SUMMER 2025 WARRIOR



Jim Elliott joined the RCN in Jan 1961 and retired in Aug 1988. During this period, he served in seven HMC Ships, three air squadrons, BAMEO (RW), AVSO and VT/HT/MOTS 406 Avionics training. All this happened while serving in the immediate Halifax area. After six years of working on preliminary planning for the New Shipborne Aircraft (NSA) (EH 101) at Industrial Marine Products (IMP) he retired for good in 1993.

Shortly after his second retirement, he joined the volunteer group at the

Shearwater Aviation
Museum (SAM) taking on
duties of tour guide, docent,
and as part of the aircraft
maintenance group. Jim
was also a member of the

SAM Foundation Board of Directors. He still attends most of the BOD meetings.

As a tour guide, he took visitors through the museum detailing aircraft and regaling guests with tales of life aboard ships. He brought life and adventure to the static displays, especially the Bonaventure diorama.

It must be mentioned here that Jim's late wife Elaine was also very involved in Museum activities, and they made a great team dealing with the public and opening the museum for many special occasions.

Jim took on the job of revitalizing the curriculum and presentation for teaching the basics of Theory of Flight to grades fives and sixes, both in house and on site in schools in Halifax, Bedford and Dartmouth. He held the undivided attention of both students and teachers during these sessions.

He brought life and adventure to the static displays, especially the Bonaventure diorama. The Halifax Flight Sim group held their weekly Wednesday night meetings in the museum, and Jim was there to open and close the building, as well as

participate in the activities. He was the only one to attend all of the meetings.

As time passes Jim still participates in all these activities and is in the throes of passing along the information and methodology to continue, and hopefully improve, the services to the SAM and its many visitors.

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Thank you to Anne Teasdale for her help with the editing read-through and packaging of Warrior.

Special thank you and credit goes to Danielle Wezenbeek for her design of the front and back cover, typography, layouts, photo editing and illustrations in the summer issue of Warrior. Danielle is a student at NSCAD University who is studying to achieve a Bachelors in Interdisciplinary Design.

Come and Celebrate the Grand Reopening

On July 31st, the Foundation is delighted to be part of and celebrate a momentous occasion: the grand reopening of the Shearwater Aviation Museum. After weathering several challenging years, marked by closures due to the pandemic, persistent maintenance issues, and the careful remediation of lead and mold, it is with profound pride and gratitude that we see the SAM open its doors once more to the community and aviation enthusiasts alike.

This triumph is not the result of circumstance, but of the unwavering commitment and hard work of many individuals who refused to let adversity define the museum's story. At the heart of this remarkable journey are the volunteers, whose passion and tireless efforts have breathed new life into the exhibits and programs. Their collective energy has restored the museum's spirit and created a renewed sense of purpose, ensuring that Shearwater's history is preserved for future generations.

The dedicated staff, ever resourceful and resilient, have navigated logistical hurdles with professionalism and creativity. From coordinating essential repairs to reimagining visitor experiences, their expertise has guided the museum through its most trying times and shaped it into a beacon of learning and inspiration.

Special recognition is owed to Christine Hines, our esteemed Museum Curator. Christine's vision and leadership have been instrumental throughout every phase of this renewal. With meticulous attention to detail and an unyielding devotion to the museum's mission, she championed both the preservation of the collection and the safety of the spaces. Her ability to bring people together—galvanizing volunteers, collaborating with experts, and engaging the public—has made this reopening not merely possible, but truly extraordinary.

As the SAM opens its doors once more, all are invited to explore the exhibits, celebrate our shared heritage, and honor the people whose determination has safeguarded this treasure. The Shearwater Aviation Museum stands as a testament not only to Canada's Military Maritime Aviation legacy but also to the resilience and unity of the community.

Let us mark July 31st not just as a reopening, but as a new beginning—a day that reminds all involved of the remarkable things that can be achieved when we all work together, with hope and dedication.

Congratulations to all involved and welcome back to the Shearwater Aviation Museum!

Jason Miller

President SAMF



From the Curator



Happy summer! The team at SAM and SAM Foundation have a great deal to celebrate. We are finally up and running in normal fashion after months of reinstalling the exhibits. While that work is ongoing (it takes much more time to put a museum together than it does to take it apart), we will be hosting an open house on 31 July 2025 from 1-3 pm, to celebrate the accomplishment of preparing the museum for visits once again.

