of Alberta Society has provided its collection, on loan to the Maritime Command Naval Museum, and will assume its new role as a supporting society to the programmes of the Naval Museum of Alberta located within TMM in Calgary.

The John Burgess Library bequeathed from the estate of John Burgess of Calgary, including a wealth of other works generously contributed over the years by friends of the NMA, will be managed by the University of Calgary. The Ken Macpherson Archival Collections, and hundreds of other items of donated archival material, will be managed by the National Naval Museum. These wonderful collections will provide important sources for the study of naval history for students and scholars throughout North America and elsewhere.

## A Brief History of the Naval Museum of Alberta

By Terry Thompson

**T**he recent transition of the Naval Museum of Alberta to its new home actually began as it officially opened on October 16, 1988. This marked the beginning of a new era within the Calgary military community.

For over twenty years the Naval Museum has been serving the City of Calgary as a source of research for students of military history and a prime attraction for Calgary's many tourists. Thousands of school children, navy, army and air force cadets and thousands of members of the general public have enjoyed and learned from the various displays set in context for the benefit of students and casual visitors alike.

The newly developed naval gallery within The Military Museums (TMM) opened in October 2008 and provides the opportunity to design more effective museum presentations without crowding, and offers a chronological visualisation of

historical events in logical sequence.

Until its accreditation as a Department of National Defence museum, the naval museum had been a non-profit museum governed by a registered Alberta Society. Receipts from our many fund raising initiatives over the years were dedicated to the acquisition of artefacts, restoration and museum operations.

With the exception of those artefacts owned by DND, and others that are identified in the Naval Museum of Alberta Society accession inventory, the NMA collection is owned by the Society. Previously, the "Society" managed, operated and was financially responsible for the annual operations, maintenance and programming costs of the naval museum.

As the Department of National Defence assumed responsibility for the Naval Museum of Alberta in June of 2008, the Naval Museum of Alberta "Society" became a supporting body to the Naval Museum of Alberta. The society will con-

The Naval Museum of Alberta Society has never lost sight of the fact that the establishment of an institution that records the history of mankind is always, and always will be, a work in progress. There is much more to do and your society will continue to ensure that as an institution, we will maintain the continuity of the story of the Canadian Navy.

Next year, 2010, is the centenary of

the Canadian Navy. The NMAS will participate along with the naval community in Calgary to help ensure this event is given appropriate recognition.

Make it a point to attend the grand opening of The Military Museums on June 6, 2009, there may be some pleasant surprises.

**Terry Thompson is the Vice President of the Naval Museum of Alberta Society.**

great deal of elbow grease, skill, patience, etc., but the costs are not significant. Conversely, transportation can incur significant expense, and currently the Society's funds are still being devoted to the Battle of the Atlantic display. Major Tremblay, CO of the ASU, was approached and he suggested he would explore the possibility of finding some way within the DND system to move the weapons. At the same time we were contacting a number of supporters who might be able to assist.

Members will recall that when we accepted the donation of the hull model of the **Bellerophon** (Admiral Nelson's favourite ship), transportation from Toronto became a problem. The model had taken five years to build and of course, is relatively fragile. Flying the model to Calgary via air-cargo was of course the optimum solution, but that would be expensive relative to highway moves, and there would be pick-up and delivery charges to and from the airports. Nevertheless, we contacted Mr. Herb Spears of Westjet for his advice. Herb made some telephone calls and shortly informed us that Westjet could not fly the model to Calgary, but that they utilized the services of International Machine Transport (IMT). This company is in the business of moving "delicate" machinery, and they might be in a position to help if they had a move from Toronto with some spare room on the trailer.

Mr. Bob Boswell, Freight and Customs Advisor with Westjet, called shortly after and advised that IMT had a move headed this way and were prepared to accommodate the move at no cost to Westjet or the Society. The rest is history.

