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The "Battle We Lost at Home" Revisited

Official Military Histories and the Battle of the St. Lawrence

Roger Sarty

The Importance of this conference*
Is that it gathers together so many of the threads of the history and legacy of the St Lawrence battle. These threads include the memories of people who lived through the events and physical artifacts of the battle, treasures that are especially precious because, 60 years after the fact, memories are being extinguished, and many artifacts have already been lost. Among the artifacts are the traces the Second World War left on the landscape - including notably the Mont Joli airport, and the naval base and fortifications at Gaspé. Durable as these remnants must have once seemed, they too have been greatly changed over time, by human intervention and by the erosion of the elements. Something that has changed much less is the geography and the environment of le bas St. Laurent and the gulf, which so greatly influenced the battle. The location of the conference here at Rimouski, close by the Bic Islands where convoys formed up and dispersed, and close by the western limits of U-boat hunting missions has enriched the understanding of the participants, and the value of the proceedings.



The subject of the present paper is just one of the threads of the battle's legacy, the Government of Canada's official military histories of the battle. These comments are something of a progress report - what has been done and what is new. The remarks are intended to encourage interested people to use the official military histories as tools for further work. Although the histories are based on voluminous government and military records in Ottawa, and in British, American and German archives, the histories do not - and could not - capture the full human experience and meaning of the battle in this region.

There were, and perhaps still are, widespread perceptions that the St. Lawrence battle was an unknown event, 'The War Story Our Leaders Kept Quiet,' in the words of an important article that appeared in a national magazine in 1972.¹ These perceptions, the very opposite of the facts, demonstrate that historical awareness must be nurtured, by such means as the work of the present conference.

When *U-553* opened the St Lawrence campaign by sinking the merchant vessels *Leto* and *Nicoya* on the night of 11-12 May 1942, Angus L. Macdonald, minister of National Defence for Naval Services, broke his department's own security regulations to announce the sinkings to the press and in Parliament the very next day. His actions cleared

* This paper was originally presented at the conference The Battle of the St. Lawrence: Impacts on the Gulf Population from the Second World War to the Present,' organized by the Musée Naval de Québec, at Rimouski, Québec, 8-11 May 2002. Participants included members of the historical, museum, teaching, armed forces, and media communities, as well as local residents who lived through the events of 1942. It is published here through the kind permission of M. Andre Kirouac, director of the Musée Naval de Québec.

the way for the national press immediately to run detailed articles that featured interviews with the survivors from the ships' crews who spoke bluntly about how the attacks had been a complete surprise: the naval shipping control authorities had not yet designated the St. Lawrence as a danger zone. There does not seem much doubt that Macdonald's action was politically motivated. The country had only weeks before been badly divided on linguistic lines in the plebiscite that asked the electorate to release the government from its promise not to send conscripted troops overseas; English-speaking provinces had responded with an overwhelming 'yes' and Quebec with an equally resounding 'no.' The government therefore believed that *Kapitanleutnant* Thurmann, the commander of *U-553*, had unwittingly struck a blow for Canadian national unity. French-speaking Canadians might see that the war was no longer a remote event that had no direct impact on them, and English-speaking Canadians might understand that there were good military reasons to keep conscripted troops in Canada.²