Keeping the good news rolling, for the first time in some years, we have qualified for a summer student grant and have welcomed the wonderful Danielle Wezenbeek to SAM. A student at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Danielle has been working at the front of house with customer service and has been creating new directional/orientation signage and exhibit object labels. A creative talent, Danielle is a great addition to our team. Thank you to the Nova Scotia Student Summer Skill Incentive (SKILL) program for the support to allow us to hire Danielle. We are also welcoming back our contract archivist, Heidi Schiller, for a project to arrange and describe several Second World War-era collections, including Lt. C.E. Butterworth RCNVR, who you will read a bit more about in this issue of the Warrior. We appreciate the support of the Nova Scotia Provincial Archival Development Program (PADP) to allow this important work to be done at the SAM Archives. Welcome back Heidi!

This spring saw the SAM and SAM Foundation team get back into attending regular off-site events. The SAM ran its signature annual spring Hobby Show in May, which saw an increase in exhibitors and attendees. We also

attended Saltscapes East Coast Expo, to create awareness of our museum and promote our reopening. The SAM team also brought a pop-up shop to Air Show Atlantic in June, which is an annual fundraiser for the SAM; despite a rainy Sunday, it was a great show, and nice to spend time with like-minded aviation groups and enthusiastic aviation fans. Thanks to Air Show Atlantic for the opportunity to participate in the 2025 Summerside show.

As you can see, the SAM is starting to get back to normal operations. We are receiving visitors from around the globe, who are excited to see us reopen and gracious in their support. We still have much work to do, but improvement and milestones are happening every day, so we are very gratified to see the progress.



From the desk of Karen Collacutt- McHarg

I hope you're having a great summer; I know I am. Here in Shearwater, the weather has been just beautiful. To bring you up to date, below is a list of our lucky winners of our Cloud Nine draws to date.

The winners of \$350. From June 4th- July 9th. They are as follows: Eric Veillette, Shirley MacLeod, Ed Adshead, Ken Walper, Mary Ann Varley, and Bill McHarg. The draws happen every Wednesday until the end of August, so good luck to everyone who supported the Cloud Nine fundraiser.

We have three Rafflebox draws this year, April 29th Winner, William McHarg \$1177.50. Our second draw will be held on August 27th, and the third will be on December 10th. Tickets can be bought online or by calling the foundation office at 902-461-0062

In July we had a visit from a few friends of the Bonaventure, pictured on page 7.

Thank you to Paul Crawford for organizing the visit.

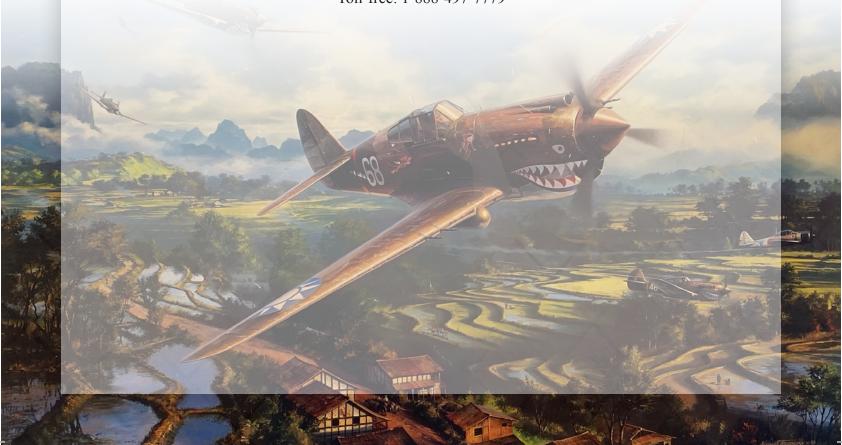
Tickets for the Curtiss P-40's of General Chennault's Flying Tigers 3rd Pursuit Squadron, "Hell's Angels", in action over the rice fields, near Kunming in West China, 1941

TIGER FIRE by Nicolas Trudgian

Tickets \$5.00 each or 3 for \$10.00. Draw Date September 6th 2025

The Shearwater Aviation Museum Foundation

Phone: 902-461-0062 Toll-free: 1-888-497-7779







By Colonel (Ret'd) John L. Orr

Years ago, a quote from the sainted Joe Howe, a Nova Scotia journalist and politician of some renown, used to grace the masthead of the editor's page of this august magazine. The quote was part of an address delivered by Howe in 1871 to an audience in Framingham, Mass. and in it he made the following observation:

"A wise nation preserves its records, gathers up its monuments, decorates the tombs of its illustrious dead, repairs its greatest structures and fosters national pride and love of country by perpetual references to the sacrifices and glories of the past."