One hesitates to go back to the trough too many times, and thereby incur the possible decline of continued museum support. But in this case we had participated in a Westjet Remembrance Day ceremony at the airport last November. Mr. Spears was there and we again

## The Rabbit's Hutch

### The Tale of the Twin Oerlikons

By Bill Wilson



**L**ate last fall we received an email from Cdr. Bill Gard, a former Commanding Officer of HMCS Sackville in Halifax, which included numerous photographs taken recently aboard HMCS **Haida** in Hamilton, Ontario. The photographs describe in some detail the major restoration that has taken place since Parks Canada have taken the ship under their wing.

While we were impressed with what has been accomplished, we were surprised to find there was a twin 20mm Oerlikon mounting which was apparently located on the jetty adjacent to the ship's brow. Being curious, we contacted Carla Morse, the former 'Queen Bee' of **Haida**, and she informed us there were in fact two twin mountings, and while they had never been aboard **Haida** as part of her anti-aircraft defence, they had been held in a warehouse as part of **Haida Inc.**'s inventory, and if we wanted further information we should contact Ms. Alice Willems, the **Haida** Project Manager in Hamilton.

Ms. Willems was contacted, and following a few email exchanges it was agreed it would be in our mutual interest if one of their two mountings was trans-

ferred to Calgary, and in return, the Naval Museum of Alberta Society would replace it with one of the two moored contact mines we had recently restored. In addition, we agreed to completely restore the two mountings here in Calgary and return one, along with the mine, to Hamilton. We also agreed to cover all transportation costs.

The restoration work will require a



Twin Oerlikon 20mm mount as displayed adjacent to HMCS **Haida**.

expressed our thanks for the **Bellerophon** move, and Herb repeated his original offer to assist when and if possible.

When made aware of our need to move the Oerlikons, he called Mr. Boswell and in a few days, Bob called to request the weight, dimensions of the guns, and the name of the contact in Hamilton. On January 29th we received advice that the mountings were to be picked up the following day. They were delivered on February 4th, and are temporarily being stored by Mr. Arthur Hazle, President of Leaseway Corp. at his plant in Ogden.

Our old building at Tecumseh is cur-

rently inaccessible due to snow in the rear approaches to the overhead entrance. The current plan is to have Mr. Hazle sandblast the paint from the mountings prior to restoration, commencing in the early spring.

As Mr. Spear told us, without Bob Boswell the guns would still be in Hamilton, and without Westjet and IMT, who are exceptional corporate citizens, this significant artefact would not soon be on display in Calgary for the education of this and future generations of Canadians.

**Captain(N) Bill Wilson is an Honorary Director of the Naval Museum of Alberta Society. He is also our resident 'Rabbitier.'**

the student or the visitor with three learning modules.

While the Discovery Room is primarily designed for student use, other visitors are welcome. Those participating in the simulations become members of a military team facing crucial military, moral, and ethical decisions guided by the scenarios. The three simulations are based on true stories. The visitors encounter virtual and real narratives, authentic video and audio clips, pictures, 3-D graphics, and animation. Throughout sessions in the Discovery Room there is opportunity for individual decision making, group discussion, and group decision making.

A new educational activity and tour has now been completed for elementary school students by Lorna Gutsche. Several NMAS Board members attended a demonstration and tour of students actually participating in this new activity.

The tour involves cross curricular connections in the areas of social studies, science, physical education, health, mathematics, and art. One part of the activity requires students to spell their own names using a chart of signal flags as a template.

The students select shapes and use coloured paper and glue to create their own names which they string together like a banner for display in their classroom, and which they later take home to show their parents. The students were very involved and excited about the museum and their activities. Their teachers were also very pleased.

Numerous school tours are occurring during the day and it is most gratifying to see so many children in the museum. Evening tours for JOUTs (Junior Officers Under Training from Tecumseh) and for several naval cadet corps, have also been conducted by Norm Holden, Ian Christie and Doug Bourne. High school principals of the Calgary Board of Education recently held a meeting at The Military Museums (TMM) which included a tour of the naval museum.