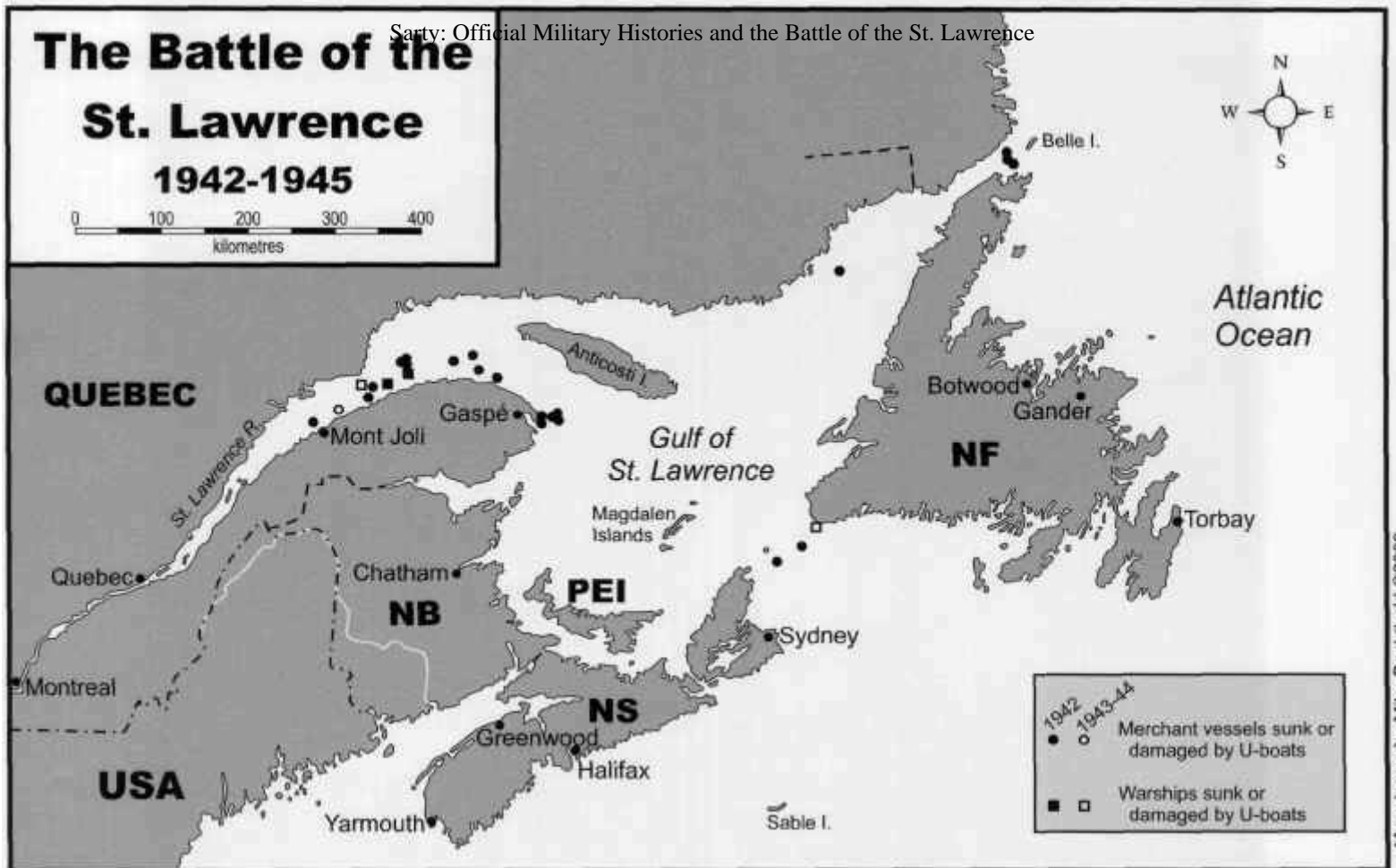
During the renewed U-boat attacks in the summer and fall of 1942, the navy delayed the release of information, so that the enemy would not have confirmation of success soon enough to allow the German U-boat command quickly to deploy additional submarines to the area. The government, however, broke its own rules again when *U-69* sank the Newfoundland ferry *Caribou*, with heavy loss of civilian life, on the night of 13-14 October 1942. Rumours might wildly magnify the scope of the disaster, causing widespread panic and unnecessary further suffering among the families of victims and survivors: the navy allowed the press immediately to publish full details

At this same time, Adelard Godbout, premier of Quebec, warned the federal prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, that losses around Gaspé and in le bas St. Laurent were causing serious alarm in those regions. Godbout's advice followed repeated demands from federal Members of Parliament from the region for fuller information and assurances the government would organize more effective defence measures. During the winter of 1942-3, therefore, the government released in Parliament the names

of all 21 ships that had been sunk in the St. Lawrence.³ Macdonald and C.G. Power, the minister of National Defence for Air, also responded to the most alarmist reports that defences were non-existent or ill-organized, with detailed information that showed these to be rumours without foundation. In the one instance in which the armed forces had been slow to respond to an accurate report by a shorewatcher of a U-boat off Gaspé, the government frankly acknowledged that errors had been made. A large government-sponsored book, *Canada and the War at Sea*,⁴ published in 1944 by the popular authors Stephen Leacock and Leslie Roberts, featured a chapter on 'The Battle of the Gulf.' It contains a reasonably full account of the operations, of the alarm in the St. Lawrence region, and of the government's policy of openness.