This could be the mission statement for the Shearwater Aviation Museum! So what reference can we at Shearwater make today to the "...sacrifices and glories of the past?"

Regular readers will be aware that Shearwater has a complex, if not convoluted, history that stretches from 1918 until today - more than 100 years of service to Canada and Canadians. Shearwater, of all the military air stations in Canada, can justifiably make the claim that "Shearwater's history is the air force's history."

What we now know as Shearwater refers to a location that has had many names: United States Naval Air Station Halifax (1918), Naval Air Station Halifax (1919-1920), Canadian Air Board Air Station Dartmouth (1920-1922), Canadian Air Force/Royal Canadian Air Force Station Dartmouth (1923-1948), HMCS Shearwater (1948-1968), Canadian Forces Base Shearwater (1968-1993) and finally, 12 Wing Shearwater. The consistent theme over all these years is flying aircraft from ashore or from HMC Ships on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts and is encapsulated in the motto of Shearwater "Supra Mare Volamus" - "We Fly over the Sea."

One aspect of Shearwater's connection with aviation 'over the sea,' a prequel if you will, includes the service of those Canadians who flew in the First World War as members of the Royal Naval Air Service and, following amalgamation with the Royal Flying Corps in 1918, in the Royal Air Force. During the Second World War, two of these Canadian RNAS/RAF veterans became

wartime Chiefs of Air Staff of the RCAF, Air Marshals Breadner and Leckie.

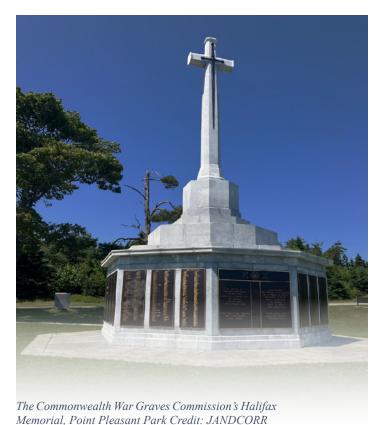
As in the First World War, Canadians volunteered to serve in aviation with the Royal Navy during the Second World War. This time, they were members of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR), loaned to the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm (FAA).

This issue of The Warrior is dedicated to those 260 members of the RCNVR who served in the FAA during the Second World War. Of these, 38 perished and 16 were lost with no known grave. Their names are inscribed on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Halifax Memorial in Point Pleasant Park, including perhaps the most well-known of this little-known group, Lt. Robert Hampton Gray VC DSC RCNVR.

On Saturday, 9 August 2025, a naming ceremony for HMCS Robert Hampton Gray, the final ship of a flight of six Harry DeWolf-class Arctic and Offshore Patrol Vessels (AOPVs), will take place at the Irving Shipbuilding Inc. shipyard in Halifax. Of note, Hampton Gray, for whom the ship is named, was not only the last Canadian combat fatality of the Second World War, he was also the last Canadian to be awarded the Victoria Cross.

The date of the naming ceremony, 9 August 2025, is significant as it marks 80 years to the day since Hampton Gray lost his life over Onagawa Wan, Northern Honshu, Japan, in an attack against the Japanese escort, Amakusa. This was the action for which Gray was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross and took place less than a week before the end of hostilities in the Second World War on VJ Day (Victory over Japan Day), 15 August 1945.

While Hampton Gray's story has been examined in some detail, those of the remaining members of the 'Halifax Sixteen' are virtually unknown. Wanting to bring attention to the sacrifice of Canada's naval aviation personnel who lost their lives during war and peace, two former naval aviators, J. Allan Snowie, a noted author on Canadian naval aviation, along with Grant Smith, who had researched a similar project concerning the First World War dead of Norfolk County, ON, decided to create a memorial project to bring these



names to a wider audience.

As the project progressed, the scope was expanded to include not only those Canadians who lost their lives in naval aviation during the First and Second World Wars, but also to include those who died on duty during the long years of the Cold War, including members of RCAF maritime patrol aviation. The result of their painstaking research was published as Signal Delta in 2024. Included in this issue of The Warrior are Allan Snowie's remarks given at the book launch for Signal Delta held onboard HMCS Sackville on 11 November 2024. "Book Launch Signal Delta."

