

Archives & Collections Society

100 Years of Our Navy

Naval Memories of John Trafford

Belleville resident John Trafford joined the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserves in 1940, following his friends and his own patriotic instincts in the early years of World War II. At this time, the Navy was growing so quickly that they took back John's uniform and gave it to another division, forcing him to arrive in Halifax for training in civilian clothing.

After beginning as an Ordinary Seaman, John quickly rose through the ranks to become a Petty Officer Wireless Operator. Trafford found, at the age of eighteen, that adjusting to naval life was fairly easy, despite the occasional bout of seasickness.

John describes his time in the Navy as a great adventure. John was also a crew member of HMCS *Columbia* I-49, a Town Class Destroyer that chased the German battleship *Bismark*, but never caught it; he laughs that they would not have known what to do with it anyway. While traveling in the Azores on the Bangor Class minesweeper HMCS *Mulgrave* J313, she ran aground and needed to be towed 1600 miles to Scotland.

John was also part of the 31st Minesweeper Flotilla on D-Day on the *Mulgrave*. Arriving off Omaha Beach, the *Mulgrave* was badly damaged and decommissioned after a mine blew off the stern. Luckily, John fondly remembers, they did not lose a single person onboard. When asked how he felt about the Normandy invasion, John casually explains that to the crew, who are constantly at sea and waiting for something to happen, anything involving navy routine is a part of daily life. John reflects that D-Day "did not affect me personally, it was just another trip at sea, but still a very active day."

While constantly fighting the harsh weather conditions and German mines, John found that the Navy inspired in him and the entire crew a strong sense of camaraderie, since "your neck depends on the guy you work with"; as a result, John developed many lasting friendships. The Navy also enabled him to get a university education: "If the war hadn't come along I probably would have ended up working in a factory" observes John, who feels that the Navy has given him a better outlook on life.



Today, after a successful career with Corrections Canada, John resides in Belleville. At age eighty-nine he remains enthusiastic and energetic, cycling over thirty kilometres to Picton to share his story with the Archives and Collections Society.

John's story, along with those of others from the Quinte region who served in the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), the Wrens (WRCNS), the Sea Cadets, and the Maritime Command of today's Canadian Forces, will be told at *100 Years of Our Navy*, the Archives and Collection Society's celebration of the centennial of the Canadian Navy from July 3 to August 8. Held at *The Victory* on 205 Main Street, Picton, this unique exhibition includes a display of rarely-seen naval photographs and other memorabilia, complemented by an original ACS-produced documentary with interviews of people from Prince Edward

County, Belleville, Trenton, and Kingston involved in Canada's naval service, from its inception to the present.

From July 17th to the 23rd, large 10 ft by 3ft models of the HMC Ships *Ville de Quebec* 332, *Cornerbrook* 878, and *Kingston* 700 from the Department of Defence will also be on display at *The Victory* on a stopover between Halifax and Vancouver. Other models include local artist Hugh Charlebois's flower class corvette HMCS *Demorestville* and a Type VIIC German U-boat from World War II. In addition, naval art by members of the Canadian Society of Marine Artists and others will hang on the walls.

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Napanee author Sherry Pringle will be at *The Victory* on July 8th to sign copies of her book *All the Ship's Men: HMCS Athabaskan's Untold Stories*, which documents her personal investigation into the sinking of the ship during World War II. On July 17th, Dr. Richard Gimblett, command historian of the Canadian Navy and former president of the Canadian Nautical Research Society, will be on the premises to sign his book, *The Naval Service of Canada, 1910-2010: The Centennial Story*. Both book signings are from 1pm to 3pm on their respective days.

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