In 1946 the navy issued a press release that gave fuller military particulars about the battle of the St. Lawrence.⁵ The first official history of the navy to appear, in 1950, fleshed out additional detail, and classed the operations in 1942 as 'an almost unmitigated defeat for Canada,' but allowed that '[i]t was a defeat deliberately and unavoidably accepted.... Adequate defence of the St. Lawrence would have meant the recall of many Canadian ships from the Atlantic; and such re-disposition would have been of far more benefit to Germany than all the achievements of Hartwig [the most successful U-boat commander in the St. Lawrence] and his companions.'⁶ A further official volume by Gilbert Tucker, completed in 1948 but not published until 1952, included an analysis of how the government's decision to close the St. Lawrence to overseas shipping in the fall of 1942 diminished the effectiveness of Canada's transportation system, with losses to carrying capacity of strategic material more important than the actual losses of ships.⁷

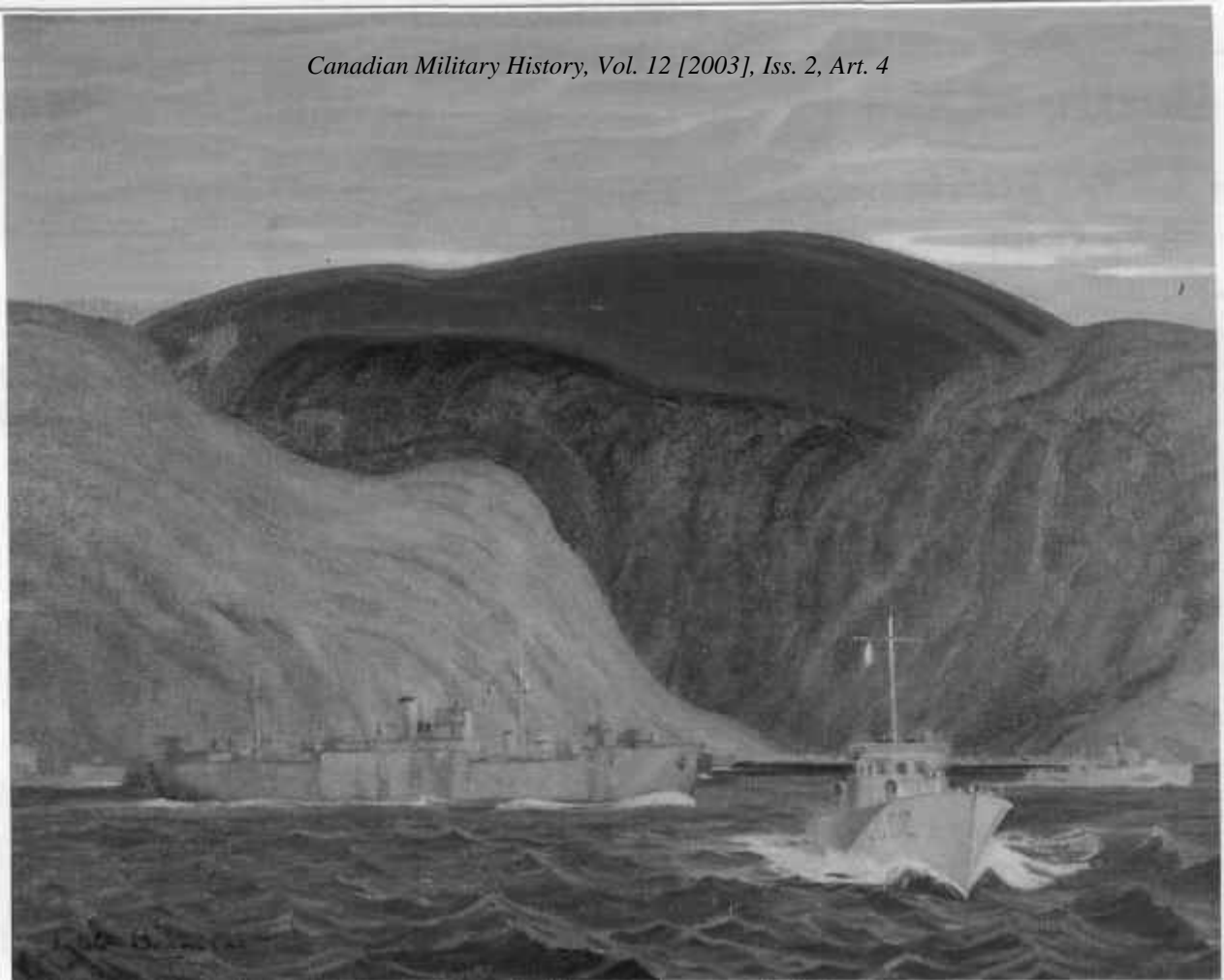
As a result of the early production of the naval official histories, maritime aspects of Second World War had a low priority in the Department of National Defence historical programme until the late 1970s to 1980s. At that time the historians working on the Royal Canadian Air Force history project began to investigate the important role of aircraft in the protection of shipping during the Battle of the



Atlantic. Preliminary work on the St Lawrence revealed a much larger story than anyone had suspected, and Dr. W.A.B. Douglas, Director of History, authorized one of the historians to devote full time work to the St. Lawrence story for the better part of a year. The result of this research was the full chapter on the St Lawrence in Dr. Douglas' *The Creation of a National Air Force: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force*, Vol. II.⁸