To illustrate the intensity of operations that faced the Canadians in the wartime FAA, we have an account of Lt. Don Sheppard's last victory, "Making Ace - Don Sheppard's Final Victory" by Michael Whitby, the former senior naval historian in the Directorate of History and Heritage in Ottawa. Don Sheppard made his mark as an 'ace' with the British Pacific Fleet in 1945, the same year that his older brother, Robert Sheppard, lost his life while serving in 1842 Squadron onboard HMS Formidable.

Michael Whitby, who grew up at Shearwater, provides our next article entitled "Chocks Away: Shearwater's Transition to RCN Control." This relates to the fractious relationship between the RCAF and the RCN Air Branch as RCAF Station Dartmouth became HMCS Shearwater. This article is based on Michael's presentation at Shearwater's centennial in 2018, an event which also marked the 55th anniversary of the arrival of the first Sea Kings at Shearwater.

Those members of the RCNVR who served in the Second World War as members of the FAA had no direct connection with Shearwater prior to the war. In later years however, two wartime pilots of the RCNVR, Don Sheppard and Bill Atkinson, both aces, served with the postwar RCN Air Branch and flew from HMCS Shearwater.

Strengthening Shearwater's connection with Robert Hampton Gray, on 29 October 1952, Hampton Gray's mother, Mrs. Wilhelmina Gray, opened the Hampton Gray Memorial School named in Gray's honour. The building still stands, but no longer serves as a dependents' school. It is now known as the Hampton Gray Memorial Building and is designated as a 'Recognized Federal Heritage Building.'

An essay, entitled "Tumult in the Clouds," encapsulates my impression of Robert Hampton Gray, who was both an engaging personality as well as a determined fighter pilot.

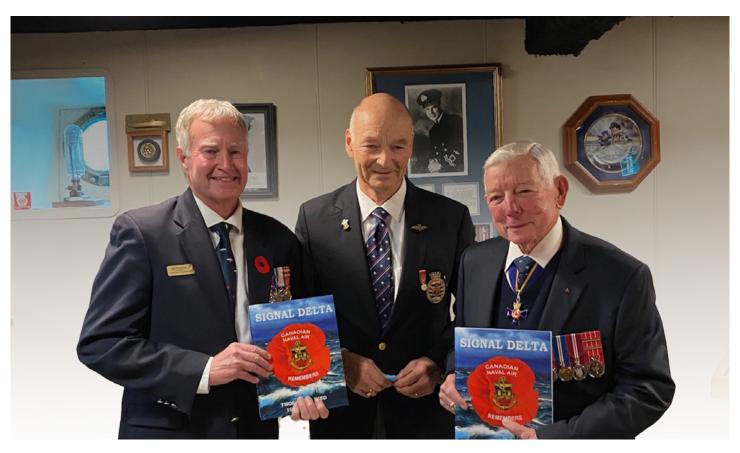
The Special Edition finishes with the transcript of a letter of condolence from the CO of 1841 Squadron, Lieutenant-Commander Bigg-Wither RN, to Hampton Gray's mother, Mrs. Wilhelmina Gray entitled "Letter of Condolence to Mrs. Wilhelmina Gray." Bigg-Wither explains the circumstances surrounding Gray's death and summarizes by saying that "The bottom fell out of life on board after it happened, and the victory when it came seemed so hollow somehow. He was so well loved by us all and simply radiated happiness wherever he went."

By J. Allan Snowie

Good afternoon everyone and 'Welcome Aboard' HMCS Sackville on this Remembrance Day 2024.

Thank you, Captain Bill Woodburn, Chair of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust, together with your crew, for graciously hosting this Naval Air book launch aboard your Ship.

A special welcome to Lieutenant-General Larry Ashley for joining us. Larry, a former Commander of Air Command, very kindly wrote the Foreword for the book *Signal Delta*.



HMCS Sackville, 11 November 2025 (Left to right, Captain (Ret'd) Bill Woodburn, J. Allan Snowie, Lieutenat-General (Ret'd) Larry Ashley)

The title Signal Delta is a significant Naval Air adoption. "Delta" is an aircraft holding pattern and "Signal" an order to proceed. We list our aviation dead as being 'In The Delta'. Our title is therefore a synonym for such loss.