## The Curator's Cabin

By Murray Bialek

**Y**our museum has finally received some much needed help. As of January 1<sup>st</sup>, Lt(N) Aura Pon from HMCS Tecumseh has joined us full time until the end of March and is acting as the administration officer. Shannon May, a University of Calgary student, will continue to come in two times per week until the end of April.

Welcome to our new volunteers who have started helping with the endless 'paper pushing' tasks: Kay Hyde, Dick and Marg Ellsworth, Ross Hicks and Robert Teel. Welcome also to Mitchell Randall who will be here several days each week as a work experience student from the Juno Beach Academy.

Of course Bruce Connolly and Gary Hansen continue to work several days a week on a myriad of continuing projects. I am very happy to welcome back Jim Cowie who, while still recovering from surgery, just completed building an exhibit cabinet base for a model of HMCS Calgary (2nd).

Norm Holden continues to help in the office; Ron Miller is working on our uni-

form collection (identifying, recording, labelling, and photographing); Barbara Murray is inventorying our library; Neil Murray is cutting and gluing pictures and signage; Jack Pidgeon is assisting Gary; Wing Low is cataloguing our archives; and of course, our watchkeepers are on duty daily.

Our annual 264 Legion brunch for volunteers who have served the museum with such vigour this past year was held on December 14<sup>th</sup>. It was a great success despite the frigid weather of the day. I always look forward to celebrating their tremendous contributions to our museum at this time of year.

As alluded to in our President's column, during the brunch proceedings Rod McLeod donated his copyright of the Naval Museum's logo. He created the logo a number of years ago, and such copyrights are very valuable. Indeed, a very generous donation.

The new Discovery Room was opened to invited guests on February 10<sup>th</sup> and will soon be completed and open to the general public. This facility contains numerous interactive computers presenting

Work continues to produce the Standard Operating Procedure manual under which the five accredited Department of National Defence naval museums will operate as the Naval Museum of Canada (NMC). In this regard I attended a series of NMC Board meetings last December in Halifax, and will attend further meetings in Winnipeg at the end of February. LCdr Graeme Arbuckle, the Canadian Navy's Heritage Officer, who will now represent the Naval Museum of Alberta on TMM's Board of Directors, attended his first Board meeting in Calgary this February.

Ann Shaftel, a well respected museum consultant under contract to DND, conducted a two day assessment / inspection of our museum and a report will be completed shortly. The Military Museum's

gift shop will soon be opening and we will once again be offering naval items for sale.

We have detected a number of inconsistencies in our texts throughout the museum displays. These issues will be resolved as each display reaches its final form.

Meanwhile, we are slowly moving our operations from the static state of the past year and a whole new routine is emerging.

A short list of items recently received by your museum includes: a large and beautiful model of the City-class patrol frigate HMCS *Calgary*, cap tallies, books, uniforms, signal card, cap badges, WWI collar bag, several plaques, DEMS badge, photos, commemorative mug, DVD "Front Lines" about WWI, CF Naval Jack,

and a large framed photo entitled "Taking the Salute."

The NMAS extends sincere thanks to a number of individuals who recently made artefact donations: Lois and Gary Eldridge, Kay Hyde, Doug Brown, Gail Sloan, Miles Chester, Capt(N) S. E. Hopkins, Bill Buchanan, C&R Del Col, M. Dennis Apedaile, Jim Jack, Bob Buchanan, P. Simundson, Dr. Evelyn de Mille, and Syd. C. Heal.

Finally, please take note of the fact that the Naval Museum of Alberta Society's casino dates have now been set for September 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009, so please mark your calendars.

Come for a visit, the new museum routine is never dull!

**Murray Bialek is the Curator and General Manager of the Naval Museum of Alberta.**



## Victoria's Wartime Haunts

By Bob Wooton



I wonder where they are today?