This chapter related a significant story that had never before been pieced together. Because of the shortage of naval escorts owing to the huge demands of the convoy system on the North American coast and across the Atlantic, Eastern Air Command of the RCAF had accepted, at the navy's request, a major share of the responsibility for the defence of shipping in the gulf. In the wake of the heavy losses of ships in late August and early September 1942, moreover, Eastern Air Command had removed aircraft from Atlantic duties to concentrate as many as 48 front-line anti-submarine bombers in the gulf and its ocean approaches,⁹ including a large detachment of bombers that operated

from the Mont Joli air base. These aircraft, although they did not sink any U-boats, repeatedly sighted and attacked *U-517*, the most successful of the submarines, and prevented the U-boat from achieving any more successes during the last three weeks of its mission in the St. Lawrence. Moreover, research in German archives, greatly assisted by Professor Michael Hadley¹⁰ who collaborated with the air force historians, revealed that more U-boats had followed *U-517* into the St. Lawrence than had previously been believed, and stayed for a much longer period of time. *U-43*, *U-106*, *U-69* and *U-518* all made patrols of two weeks or more in September to November 1942, but nevertheless together sank only three vessels, as compared to the eighteen sunk by *U-553*, *U-132*, *U-165* and *U-517* in May to September. The reduction in shipping traffic only partly accounted for the meagre results of the continued German effort. Ships still sailed, both independently and in convoys, but the air patrols were so intense that the U-boats did not dare run on the surface long enough to sight and chase the merchant vessels. Indeed, the captain of a fifth submarine assigned to follow up *U-517*'s successes in the gulf, *U-183*,



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St. Lawrence Convoy by Commander Harold Thomas Beament

was so intimidated by the air patrols off Sydney that he decided it was too dangerous to enter."

The air force research also turned up crucial information on Canadian naval intelligence that had still been classified when the naval historians had published in the early 1950s. Since the beginning of the war naval radio stations and other government radio stations operating under naval instructions, had been taking directional bearings on transmissions by German warships and sending these bearings to British naval intelligence. By plotting these bearings together with others on the same transmissions by radio stations in Britain, Iceland and the Caribbean, British naval intelligence could estimate the approximate position of the transmitting warship. By mid-1942, the Canadian navy had developed its own plotting and analysis capabilities, and begun quickly to pass estimated positions of U-boats transmitting in Canadian coastal waters to Eastern Air Command so that aircraft could immediately search the areas. In September 1942 the navy and the air force began to apply this system in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. One of

the Lockheed Hudson bomber units transferred at that time from Atlantic coast stations into the gulf was 113 Squadron, which had led the way in using the navy's plots of estimated U-boat positions to concentrate air patrols in the most promising areas. It was 113 Squadron aircraft, using this system, that repeatedly attacked *U-517* and thereby brought an end to its success. Other squadrons followed this example, with the result that the four U-boats that followed *U-517* seldom dared remain on the surface because aircraft were so constantly overhead.

As a result of these discoveries during the preparation of the air force history, the St Lawrence battle became a focal point of research for a new official history of the navy on which a small team began to work in the late 1980s. The Second World War volume was about two-thirds of the way to completion when the deep government cutbacks of 1993-96 brought the project nearly to a halt. Cuts in the Directorate of History from 32 personnel to ten left only two of the five naval historians on staff. Dr. Serge Bernier became director in these difficult times. Despite many competing pressures and the

extreme shortage of staff, he organized the production in 1997-8 of *Canada and the Battle of the Atlantic*, which featured a chapter on the St. Lawrence with new naval information that built on the results of the air force project. This moderately-sized book was designed to make some of the most important parts of the naval research available to the public until the full naval history could be completed, a date that at that time seemed far in the future.

In 1999, however, the department of National Defence supported the revival of the naval history project. The first of these large volumes was recently published and includes a chapter of some 50 printed pages on the St. Lawrence battle.¹²

There are two particularly interesting areas in which the new work contributes to broader understanding of the St. Lawrence battle. The first is to establish more clearly the strategic context. The St. Lawrence battle was only one part of the large-scale U-boat offensive into North American coastal waters that began in January 1942, after the entry of the United States into the war in December 1941; previously Hitler had banned U-boat attacks west of Newfoundland for fear of triggering American belligerence. The new book shows in detail that the main weight of the initial German assault-by 14 of the 17 U-boats that crossed the Atlantic - fell in Newfoundland and Canadian waters, but that the Canadian forces, despite shortages of ships, aircraft, trained personnel and equipment, were successful in defending shipping. Most of the shipping losses were among unconvoyed ships, that is ships that were sailing alone without immediate protection, and the Canadian navy very rapidly established coastal convoys between Canadian, Newfoundland and, subsequently, northern US ports. Any and every naval escort was pressed into service, and these convoys often sailed under the protection of only one or two small warships. Nevertheless, the U-boats soon shifted the weight of their assault to the US coast, as far south as Florida, and then into the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico. The US Navy did not establish coastal convoys, incorrectly believing that the small number of escorts then available could not provide sufficient protection, and that the convoys would merely create clustered targets for the enemy. The U-boats,