The book began as a concept for a Vimy Ridge-type memorial wall to Remember and to Honour our Naval Air losses. Vimy was the hard fought, bloody battle won by the Canadian Expeditionary Force in April 1917. It was one of the first major Allied victories of that so-called 'Great War.' The entire Ridge was ceded to Canada by a grateful France following the 1918 Armistice. It is Canadian sacred ground.

Gathered here today aboard HMCS Sackville, we stand on a sacred deck. This vessel reminds us of the Royal Canadian Navy's finest years - securing the Atlantic convoy routes during the Second World War.

The first 'deck' that many of my generation stood on was at HMCS Venture. Arriving there in 1965, we were met by an

older man with three large red chevrons on his arm calling the roll. When I answered "Here Sergeant" he seemed to get most upset.

Not an auspicious start - but we new naval Cadets soon learned that these Petty Officers were not there just to bark at us but to 'mother' and develop us into the kind of leaders that they would happily follow.

It was at Venture that November Eleventh when naval history first jolted my interest. We randy young lads were looking forward to parading at the Cenotaph in downtown Victoria and then, after dismissal, seeking the company of young ladies...

It was not to be. Our Captain, Commander Bill Atkinson, had us remain on base and marched off to dockyard church services. Following that he and his wife Val joined us in the Cadet Gunroom for tea - What a comedown!

My classmates and I did not know much about medals and Atkinson certainly had a chestful, but it was the badge on his left sleeve, just above the curl of Elliot's Eye, that captured our interest. There he wore Naval Pilot Wings - and a goodly half of our Venture class lusted after achieving that brevet!

Bill and his wife strolled about the Gunroom chatting to us while we tried not to spill our cups, clatter saucers or drop tea spoons. He then gave a short and most poignant address, stating that he had gathered us together in this informal manner to enjoy our company. Why? Because our shining young faces and happy camaraderie reminded him of his own shipmates and fellow pilots from the War - and of the many who did not survive to come home to Canada.

These were startling words. Suddenly we became aware of the commitment we had made to Naval Service. We were these same sailors and airmen - just a short twenty years later.

Personally, it jogged a lifetime fascination for military history. One finds that in 1945, then Lieutenant Bill Atkinson had flown Grumman Hellcats off the Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMS Formidable during the Pacific War. He achieved the status of night fighter ace, sending down five enemy aircraft - in the dark.

From history one also learns that it was Bill that clambered up on the wing of Hampton Gray's Corsair fighter-bomber to help strap-in his friend on the 9th of August 1945. 'Hammy' Gray launched off that day and achieved immortality by earning the Victoria Cross, but he was lost in the action.

Of the seven Canadian pilots serving in Formidable, only Bill Atkinson and 'Charlie' Butterworth survived that War. Charlie's father had been a naval pilot during the First World War. He was wounded and shot down in October 1916 and spent the next couple of years as a 'Guest of the Kaiser'.

Let's go back a bit to that previous War, 1914-1918. Most of us had no idea of the extent of Canadian sacrifice in naval air with the Royal Naval Air Service and the integrated Royal Air Force of that conflict.

Here are extracts from the RNAS Pilot's log book of Flight Sub Lieutenant George Knox Williams from Toronto. He gained his Federation Aeronautique International license at the Curtiss Aviation School in Ontario on the 3rd of September 1915 - Certificate Number 1722.

In other words, George was the one thousand, seven hundred and twenty-second licensed pilot in the world. In these early War years, one had to purchase flying time and gain a license before selection into the RNAS.

On October 15th his logbook reads - First Flight in England with the comment: "Weather a bit misty. Landed OK." Many pages later: June 4th 1916 – "Flew a Sopwith Strutter from Dunkirk to Le Bourget, Paris..." Then on the 9th a flight onwards to Luxeiul-les-Bains. (Hmmm! five days in Paris...). That was his last entry. George Williams was killed in a midair crash the following day 10 June 1916.

Christine Hines, Curator of our Aviation Museum at Shearwater, joins us here today. Christine, please forgive my lack of archival white gloves but may we present you with the actual flight log book of George Williams. We're certain that you'll

provide a good home for this 109 year-old aviation artifact.

Canada's population that long ago was 7.5 million and some 625 thousand answered a call to arms in the years through to 1918. Over 67 thousand died from battle injuries, disease and accidents - a loss ratio of 10% of our troops. The returning blind, lame, and insane were sadly double that number.