Where have they all gone, the favourite haunts of yesterday?

'Terry's,' 'The Poodle Dog,' where sailors when walking out

Would dine the ladies, laugh and play,

Is there any place the likes of those left today?

Summertime! Evening concerts,

A band! Outdoors in Beacon Hill,

Soldiers, sailors, and their ladies,

Dancing 'round the bandstand,

What fun that was, such a thrill,

'The Hokey Pokey,' the 'Schottische,'

Jive, or even cheek to cheek,

I loved to watch and even learned the drill.

For I was just a lad of eight or nine,

My Dad away at war,

And Mummy trying to manage three boys, one a babe

Meant I was often footloose and fancy free,

And the entertainment was for free!

And all only a walk away!

'The Hostess House' on Fort Street, how neat!

Where 'hostesses' would entertain the sailors after dark,

Sailors waiting for a ship, on liberty, waiting to embark,

But Oh! What fun it used to be for me,

Standing in the doorway,

The music, cigarettes, the uniforms, the girls.

Why sometimes I would see them spark,

And I was so small, so no one ever noticed me!

Bob Wooton is a member of the Naval Officers Association of Vancouver Island.

# The Saga of the SS Flying Enterprise

## A Tale of One Man's Courage and Devotion to Duty

By Frank Saies-Jones

**F**ifty-eight years ago on Sunday, December 30, 1951, a Royal Navy observation aircraft took off from an airdrome in southern England to search for a ship reportedly abandoned and drifting off the coast of Cornwall. When the drifting wreck was spotted, the pilot of the aircraft circled around it checking for any sign of life, while one of his crew took a photograph of what was supposed to be an abandoned and sinking vessel.

That night the photograph taken of the derelict came to the attention of someone in the editorial office of the **Daily Graphic** in Fleet Street, and, on close examination, what appeared to be the figure of a man could be seen on the upper deck of the crippled ship. A telephone call was then made to the naval base in Cornwall which

confirmed this was indeed the case, and that the man in the photo was Captain Kurt Carlsen, skipper of an American freighter, the **Flying Enterprise**. Captain Carlsen had insisted on remaining behind when forty crew members and ten pas-

sengers had been rescued by more than six ships that had come to his assistance. On New Year's Day 1952, the **Daily Graphic** scooped the world's newspapers when it published the photograph of the **Flying Enterprise** lying on her port side in the storm-tossed Atlantic, with the lone figure of the captain, who had stubbornly refused rescue, electing to remain on board as long as she stayed afloat. Thus began the saga of the **Flying Enterprise**



The SS *Flying Enterprise II* in a watercolour painting by T. Hagiwara.

and her heroic Captain who was determined to ride out the storm in the hope of getting his ship to a safe harbour under tow.

The **Flying Enterprise** was built by Consolidated Steel Corporation of Los

Angeles, California in 1944. She was a vessel of 6,711 tons, capable of a cruising speed of 14 knots, and a range of 15,000 nautical miles without refuelling. Named **Cape Kumukaki** at her launching, she was renamed **Flying Enterprise** in 1947 when she was purchased from the US Maritime Administration by the Isbrandtsen Line out of New York.

On Friday, December 21, 1951, having taken on a general cargo at several Euro-

pean ports consisting of, among other things, carpets in Antwerp, pig-iron, rags, coffee and onions in Rotterdam; peat moss, bird cages and twelve Volkswagen cars in Bremen, she finally sailed from Hamburg, Germany after loading close to five hundred tons of mail for the US (mainly from American servicemen serving in Germany at that time). De-

spite her varied cargo, the **Flying Enterprise** was far from being fully loaded, and as a result of her subsequent loss, questions were raised as to whether she had been loaded correctly. The verdict of a Coast Guard Board of Enquiry did in

fact state that: "The stowage of pig-iron as executed aboard the *Flying Enterprise*, was considered to have been a potential hazard," but did not implicate anyone in particular for the way that it had been stowed.