however, as events in Canadian waters proved, had no wish to take the time and run the risks necessary to find and attack convoys. German policy was to sink as much shipping as possible with the least possible danger of counterattack, and that made independently sailed ships the target of choice. During the first eight months of 1942, the Germans were thus able to destroy over 100 ships per month along the US coast.

Canadian defence planners had always worried - in the First World War, and when war threatened again in the late 1930s - that such a submarine assault on the North American coast would inevitably extend into the St. Lawrence. Every winter during the Second World War the navy drew up detailed plans as to what measures could be taken in the St. Lawrence with the warships and maritime aircraft actually available when the ice cleared and shipping again began to sail in the following spring. The great demands of the new coastal convoys early in 1942 left very little for such an emergency at the very time it seemed most likely. On the advice of the British Admiralty (which itself had contributed a large number of British escorts to help out in Newfoundland, Canadian and US waters) that all escorts were urgently needed on the Atlantic routes, the navy assigned only a small number of Bangor minesweepers and wooden Fairmile motor patrol craft to the Gulf. Many of these were newly-built vessels that would not complete until the spring and summer of 1942. Given the shortage of resources, the naval staff also decided that convoys would not be organized in the gulf until merchant ships had actually been sunk there, and further decided that if the lightly escorted convoys suffered serious losses to the submarines, it would be wiser to close the gulf to shipping than to divert escorts from the critically important Atlantic routes.

The navy received intelligence that a U-boat might be in the Gulf the day before the attacks on *Leto* and *Nicoya*, and requested the air force to begin to patrol in pursuit of the submarine. When the destruction of the two ships confirmed that a U-boat was present and active, the navy and air force swiftly implemented the plans made the preceding winter. All shipping was held in port for a few days until defended convoys could be organized, and the air force greatly increased its patrols; these measures were



Sailors from a merchant ship torpedoed in the Gulf of St. Lawrence are provided with "survivor's bundles" by the Women's Naval Auxiliary Services, May 1942.

effective and *U-553* was unable to make any further attacks on shipping.

At this same time, the pressures on the limited pool of escorts increased even more. During the spring of 1942 U-boat attacks on tanker traffic in southern US waters virtually cut off the supply of crude oil from the Caribbean to refineries at Montreal and Halifax; much of eastern Canada, including the ship refuelling facilities at Halifax and St. John's, Newfoundland, depended upon the production of these refineries. The Canadian naval staff therefore pulled two escorts from Atlantic convoy service to run special tanker convoys to and from the Caribbean. This was a success, in part because the tanker convoys did not have to make the week-long run from Halifax up the St. Lawrence; in 1941 an oil pipeline had opened between Portland, Maine and Montreal.

The British and Americans agreed that Canada could redeploy a total of six ocean escorts - corvettes - from the Atlantic routes on

a long term basis for regular tanker escort duty to the Caribbean, with the intention that they should escort British as well as Canadian tankers. Just as the new Tanker Escort Force was assembling at Halifax, *U-132* entered the Gulf and made determined, successful attacks on the weakly-escorted convoys. The Canadian naval staff, despite the contrary advice of the British and Americans, immediately began to deploy the tanker escorts into the gulf to strengthen the defences of the convoys there, and scaled back the size of the tanker convoys to the Caribbean. When, in September, *U-517* and *U-165* made still heavier attacks in the gulf, the Canadian naval staff pulled additional escorts from the Atlantic routes, including two British destroyers that were operating under Canadian control; it was at this time that Eastern Air Command made large-scale redeployments of aircraft from coastal stations into the gulf. Far from ignoring the St. Lawrence defences in the gulf, as anxious Members of Parliament and journalists charged, the Canadian forces defied the priorities of the Allied high command in

order to strengthen the defences as much as was humanly possible.

On 9 September 1942, as losses in the gulf convoys were continuing to increase despite the recent reinforcements, the Canadian government closed the gulf to ocean shipping on the advice of the naval staff. Thus, it seemed, the gulf had proved indefensible with the resources available, and the navy was doing what had always been provided for in the plans.