George Williams was one of 943 Canadians who flew with the RNAS during the War and was one of the 204 who died. That's a loss of one in every five. An overall ratio of 20%. You were perhaps safer in the trenches than in the air.

Let's move back to our aviation contribution of the Second World War. While thousands of Canadians flew in the RCAF, two hundred and sixty chose to be Naval Aviators with the British Fleet Air Arm. Thirty-eight perished; the last being Hammy Gray from Nelson BC in the action that earned him a posthumous VC.

As the European war theatre drew to a close in early 1945, some 550 RCAF airmen requested a transfer to the Navy for operations in the Pacific. Many of them remained in service after Victory over Japan and they provided the backbone for a new peacetime Canadian Naval Air Branch.

From 1946 through to 1969 the RCN operated three aircraft carriers - one at a time. First was HMCS Warrior with Firefly and Seafire aircraft; then Maggie, HMCS Magnificent, with Avenger and Sea Fury machines as well as our first helicopters, which included the Sikorsky HO4S.

Finally, and in every sense of the word 'finally', our Bonnie, HMCS Bonaventure. She was armed with Banshee jets and CS2F Trackers as well as the venerable Sea King - which also pioneered flying from the tiny decks of our destroyer-escorts. The RCN led the world in deployment of anti-submarine helicopter operations from small ships.

We kept the Cold War cold during these years - But at a cost of one hundred and nine Naval Airmen who died. Bob Stewart, one of the Docents aboard Sackville and a Naval Aviator of my vintage, is here today - Bob, your father is named on page 99 of this book Signal Delta.

2024 is the 110th Anniversary of Canada's Naval Air. Our first 55 years from 1914 to 1969 marks losses of three hundred and fifty-eight personnel. Our second 55 years through to today shows a loss of thirty-five. A much lower figure but every death does diminish us. Albeit our RCAF Naval Air today is smaller, it is, I believe, a lot safer and certainly highly professional.

This year we are truly honoured that a new vessel in our RCN fleet will be called the HMCS Robert Hampton Gray. An east coast naming ceremony will take place here in Halifax 80 years following the date of Gray's death in combat. Then in 2026, HMCS Robert Hampton Gray will be formally Commissioned on the west coast.

As mentioned earlier, Signal Delta was begun as a Vimy Ridge-type of memorial wall concept by former Sea King pilot Grant Smith. It has been brought along, thus far, by a CANAR (Canadian Naval Air Remembers) team of Christine Hines, John Orr, Jack McGee, Dave Cramton and myself. We have more to do!

What started off to be a wall of names has grown into a full-blown work of art proposal for our Shearwater Aviation Museum. This latest initiative is not just of names but with photographs and a wee narrative on each individual artistically mounted on a huge wave backdrop. You can see the layout detail on Page 152 of Signal Delta.

You may note that the book has photographs of most of our lost aircrew and flight deck crew. In this tribute to the 393 named souls we are missing some 76 photos and a poppy is mounted in their place. This is a first edition and we hope that families and friends may find and forward other pictures and information for a second edition.

Sales of the book and any generous donations are stepping stones for the memorial artwork to be completed. From a personal perspective, working with our CANAR Team to put Signal Delta together has been a voyage of Remembrance - and a recognition of why we should acknowledge our very own naval air history.

Making Ace - Don Sheppard's Final Victory

By Michael Whitby

(This article has been excerpted from *Navy Blue Fighter Pilot*, a biography of Don Sheppard's war in a three-part series that appears in the magazine *Vintage Wings*. This is taken from episode three which can be found at https://www.vintagewings.ca/stories/donsheppardepisode3)



A Corsair Mk II of 1836 Squadron, similar to that flown by Don Sheppard. Fellow Canadian, Sub-Lieutenant Don 'Whitey' McNicol, RCNVR, who joined 1836's sister squadron in May 1945, flew JT-633 on several missions over Japan and referred to it as his private 'cab'. The lady on the cowling is unidentified. (Courtesy Randy and Jane Hillier)

As part of Operation ICEBERG, the invasion of Okinawa, the aircraft carriers of the British Pacific Fleet were assigned the task of neutralizing enemy airfields on the Sakishima Gunta island group from where Japanese aircraft could threaten American shipping off the assault area. Since the invasion in early April 1945, Fleet Air Arm aircraft, including Lieutenant Don Sheppard RCNVR and the Corsairs of HMS Victorious' 1836 Squadron,

had been engaged in a demanding flying programme that included sweeps against the airfields as well as Combat Air Patrols (CAP) to cover the fleet from Japanese kamikaze attacks.

