

OUR NAVAL RESERVE CENTENNIAL By Robert Williamson CD* CDR RCNR Ret'd.

Woven seamlessly into the social, economic and everyday fabric of our Mountain and Regional community is the national fiber of our Citizen Sailors. These men and women, our neighbors, could easily go unnoticed except for the fact that the year 2023 marks the 100th anniversary of the creation of Canada's Naval Reserve. It is a hallmark in Canada's history but unrecognized by the vast majority of Canadians. Living on a large continent, causes people to suffer from "Maritime Blindness". Even after WWI, unlike the army whose bloody victories on the battlefields of Europe were renown, Canadians had no concept of the need for a navy. With post war budget reductions, naval funds were reduced from \$2.5 million to \$1.5 million, scarcely enough to keep one ship afloat.

It was then that Admirable Walter Hose, Director of Naval Services, decided that there would never be a Canadian Navy until it found a place in the hearts and minds of Canadian citizens. He directed his small budget to the establishment of a naval presence in every major population centre in Canada. Thus the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) was born.

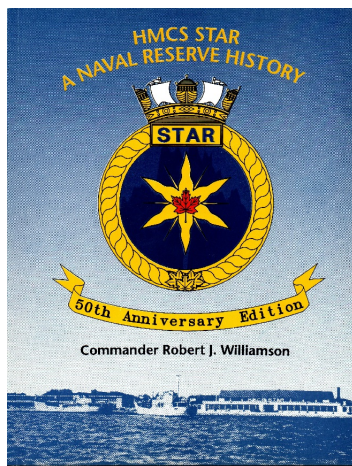
In Hamilton, a Half Company of the RCNVR, with a complement of fifty men was authorized on January 31, 1923. A member of the local Navy League Executive, Howard Yeates, with a distinguished career in the Royal Navy Air Service was sworn in as the Company Commander. Hamilton was the first city to reach its quota by mid March and was rated the best unit in the new RCNVR.

Twelve half companies with a complement of 1,000 men were initially established in major cities across Canada, growing to 19 by the outbreak of WWII. In 1936 the Naval Service decided to identify training facilities as Divisions, replacing the term Half Company. All Reserve Naval Divisions took on the recruiting role envisaged by Admiral Hose. By the end of the war, the RCNR had trained 92,000 recruits enabling the navy to man the convoy escorts that were essential to protecting the supply ships in the Battle of the Atlantic and playing a decisive role in winning the war in Europe.

In part, that rapid growth of the Naval Reserve Divisions occurred on November 1, 1941 when a government document entitled, "The Development of the Naval Reserves in Canada", announced that all existing RCNVR Divisions were to be commissioned as stone frigates. They were given ship's names preceded by the title, "His Majesty's Canadian Ship" (HMCS). This was likely a political move to allow the Department of Defense to purchase building sites and construct bases to meet the ever growing war demands placed on the navy.

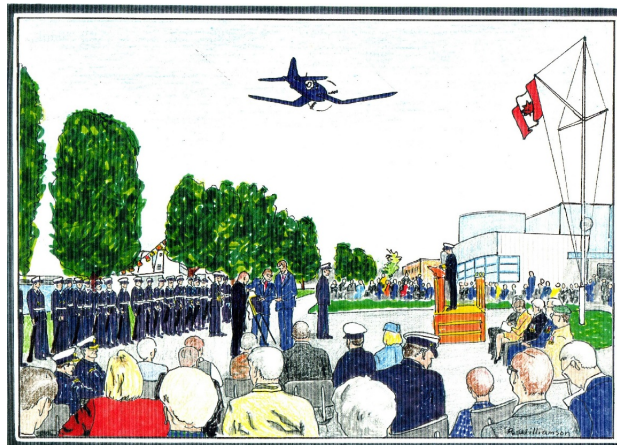
In Hamilton the Member of Parliament for Wentworth announced that a new naval barracks was to be built on reclaimed land on the waterfront at Eastwood Park. It was to be the **first new establishment** in the navy's inland flotilla of training bases called stone frigates and commissioned as HMCS STAR in honour of a 14 gunned, two masted, square-rigged brig, built during the War of 1812 that served gallantly in our region at the head of Lake Ontario 1813-14.

There appears to have been little or no fanfare in 1941 as the RCNR stone frigates were commissioned in every major Canadian city. The unveiling event was lost in the momentous war news of that time period.



Nevertheless, HMCS STAR did celebrated its 50th Anniversary of Commissioning 1941 to 1991, by publishing my 150 page picture-history of the ship, one of the few RCNR Divisions to do so. This was well warranted since Hamilton served as the Canadian Naval Reserve Headquarters from 1953 to 1968 when it was the Great Lakes Training Centre.

The 1941 stone frigate was replaced in 1997 and rededicated. This time many political and military officials attended. The ceremony was enhanced by an Honour Guard, a Commemorative Visit by Coastal Defense Vessel, HMCS SHAWINIGAN and a Fly-Past Salute by the Lt. Robert Hampton Gray Victoria Cross, RCNVR, Memorial Corsair from Canadian Warplane Heritage, shown here in a rare commemorative painting. A Naval Reserve Air Arm was established at STAR in 1946. Lieutenant. Don Sheppard, a Fleet Air Arm fighter Ace in the Pacific Theatre was appointed Staff Officer.



Painting by Robert Williamson CD, Cdr. RCNR Ret'd

Since that time HMCS STAR has become a National Naval Historic Site with a World War II Memorial Destroyer, HAIDA, on display and a War of 1812 Naval Memorial Garden in nearby Confederation Park. The quarterdeck also houses the bell of HMS Ramillies, the battleship that bombarded the eastern perimeter of Canadian landing zone on "D" Day. In celebration of it all, STAR, recognized in 2021 as the Best Naval Reserve Division in Canada, will hold a Gala Dinner for the 100th Anniversary of the RCNR at the historically grand Liuna Station on Saturday March 11.

Mountain Memories by award winning writer Robert Williamson of the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society appears monthly to preserve Hamilton's Mountain Heritage.