Allied priorities for escort deployments changed at this time, however, as did the whole organization of shipping defence in North American waters. It was, in fact, these changes that brought the closure of the gulf, although the recent heavy losses undoubtedly influenced the decision. The immediate reason for the decision to close the gulf was a personal appeal from Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain to Canada's prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, asking that Canada provide as many as 16 corvettes to help protect the troop and supply convoys that would carry British and US forces for the invasion of North Africa planned for early November 1942. This was the first western Allied land offensive against the Axis powers, and it was the most urgent and pressing war operation.

Closure of the gulf was the most immediately practical method of freeing up escorts to provide these corvettes because Canadian, British and US shipping authorities had already agreed, in August, that the huge losses of Allied shipping in US waters could only be stopped by greatly curtailing shipping to and from Canadian ports, and making New York the focal point for the shipment of supplies from North America to Britain. The Canadian tanker convoys to the Caribbean had helped to show that even lightly escorted convoys along the US coast would greatly reduce the number of German attacks, but experience had demonstrated that the coastal convoy system would have to be comprehensive. As the US forces had gradually improved defences along the Atlantic seaboard in the spring and early summer of 1942, the U-boats had simply shifted further south to the heavily travelled and still weakly protected

waters of the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico. Escorts were still not available in sufficient numbers to implement such a large system of new convoys without economies somewhere, and all authorities agreed those economies had to come in Canadian waters.

Since the entry of the US into the war the proportion of North American shipping carrying supplies to Great Britain that sailed from US ports had completely outstripped the amount that sailed from Canada's Atlantic ports and the St. Lawrence. It was therefore much more economical, in terms of escorts, to bring the relatively small number of ships from Canadian ports south to New York, than to continue to escort very large numbers of ships north from US ports for transatlantic convoy assembly at Halifax and Sydney, Nova Scotia. In August-September, as British and US escorts implemented a complete system of coastal convoys on the US coast and in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico (with the Canadian tanker escorts also participating), New York replaced the Nova Scotia ports as the assembly point for transatlantic convoys. The RCN was able assume full responsibility for the escort of the big transatlantic convoys from New York because it was no longer necessary to move so many ships between Canadian ports and to and from northern US ports: as the main transatlantic convoys sailed north from New York, groups of merchant ships that had loaded at Canadian ports simply sailed out and joined under local escort of small numbers of warships that had only to make a short shuttle out and back from Halifax and Sydney. In short, the decision to close the St. Lawrence was driven by the needs for escorts for the invasion of North Africa, and even more so by the need to stop losses in the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean than by successes

This photo was taken from a Lockheed Hudson of 113 (Br) Squadron during an attack on *U-165* on 9 September 1942 just south of Anticosti Island.



of *U-517* and *U-165* in the St. Lawrence. In July to September the U-boats sank 16 vessels in the St. Lawrence river and gulf; in those same months the enemy destroyed 104 vessels in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico.¹³ There was more than a little of truth in the statement Angus L. Macdonald made in the House of Commons in March 1943:

I say that the battle of the St. Lawrence has not been lost... of the total tonnage which used the river and the gulf last year, only three out of every thousand tons was sunk...I know the general average of convoy sinkings throughout the world, and I can say that if you only lose three tons out of every thousand which you have at sea you are doing pretty well, in fact somewhat better than average. We have not lost the battle of the gulf. Some people think the gulf is easily defended...Let them remember that the St. Lawrence river, at the point farthest inland where an attack was made last year, is thirty miles wide. That is almost like the open sea.¹⁴

Yet, despite these brave words, the government and the armed forces did regard the battle in the St. Lawrence as a defeat. It was that sense of defeat at the end of 1942 that informed the original official histories, quoted above, that were published in the early 1950s.

The new official history seeks to explain why, when the armed forces had energetically executed well-conceived plans, effectively suppressed the U-boats in the gulf after mid-September, and all the while contributed to much larger and more important Allied objectives, there was such a sense of defeat. This is the second area of investigation that might be of general interest.

In the St. Lawrence, as was not fully understood at the time, the Canadian forces faced conditions that were extraordinarily favourable to submarines, and extraordinarily difficult for defending forces. Although Macdonald was right that the gulf and estuary of the St. Lawrence are inland seas, there are also choke points, in the Cabot Straits, between the Gaspé Peninsula and Anticosti Island, and in the river west of the Gaspé Peninsula. These choke points force shipping to follow standard routes, and thus made it easy for submarines to locate convoys, whose best protection on the open ocean was the extreme difficulty

submarines had in finding them. At the same time, the broad and deep waters of the St. Lawrence enabled submarines quickly to escape once they had attacked a convoy. Canadian aircraft and escorts carried primitive radar or no radar at all for detection of U-boats that fled at speed on the surface, and, more than was appreciated at the time, the complex layering of cold seawater and warm river water blinded the asdic (sonar) then available for underwater detection. Given these conditions, it was not surprising that convoys protected by escorts that were either weak, or comprised of larger numbers of warships that had been hastily assembled with no chance to achieve proper coordination, suffered heavy losses. The imperfect understanding in 1942 of the challenges of defending shipping in coastal waters like the gulf, meant that the losses experienced - which included two RCN escorts and a USN troopship - were scarcely less demoralizing for the armed forces than they were for the population on shore.