As with many cargo ships throughout the world, the *Flying Enterprise* was allowed to carry a maximum of twelve paying passengers (any more would have classified her as a passenger ship). On the morning of her departure from Hamburg, ten passengers joined the ship, all of whom were European citizens immigrating to the United States. During the first two days of her voyage, as she made her way through the North Sea towards the English Channel, the *Flying Enterprise* encountered heavy fog, and it was with a sense of relief that on Sunday, December 23, 1951, the fog began to lift. As all seamen know, the English Channel is one of the busiest waterways in the world, and where the danger

of collision is always present. The following day, however, the fog closed in again forcing Captain Carlsen to reduce speed to 'half ahead.' Later that day a north-west wind sprung up clearing the fog and allowing Captain Carlsen to relax his vigilance for the first time since leaving harbour. The northwest wind that had cleared

away the fog veered later to the west as the day progressed, and by nightfall had increased in strength to Force 6 on the Beaufort scale, pre-staging what was in store for the *Flying Enterprise* for the next two weeks. The Beaufort scale, initiated

in 1838 by Admiral Sir Frances Beaufort RN, indicates the state of the sea and wind on a scale of 0 to 12 (0 being a state of flat calm, and 12 meaning wind gusts up to 103 mph, and seas of 40 or more feet in height from crest to trough).

On Christmas day the barometer continued to fall and weather warnings were issued to all ships in the Western approaches. Every coast of the British Isles was affected, and storm damage was reported throughout the land. The storm which originated off the eastern seaboard of the United States had picked up strength and was approaching hurricane force as it bore down on Western Europe. By midnight, when the *Flying Enterprise* had cleared Lands End, the sea state was reported to be Force 7.

Many ships in the Eastern Atlantic and in the Bay of Biscay were in trouble and sending out distress signals. On Boxing Day, the *SS Buccaneer* reported the



The stricken *SS Flying Enterprise II* in a watercolour painting by T. Hagiwara.

loss of her propeller off the coast of Wales. Off the southwest coast of Ireland a Spanish fishing vessel was lost with all hands, and in the Bay of Biscay the Norwegian tanker *Oestthan* foundered with the loss of nineteen lives.

At about 0600 on Thursday, December 17, the *Flying Enterprise* was holed and encountering waves estimated at 50 to 60 feet in height. Suddenly, and without warning, she was overwhelmed by a rogue wave which heeled her to port at an angle of approximately 45°, at the same time cracking her hull amidships with a noise that sounded like gunfire. Moments later the ship righted herself, and despite the crack in her hull which extended down to the waterline, her hold appeared dry.

Over the next twelve hours under the direction of Captain Carlsen, the crew of *Flying Enterprise* worked feverishly in fearful weather attempting to repair the crack in her hull. They passed steel cables around the bollards on the foredeck, and leading the cables to bollards on the after end, winched them taut after sealing the fault with cement. Twenty-four hours later, any chance of saving the ship

seemed to disappear when a second rogue wave, over 60 feet in height and travelling at a high rate of speed, hit the *Flying Enterprise* on her starboard bow, staving in the wheelhouse windows, wrecking the starboard lifeboat, ripping bunks, tables and lockers from the deck, and shifting her cargo so that the vessel took on a list of 25° from which she never recovered.

The generators in the engine room stopped, plunging the ship into darkness before the emergency generator kicked in. Because of the angle the *Flying Enterprise* had taken on, pumps, breakers, emergency generators, vacuums, main engines,

condensers, and fans, all had to be shut down. The ship lay dead in the water, not responding to her helm.

Surveying the condition of his vessel, Captain Larsen came to the conclusion that he had no alternative but to abandon ship. Ordering his radio officer to transmit a call for help, he then had the chief steward assemble his ten passengers in one place, ensuring they were dressed in warm clothing and wearing their life jackets.

