



Van Arty Association and RUSI Van Members News June 13, 2017

Newsletters normally are emailed on Monday evenings. If you don't get a newsletter on time, check the websites below to see if there is a notice about the current newsletter or to see if the current edition is posted there. If the newsletter is posted, please contact me at bob.mugford@gmail.com to let me know you didn't get a copy.

Newsletter on line. This newsletter, and previous editions, are available on the Vancouver Artillery Association website at: www.vancouvergunners.ca and the RUSI Vancouver website at: <http://www.rusivancouver.ca/newsletter.html>. Both groups are also on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=vancouver%20artillery%20association> and <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=rusi%20vancouver>

Wednesday Lunches - We serve a great 5 course buffet meal for only \$20. Hope to see you all there. Attendance has been down recently. Most of our regular attendees, who are retired, are slowly fading away and the next generation seems, by and large, to be too busy to attend. Guests are always welcome and we encourage members to bring their significant others. Dress - Jacket and tie, equivalent for Ladies

Big Changes Coming Renovations in the Officers Mess started at the beginning of June and are expected to take all summer (if not longer). During renovations, lunches will be held in the WO & Sgts Mess.

Upcoming events – Mark your calendars See attached posters for details.

June 18 - Point Atkinson Tour

July 27 - 4th Annual Korean War Veterans Day Ceremony

World War 2 - 1942

John Thompson Strategic analyst - quotes from his book "Spirit Over Steel"

June 14th: The first Axis air attacks hit the Harpoon and Vigorous convoys, sinking one merchant vessel.

June 15th: The Harpoon convoy makes it to Malta, with only two merchant ships, the rest have been sunk along with two destroyers and much damage to many of the other escorts. The Vigorous convoy turns back when the Italian fleet sorties, but it is minus five merchant ships and two destroyers – but the British have the consolation of knowing that a submarine bagged the Italian cruiser Trento and the battleship Littorio is damaged by air attack. Rommel's men can be slow too, and 15th Panzer fails to bag the South African division before it slips by into Tobruk and 21st Panzer reaches Sidi Rezegh.

June 16th: The end to the latest round of Malta convoy battles comes when U205 sinks the cruiser HMS Hermione. The Harpoon and Vigorous convoys have also kept much of the Luftwaffe in North Africa from harassing the retreating British in the desert. The British withdraw from El Adem, thus exposing Tobruk to attack again.

June 17th: A British counterattack at Sidi Rezegh bounces off 21st Panzer. Almost all of the major fortifications in Sevastopol have been destroyed (the German's giant 600mm and 800mm guns have helped), and the new assaults start to capture the hills that immediately surround the city. U584 lands four spies on the Florida coast.

June 18th: Churchill arrives in Washington for talks with Roosevelt that decide on the invasion of Africa (and against an invasion of France in 1942) and the transfer of the main impetus of nuclear weapons research to the US. Rommel urges the much battered 15th, 21st and Ariete Divisions into a new effort against Tobruk, he also has Luftwaffe support again.

June 20th: Rommel's panzers thunder into Tobruk, whose defences have decayed since the epic siege of last year. The South Africans do not have the resilience that the Australians demonstrated earlier, or the time to organize themselves. In the Crimea, the Germans finally reach Sevastopol's harbour.

Billy Bishop – Canada's First Air Force Victoria Cross Recipient

June 2, 2017 *Captain Steven Dieter*

June 2 is commemorated as "Billy Bishop Day" in honour of the famous First World War ace.



One hundred years ago today, Captain Bishop carried out his daring raid on the Estourmel aerodrome, for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

On June 2, 1917, Captain William Avery "Billy" Bishop took off from Filescamp Farm, his home base with No. 60 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps, near Arras in northern France, on a daring early morning mission. It was a mission planned "after much thought", according to his own words in *Winged Warfare*, first published in 1918. "Dawn was the hour I considered advisable, as there would be very few machines in the air, and I would have a great chance of evading trouble on the way to the

aerodrome.” Captain Bishop was no rookie in terms of combat, although he had only joined No. 60 Squadron in March 1917, and won his first combat victory on March 25. Already credited with 22 aerial victories by the morning of his dawn attack, he was a keen marksman both in the air and on the ground. These skills would prove valuable during his solo adventure. Flying over the enemy lines, Captain Bishop acknowledged that his original target turned out to be less than ideal. Finally finding a suitable target – the German aerodrome at Estourmel – he realized he had no clue where he was. Nevertheless, he continued with his mission.