The success of closer naval-air cooperation starting in mid-September 1942, moreover, was not apparent at the time. Encouraging as were the initial string of air attacks (and a surface escort attack) on the unusually bold *U-517*, thereafter the Canadian forces never got even a glimpse of the enemy. Because the Allies were unable to decrypt German U-boat radio signals in 1942, no one realized that four U-boats made long patrols in the gulf in October to November, and that the defences had all but paralyzed these submarines while persuading a fifth not to venture past the Cabot Straits.

Although the U-boats succeeded in sinking only three ships after mid-September, these included two of the most dramatic losses: the steamer *Carolus*, sunk furthest upriver of all the losses, close off Metis Beach; and, in the Cabot Strait, the Newfoundland ferry *Caribou*. Both were destroyed by *U-69*, and this boat, as we now know from German sources, had been driven to hide beneath the surface in deep narrow waters and attack only ships that passed close by under cover of dark nights because of the strength of the defences along the main shipping routes. Unfortunately, these dramatic successes in October - the parting shots of the U-boats as they retreated from the St Lawrence

- coincided with the publication of a series of articles by the Quebec journalist Edouard Laurent under the title "Ce qui se passe en Gaspésie," which reported in powerful terms the alarm of the population, and their conviction that they had been abandoned by their governments in the face of the enemy.

La guerre est tout proche de lui. Un bon nombre ont vu des sous-marins ennemis; d'autres ont été les témoins de torpillages de navires alliés; un plus grand nombre ont entendu dans le lointain, le bruit de la canonnade. Ceux qui sont allés dans les hôpitaux de région ont vu ou entendu parler des marins blessés qui se remettent de leurs blessures....

Ce qui augmente l'angoisse collective, c'est d'abord le silence du gouvernement sur tout ce qui se passe dans le bas du fleuve. Les gens de la Gaspésie savent bien que si le gouvernement exposait la véritable situation, l'opinion publique réagirait assez vigoureusement pour exiger une action plus efficace de la part des autorités...¹⁵

It was these articles that brought Premier Godbout to alert Mackenzie King to the urgent need to address the concerns of the population in the region, which in turn brought the government to increase pressure upon the armed forces to investigate what had gone wrong in 1942 and prepare detailed plans for greatly improved measures in 1943. Godbout's warning stimulated the government's own efforts to reply more vigorously to critics with much fuller information about events in the gulf. The government also directed the armed forces to work closely with provincial and municipal authorities in all the areas around the lower river and gulf to provide better information to the coastal populations and enlist their cooperation in keeping a sharp watch and reporting anything suspicious along those isolated shores. This programme was a central part of the military planning for 1943, together with the assignment of many additional escort warships and bomber aircraft to the gulf. Yet no U-boats returned to hunt in the St. Lawrence in 1943, because, as we now know, the improved Canadian defences during the fall of 1942 had persuaded the U-boat command that the gulf was no longer a promising area for attacks on shipping.

Paradoxically, the destruction of *U-517* by British forces in the eastern Atlantic in November

1942, and the capture of *Kapitanleutnant* Paul Hartwig and most of his crew, further contributed to the sense of defeat among the senior levels of the Canadian forces, and their determination to strengthen the gulf defences in 1943. Hartwig and his men spoke freely of their exploits and of their narrow escapes from the repeated, and often hair-raising, counterattacks by Canadian aircraft and warships. Most of what they said could be confirmed from Canadian action reports, and both British and Canadian officers were deeply impressed that the German submariners had had the confidence to persist in the face of such determined opposition. If it was this difficult to deter German submariners, then there was every reason to expect renewed attacks in the St. Lawrence in 1943 that would be as least as heavy as those spearheaded by Hartwig.

When the first official histories of the navy appeared in 1950 and 1952, it was the exploits of *U-517* that largely accounted for the authors' conclusions that Canada had been dealt a defeat. The full German archives that included reports from the other submarines that had been forced continuously to hide immobile beneath the water and ultimately abandon the gulf were not yet available to the Canadian naval historians. They were only too aware of the gaps in the sources they had to work with and quite consciously laid the groundwork for additional research by later generations of official historians. In this sense, the belated appearance of the new official history of the navy is nevertheless the result of a successful passing of the baton.