Addressing the assembled passengers that evening, Captain Carlsen told them to remain calm and that help was on the way. They then spent the night huddled together in the dark, wet and cold, listening to the sound of the waves breaking over the ship.

Twenty minutes after the distress signal went out, the first ship to answer was a US naval vessel, the **General A. W. Greely**, a 30,000 ton troopship which reported that, because of the weather, she was only making 4 knots, but estimated her arrival in approximately 24 hours. Also heard from was an American freighter, SS **Southland**, the British freighters **War Hawk** and **Sherborne**, and three Norwegian vessels, SS **Westfal Larsen**, **Norse Mountain** and **Noordam**.

All seven ships converged on the scene during the night and Captain Larsen reported to his owners by radio: "Vessel floating, listing 60° to port, plant dead, taking water in number three hold, cargo shifted, no casualties, passengers or crew."

As dawn broke on December 29<sup>th</sup>, preparations were made for the passengers and crew to abandon ship. The **Flying Enterprise's** lifeboats having been wrecked, both the **Greely** and **Southland** closed in on her and lowered boats, while the **Westfal Larsen** spread oil in the lee of the stricken ship. The second mate of the **Southland** in command of her lifeboat, managed to place a heaving line on the **Flying Enterprise** from a distance of about twenty feet and the rescue of the passen-

gers began. All ten passengers and the crew were taken off the sinking ship in a rescue operation lasting all day.

In order to ascertain that all his passengers and crew had been picked up, Captain Carlsen called the **Greely** by radio asking her to contact the participating ships for a final tally. The **Greely's** boat had picked up thirty-five people, but reported that one elderly passenger had died of apparent heart failure after being brought aboard. **Southland** had rescued a total of fifteen, the German ship **Arion** (a late arrival) had picked up one, and the **Westfal Larsen** also had one survivor. Collectively, the magic number of fifty was reported by the operator in the **Greely** who then asked the person who he thought was his opposite number in **Flying Enterprise**: "When do you come off?", to which Captain Carlsen replied: "I'm the captain and I'm staying."

To communicate with the **General Greely**, Carlsen used a small R/T short-wave radio powered by dry batteries. With **Greely** acting as his mailbox, he was able to communicate with the owners in New York from whom he learned the salvage tug **Oceaan** had been hired and dispatched to come to his aid.

By the evening of December 30, all ships that had been standing by the **Flying Enterprise** had departed except for the **General Greely** which remained throughout New Year's Eve.

A few minutes into the New Year, however, the **Greely** was ordered by the US Navy to sail for New York, and told that she would be relieved by another US vessel, the SS **Golden Eagle** under the command of Captain William Donahue. Expecting the tug **Oceaan** to arrive on December 31, Captain Carlsen was disappointed to learn that she had now been diverted to go to the aid of another vessel in trouble and that his company had hired the British tug **Turmoil** out of Falmouth, England, to take her place. There was a problem, however, because **Turmoil** was already at sea engaged in towing a

Shell Oil tanker, the SS **Mactra**, into Falmouth, and she would not be able to reach **Flying Enterprise** until January 3.

On the previous day, January 2, the **Golden Eagle** had been relieved by the destroyer USS **John W. Weeks**, and along with **Flying Enterprise**, settled down to await the arrival of the tug **Turmoil**.

At around 2200 on January 3, **Turmoil** arrived on the scene and immediately began the dangerous task of trying to pass a line to the **Flying Enterprise**. After numerous failed attempts, they gave up for the night and tried again at dawn the next day, when seven more unsuccessful attempts were made.

In the afternoon it became apparent that if **Turmoil** was ever going to take **Flying Enterprise** in tow, Carlsen would need help. The question was, how were they to get a man aboard the derelict to help this courageous captain? This was answered quite unexpectedly later that day when, as the **Turmoil** came within a few feet of **Flying Enterprise**, the two vessels actually touched, and the first mate of the British tug **Kenneth Dancy**, seized the opportunity to take hold of **Flying Enterprise's** taffrail and was able to hang on before the two vessels swung apart once more.