He shot up one aircraft as it taxied its way towards take off. The second aircraft “crashed into some trees near the aerodrome” after Captain Bishop had shot at him. The third would be the victim of a dogfight. Captain Bishop returned to his aerodrome with his aircraft, a Nieuport 17, which was now riddled with many bullet holes. He recounted the exploits of his mission to his fellow pilots and ground crew; the accolades soon followed. “Within three or four hours I had received many congratulations upon this stunt, and what I had planned as merely a way of shooting down some more of the Huns I found the authorities considered a very successful expedition,” he said. Indeed, the authorities considered this expedition so successful that Captain Bishop would be considered for the British Empire’s highest decoration for Valour – The Victoria Cross. The decision to award Captain Bishop the Victoria Cross was not an impulsive one. Senior officers fully investigated the incident, reviewing combat reports, squadron records, and other supporting documentation. Near two and a half months later, it was announced that Captain Bishop had been awarded the Victoria Cross – the first Canadian airman to receive this honour. It would accompany the Distinguished Service Order and Military Cross that had been awarded but not yet presented. King George V presented Captain Bishop his three decorations – the three highest decorations for valour – on August 30, 1917, at Buckingham Palace.

Billy Bishop, who was born February 8, 1894, in Owen Sound, Ontario, attended Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario, and joined the Army when the First World War broke out. After arriving in Britain, he transferred to the Royal Flying Corps as an observer and was sent to France. The following year, he successfully applied for pilot training and, in 1917, he joined 60 Squadron. He retired from the Royal Air Force at the end of 1918, but was appointed honorary air marshal in 1938. He returned to active service in September 1939, when the Second World War broke out, with the substantive rank of air commodore. The Royal Canadian Air Force put him in charge of recruiting, a task at which he was extremely successful. Although he resigned from his position in 1944 due to ill health – and began working in the oil business – he offered to return to his recruiting post upon the outbreak of the Korean War. Billy Bishop died on September 11, 1956, at the age of 62, and is buried in Owen Sound. He was inducted into Canada’s Aviation Hall of Fame in 1974 as one of the inaugural members. His honours and decorations included the Victoria Cross (VC), Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB), Distinguished Service Order (DSO) and Bar, Military Cross (MC), Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC), Mentioned in Despatches (MiD), *Croix de guerre* (CdG) (France) and the *Légion d’honneur* (Ld’H) (France).

Operation HERMETIC

Countering the Threat to D-Day from the German Surface Fleet

Dr Tim Benbow May 26, 2017

It was a signal that Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay must have been longing to send while being concerned at the potential consequences: ‘CARRY OUT OPERATION HERMETIC’. The issue of this simple order would have executed the contingency plan he had devised as Allied Naval Commander, Expeditionary Force to counter any attempt by the remaining major warships of the German Navy to attack the D-Day landings. It was one of the most interesting papers I discovered in the National Archives at Kew (in AIR 37/1453) while I was researching some primary material for the introduction of my volume on Operation NEPTUNE. Not least, it helps to counter the inaccurate but frequently held assumption that battleships were obsolete in the age of air power and were by this stage of the war entirely lacking a role in naval strategy.



*HMS Rodney, firing a salvo
(Warships To-day, 1936)
courtesy of wikimedia commons.*

Accounts of the D-Day landings all too often begin on the beaches and focus upon what happened subsequently, overlooking the vast challenges of the cross-Channel assault itself. Operation NEPTUNE, the amphibious landing that began Operation

OVERLORD, was arguably the most complex military operation ever attempted. Among the enormous number and range of issues that the planners had to address, it is easy to overlook the imperative to neutralise Germany’s surviving surface warships. Countering the threat that these units posed remained largely a role for the Royal Navy: although Coastal Command became increasingly effective during the war, it was starved of resources by the leadership of the RAF while Bomber Command, despite the boasts of Arthur Harris during and (even more) after the war, had demonstrated little inclination or ability to target German warships.

The German fleet had been severely weakened by the late spring of 1944. Two of its three battleships had been sunk. Bismarck had been destroyed in May 1941 by a British naval force led by the battleships HMS King George V and Rodney, after being slowed by carrier-based aircraft from HMS Ark Royal. This victory was followed in December 1943 when a Royal Navy surface force led by the battleship HMS Duke of York had sunk Scharnhorst. The pocket

battleship Admiral Graf Spee had in December 1939 been damaged by cruisers and was then scuttled rather than face what her captain believed to be a force of British capital ships. Some German warships had been temporarily put out of action by air mining or bombing, notably the battleship Gneisenau which was sufficiently badly damaged during a raid on Kiel in February 1942 to require a major rebuild. It is striking that by this stage in the war, the only German capital ships to have been sunk had fallen victim to other warships, not land-based air power. (A heavy cruiser, Blücher, had remarkably been sunk by Norwegian coastal artillery and torpedo batteries in April 1940.) It was also primarily the fear of British warships – in particular the combination of battleships with carrier support – that kept most of the remaining German major naval units confined to port. The general passivity of these warships infuriated Hitler, but they were a formidable potential force, a ‘fleet in being’ that caused much concern to Allied planners.