Perhaps the greatest value of the official histories is that they bring to bear the substantial resources needed to assemble and digest the vast and frequently obscure military and government archives. This specialized scholarship alone is not sufficient to bring meaning and currency to history. It is, however, an essential resource for others accurately to gather and analyze personal memories and artifacts, review archives with fresh eyes, preserve and interpret significant sites, and produce the memorials, exhibits, films, and books that, with new perspectives, keep history vital.

Notes

1. Peter Moon, 'The Second World War Battle We Lost at Home,' *The Canadian Magazine* (26 February and 3 March 1972). In about 1976 and again in 1995 the author assisted national television journalists who had the same view.
2. Roger Sarty, *Canada and the Battle of the Atlantic* (Montreal: Art Global and the Department of National Defence, 1998), 101-3
3. House of Commons, *Debates*, 17 March 1943, 1338
4. Stephen Leacock and Leslie Roberts, *Canada and the War at Sea* (Montreal: Publications (1943) Limited, 1944), II, 39-43
5. 'Royal Canadian Navy Press Release,' file 1699, 29 March 1946, copy held in the Maritime Command Museum, Halifax, and kindly provided by Marilyn Gumeay
6. Joseph Schull, *The Far Distant Ships: An Official Account of Canadian Naval Operations in the Second World War* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1961 [reprint of first edition, 1950]) 121-2
7. Gilbert Norman Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History*, Vol. II: *Activities on Shore During the Second World War* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1952), 390-4
8. W.A.B. Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force*, Vol. II, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press and the Department of National Defence, 1986), chapter 13
9. Douglas, *Creation of a National Air Force*, 509
10. Michael L. Hadley, *U-Boats against Canada: German Submarines in Canadian Waters* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985) is still the fullest account of U-boat operations in the St. Lawrence. Professor Hadley and the air force historians benefitted greatly from the generous assistance of Dr-Professor Jiirgen Rohwer, whose book *Axis Submarine Successes 1939-1945* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1983) is an essential source on U-boat operations during the Second World War.
11. Brian Tennyson and Roger Sarty, *Guardian of the Gulf: Sydney, Cape Breton and the Atlantic Wars* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000), 280-1.
12. W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty and Michael Whitby, with Robert Caldwell, William Johnston, and William G.P. Rawling, *No Higher Purpose: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943, Vol.II, Part I* (St. Catharines, ON: Vanwell Publishing and the Department of National Defence, 2003), chapter 8
13. Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Battle of the Atlantic September 1939-May 1943* (History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, vol. 1)(Boston: Little, Brown, 1947), 413-4
14. House of Commons, *Debates*, 17 March 1943, 1344
15. *L'Action Catholique*, 14 October 1942, copy in Queen's University Archives, C.G. Power papers, box 70, file D-2032

Roger Sarty is the Deputy Director chiefly concerned with research and exhibits at the Canadian War Museum. He has written extensively on Canadian naval and defence topics.

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affected Canadian performance is equally applicable to the Poles. Compounding all this was that the corps and divisional commanders (and their staffs) lacked situational awareness. To a degree, Simonds' may have believed the end was in sight and failed to follow the battle as closely as he should.

I find that historians often treat the Polish forces (and many other allied nations) during the Second World War as if they are gossiping about someone who is in the room with them, while pretending that person is not there. This is particularly noteworthy in the literature about Normandy and especially true of Major-General Sosabowski and the Polish Parachute Brigade. I am often surprised at the shoddy or limited research, especially in this case, where for most of August 1944, the

Polish division played a key role. Source material is abundant and not that difficult to find. The National Archives of Canada holds a number of critical documents regarding 1st Polish Armoured Division pre-invasion training and operations in Normandy, while a number of English language publications describe their operations in greater detail. The Sikorski Institute in London holds a goldmine of untapped documentation. History is about pinning down facts and treating a significant player, such as the 1st Polish Armoured Division, solely through third party comments still leaves us without an accurate portrayal of the Normandy campaign.

Please also note the caption on page 16 is not correct. The individual in the photo is not a "trooper" but actually a captain (indicated by the three stars on his beret) from the 10th Mounted Rifle

Regiment, the divisional reconnaissance regiment of the 1st Polish Armoured Division.

Finally, the author points out, quite correctly, many British and Canadian commanders such as Montgomery, Simonds, Kitching and others lacked "armoured training or armoured command experience." Among those with experience was Major-General Stanislaw Maczek, who with his tiny armoured brigade, fought a spirited defence against two German divisions in 1939, commanded an armoured brigade in France in 1940 and led the 1st Polish Armoured Division between 1943 and 1945.

Yours sincerely,
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