The following day, Captain Larsen and his new shipmate managed to secure a line to the stricken ship, and as **Turmoil** slowly forged ahead, it became apparent that **Flying Enterprise**, despite a 60° list to port, was no longer out of control and was once again underway at a speed of about 3-1/2 knots.

Falmouth lay 300 nautical miles ahead and if the weather held, it was estimated that **Flying Enterprise** had a 75% chance of making landfall in about four days. The destroyer USS **Willard Keith**, which had relieved the USS **John W. Weeks** as the stand-by ship, was able to get food and hot coffee to the two men on the **Flying Enterprise** and conditions were improving all around.

While these events were taking place,

the saga of the **Flying Enterprise** was playing out around the world. In Britain, the United States and other countries, newspapers, radio and television stations were proclaiming Kurt Carlsen and Kenneth Dancy to be heroes. Everyone was watching the progress of the **Flying Enterprise** and the two men aboard her as she was being towed to safety. Unfortunately, on the morning of January 9, the tow parted and it became apparent to those on the scene that the **Flying Enterprise** was not going to make it.

The weather had deteriorated to the point that a rescue helicopter from RAF Culdrose in Cornwall that had flown off with the intention of lifting Carlsen and Dancy off the stricken ship, had turned back. Surrounded by the tugs **Turmoil**, **Willard Keith**, **Englishman** and **Abeille 25**, together with lifeboats, a wide variety of watchers, freighters, and chartered tenders carrying reporters and cameramen, Captain Larsen and First Officer Dancy prepared to leave the sinking ship. Both men, barefoot and wearing life vests, climbed to the top of the funnel, and at 1523 GMT on the afternoon of January 9, 1952, Kenneth Dancy jumped into the sea, followed moments later by Kurt Carlsen. Swimming toward the tug **Turmoil**, they were pulled aboard by willing hands, and as the **Flying Enterprise** disappeared under the waves stern first, all vessels in the vicinity sounded their horns and sirens in salute, while their crews watched silently from the decks of their storm-tossed ships. So ended the saga of the **Flying Enterprise** only 50 nautical miles from a safe haven in Falmouth, and 19 days after sailing from Hamburg.

Kurt Carlsen and the courageous young mate of the **Turmoil** will ever be remembered by those who go down to the sea in ships. True to the tradition of the sea, Captain Carlsen was the last man to leave his sinking ship and was responsible for having saved the lives of his passengers and crew with the single excep-

tion of the one who died after being rescued.

Regarding theories later raised as to why Captain Larsen remained aboard the stricken freight until she sank, most would agree that his motives stemmed from his loyalty to the owners of the **Flying Enterprise** and his belief that it is the duty of the captain of a sinking ship to be the last man to leave. Showered with honours, medals and awards from maritime nations around the world, including a ticker-tape parade in New York upon his return, Captain Larsen protested that he had only done his job. This modest man passed away at the age of 75 on October 7, 1989, and will long be remembered in the annals of the sea for his courageous vigil of 19 days in the North Atlantic.

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**Frank Saies-Jones is the former Curator/General Manager at the Naval Museum of Alberta, and is a regular contributor to the 'Ensign.'**



Top – the *Flying Enterprise* after being struck by the rogue wave, and Bottom – in better days.

# Volunteer Requirements

- ◆ One person to act as the chairman for our upcoming casino, September 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>.
- ◆ Several people to fill a number of positions at the casino.
- ◆ A couple of folks to take on a project sewing cotton muslin garment bags to properly protect our uniforms in storage.
- ◆ Many more volunteers are needed who can give a minimum of 4-5 hours per month to act as hosts and watchkeepers.

Please contact Murray at 243-242-2006, or [curator@navalmuseum.ab.ca](mailto:curator@navalmuseum.ab.ca)



Please don't forget to renew your membership for 2009 if you have not yet done so.

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