Despite the losses suffered, the German Navy could still have put a highly capable fleet to sea in late spring 1944. This could have included the battleship Tirpitz, the pocket battleships Lützow (the renamed Deutschland) and Admiral Scheer, and the heavy cruisers Prinz Eugen and Admiral Hipper, supported by four light cruisers and numerous destroyers. The threat these units posed could have been further increased through coordination with E-boats, U-boats and land-based aircraft. British intelligence assessments saw any intervention by the major German warships as unlikely. Indeed, given the overwhelming naval preponderance of the Allies, it is entirely conceivable that an order for a major sortie would have elicited the same response from the German crews as from their predecessors in the High Sea Fleet, who had mutinied rather than participate in a ‘death cruise’ in October 1918. The far more likely naval threats, which accordingly dominated the attention of those planning Operation NEPTUNE, were mines, E-boats and U-boats. While these could have imposed grievous losses, it was only the enemy surface fleet that could conceivably have defeated the landings at sea. However low the probability of such an operation (their poor serviceability was not known at the time), it had to be considered, and a counter devised. The attention devoted to doing so suggests that the British had learned from the chastening experiences of the invasion of Norway and the ‘Channel Dash’ that the German Navy was quite capable of seizing the initiative and doing the unexpected in a highly competent fashion. The prospect of it doing so again, seeking to turn the tide of the war in the west even at this late stage, could not be ignored.

The first line of defence against any such sortie was the Home Fleet of the Royal Navy, based in Scapa Flow, with three battleships and three carriers. Two of the latter, HMS Furious and Victorious, reduced the potential threat in April 1944 with Operation TUNGSTEN, a highly successful attack that inflicted serious damage on the Tirpitz (which had only just finished repairing the damage inflicted by midget submarines in September 1943). She was thereby kept out of the Normandy campaign and was not included in the potential enemy force detailed in Ramsay’s memorandum. The Home Fleet after that provided cover against any German breakout (especially into the North Atlantic, seen as the most likely course of action). At the same time, it conducted strikes against targets ashore and obvious beach reconnaissance flights in Norway, in support of the Allied FORTITUDE NORTH strategic deception campaign. These

operations were intended to help keep the German Navy in two minds as to where its efforts should be focused. The cover role performed by the Home Fleet aimed to contain and, if necessary, attack any German naval breakout. Should such a sortie evade this force, an even more daunting obstacle would stand between it and the vulnerable supply shipping in the English Channel.

The plan for Operation HERMETIC, ‘to deal with a possible breakout through the Straits of Dover by some or all effective main units of the German fleet subsequent to D-Day’, was outlined by Ramsay in a memorandum of 24 May 1944. He expressed the hope that there would be an early warning of any such operation from intelligence, whether that was information that the warships concerned were redeploying to more westerly bases or increased minesweeping along their intended route. Unmentioned but no doubt in his mind was the likelihood of Ultra signals intelligence providing notice of enemy intentions. Should indications of a sortie become apparent, the Allies would increase air reconnaissance over the North Sea and would aim to bomb the enemy ships in harbour (although the meagre results achieved to date by such efforts meant that they could not be relied upon to prevent the German ships from putting to sea). They would also undertake additional minelaying in the Kiel Canal and the southern North Sea, while two squadrons of Coastal Command Beaufighters would be held back from patrols against E-boats. If the German force headed south, it was to be attacked by aircraft if the circumstances permitted, and also by light surface forces if it passed through the Straits of Dover in a bad visibility or at night. Should the German fleet successfully run this gauntlet and break through the Straits of Dover, Operation HERMETIC would begin. Its aim would be to destroy the enemy warships before they could fall on the supply convoys running between Britain and France.

Admiral Ramsay would assume operational control in the Channel, while all build-up convoys at sea were diverted from the potential area of battle. The Vice-Admiral commanding at Dover would use his destroyers to locate, shadow and report the advancing enemy force. The Naval Commander, Eastern Task Force (Rear-Admiral Sir Philip Vian, Royal Navy) would take command of a force of battleships, cruisers and destroyers. These would come primarily from the British Eastern Task Force that was conducting Operation NEPTUNE, which would form Force H, ‘the main attacking force’ – detaching them from their vital role of providing fire support for the forces ashore to shift them temporarily back to their principal purpose. This force would be supplemented by warships from the American Western Task Force (designated ‘Force T’) as well as those held in reserve in Portsmouth – the battleships, and their escorts would be Force X, the cruisers and remaining destroyers Force Y. Vian’s fleet, comprising up to seven battleships and more than 20 cruisers, would come together at a buoy some 35 nautical miles south-east of the Isle of Wight, with fighter cover provided by 11 Group. The force commander was then ‘to proceed as necessary to bring the enemy to action’ – including an instruction that if gaining or maintaining contact with the enemy required entering known German minefields, he ‘should not hesitate’.

As it turned out, Operation HERMETIC was unnecessary; the German heavy ships did not sortie to challenge the Normandy assault or the subsequent operation to reinforce and sustain the liberation of western Europe. The existence of this plan, however, is a striking reminder of the continued albeit often overlooked role of major surface warships. In the era of submarines and land-based aircraft, capital ships were not sufficient to ensure the ability to use the sea, but they were still necessary. Even when they were not engaging their enemy counterparts, they remained the rock on which command of the sea ultimately rested.

Vancouver Artillery Association Yearbook Updates

The war diaries updates from 100 years ago continue on our What's New page
<http://www.vancouvergunners.ca/whats-new>

War Diary entries from 85 Heavy Battery CASF have been placed in the 1939 yearbook. The latest entries include the Battery occupying the Yorke Island Fort.
<http://www.vancouvergunners.ca/1939---15th-vcr-coast-bde-rca-casf.html>

New photos from Sergeant Colin Parkinson in 1981. Are you included in the photos?
<http://www.vancouvergunners.ca/1981.html>

Trophies upgraded in the Warrant officers and Sergeant's Mess.
<http://www.vancouvergunners.ca/2017.html>

The Regimental Band performing on Victoria Day.
<http://www.vancouvergunners.ca/2017.html>

Keep those stories and pictures coming! Contact Leon Jensen at LeonJ1@hotmail.com

Who Is It

Last Week: It is a little difficult to see much detail in this picture but there is a 3.7" AA position set up in the clear patch just below the photo's centre. There are 4 emplacements (circled, if you can zoom in enough) along the arc of the clear area pointing to the upper left corner. In the right-hand emplacement is No 1 gun, in the second emplacement is a radar unit and in the 3rd and 4th emplacements, No 2 and No 3 guns. After a huddle amongst us locals, we believe this is the position near 41st (the road running across about 1/3rd down from the top) and Oak St (the road cutting across the top right-hand corner).



This was part of the Shaughnessy Golf course at the time and is now the location of the BC Transit Bus storage and Maintenance facility (which has just closed down)

This Week: Just when we thought we had found all the photos in our museum collection, our museum serf stumbled upon a box in the storage area that has ones not seen before. There were three items: a between-wars small album of training shots from Sarcee, contact strips of the UK during the Second World War, and slides from the 50s. It is one of the latter that we are presenting this week. I am sure many of you Cold Warriors have fond memories of these attractive overalls. Most came in alluring black (usually of the “stone-washed” type), but there were other fetching colours available, as our photo shows. Talk about sexy!



Well, it is not that which we will focus upon, much to your disappointment, I am sure. Rather, it is the green object with which these bush-cap clad lads are grappling. Forget the space-age thingie in the background. Our questions this week are two: what are the chappies playing

with, and from what unit do they hail? Send your answers to the editor, bob.mugford@outlook.com or to the author, John Redmond (johnd.redmond@telus.net). Also, should you wish to view moving pictures, look up our YouTube channel (15th Field Regiment, RCA, Museum). We have movies old and new, for your edification and enjoyment. By the way, if you have any other photos of interest that would test our readers, please let me know.

From the ‘Punitentary’

What do marathon runners with bad footwear suffer from? The agony of de feet.

Murphy’s Other Laws

Never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity.

Quotable Quotes

Those who are too smart to engage in politics are punished by being governed by those who are dumber. *Plato*



CANADA 150 TOUR of POINT ATKINSON LIGHT STATION

Lighthouse Park Preservation Society and West Vancouver Historical Society invite you to join a free guided tour of the light station grounds. Learn about the link between the lighthouse and Canada's confederation. Climb the steps to the base of the lighthouse (the tower will not be open). Enter the Fog Alarm museum to learn about its inner workings and the role of the lighthouse keeper. Sit inside the Power House to view a short slide show on the presence of the military during WWII.

For more information about the tour and to register please email pointatkinsonpals@gmail.com

TOUR DATES

Sunday May 14

Sunday June 18

Sunday July 23

Sunday August 13

Sunday Sept. 3

TOUR TIMES

1:00 pm & 3:00 pm

Registration required
Limit 20 per tour



COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS OF CANADA
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CANADA 150

Canada

4th Annual Korean War Veterans Day Ceremony



SPECIAL INVITATION

The Korean War Commemorative Alliance
cordially invites you to

The 4th annual Korean War Veterans Day Ceremony

To mark the 64th Anniversary of the Korean War Armistice

Thursday, July 27th, 2017

10:30am Wreath-laying Ceremony

**Location: "Ambassador of Peace" Korean War Memorial in
Burnaby's Central Park**

(Boundary Road and East 46th Avenue)

Light lunch provided by the Burnaby Firefighters following the ceremony

Kindly RSVP your attendance to reg-asst-martin@outlook.com

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