By this point of the war Sheppard had garnered considerable experience and had already scored four victories in combat against Japanese fighters in earlier carrier raids in the Indian Ocean. On 4 May 1945 he would achieve his final victory in an interception that matched brilliant fighter direction with the skills and instincts of a seasoned fighter pilot. Early that afternoon, Sheppard, designated 'Loyal 53', was on Victorious' sweltering flight deck at the head of a readiness section of three Corsairs, waiting to scramble if kamikaze suicide aircraft approached the fleet:

Before launching, the Fighter Director called me to the Direction Room for a briefing in which he stated that they received a number of strange radar contacts which kept fading and returning. He was not sure if was atmospherics, technical problems or a very high-flying aircraft. Since my flight had not flown that day I persuaded Cdr. (Air) to launch us and let us go up and investigate this strange echo. Fortunately, the ship again picked up the target on radar immediately after our launch and held it long enough to give us a good vector and a rough height. We received about three corrections to this vector while in the climb and then the ship lost the target on radar.

Despite the poor quality of the radar return, Victorious' fighter direction team put Sheppard in the vicinity of target. Visibility was good, with about 3/10ths cloud at 20,000 feet, and as Sheppard climbed through 15,000 feet "by sheer luck I spotted a small dot about five thousand feet above us." As they continued to climb, the dot grew into an Aichi D4Y Suisei, or 'Judy', dive bomber with "greenish brown camouflage."



"By sheer luck I spotted a small dot about five thousand feet above us."

An Aichi D4Y Suisei or 'Judy', dive bomber, with "greenish brown camouflage", such as Don Sheppard shot down on 4 May 1945. Japanese kamikaze operations were closely directed affairs, and his Judy was likely a 'Gestapo' or 'snooper' aircraft co-ordinating attacks against TF-57, making it an extremely valuable victory. Photo: NavyField.com

Sheppard wasted no time in engaging the enemy:

I dropped my tank and gave full boost; climbed up and under enemy aircraft. At 300 yards aircraft started to turn to port, I fired a 1 sec. burst at about 30° and he straightened out and must have dropped his flaps and cut his throttle as I began to gain on him rapidly. I cut my throttle and fishtailed and had time to give him a 2 sec. burst from astern at about 100 yards. He blew up in a terrific flash of flame and at the same time the bombs or drop tanks dropped loose from the wings. The aircraft then descended in pieces and burned on hitting the water. A parachute made free from the aircraft while it descended and was strafed, but there was only the harness attached when I had a closer look.

Sheppard was too close to avoid the massive fireball, which he thought was sparked by the explosion of a long-range

fuel tank in the Judy's bomb bay. That "made a bit of a mess of my fabric rudder and elevators", but he was able to land safely on Victorious. Intelligence officers concluded that the Judy was a so-called 'Gestapo' aircraft that co-ordinated kamikaze attacks making it an extremely valuable kill, both in terms of the mission that may have been thwarted and the personnel that went down in it.

By the standards of the day Sheppard's fifth kill made him an 'ace', but that status has been the source of some misconception. Some credit him with more victories, others with less, while others choose to ignore his record altogether. Since Don Sheppard is a figure of some historical standing, the discrepancies need to be addressed. First, the total below seems accurate:

4 January 1945: two Nakajima Ki-43 'Oscars' 24 January 1945: one Nakajima Ki-44 'Tojo' (first claimed as Probable but later assessed as Confirmed) 29 January 1945: one shared 'Oscar'; one shared Tojo (both with Major R.C. Hay)

4 May 1945: one Aichi D4Y 'Judy'

The categories of "shared" and "probable" victories require clarification. The official regulatory 'bibles' that governed such matters in the Royal Navy were the Confidential Admiralty Fleet Orders and Admiralty Fleet Orders—CAFOs and AFOs. In the matter of air victories, they imposed rigorous standards. According to CAFO 1021 of 11 May 1944, in force at the time of Sheppard's victories, "to claim an aircraft destroyed one of the following conditions must have been fulfilled":

- (a) Aircraft seen to crash into the ground or sea.
- (b) Aircraft seen to break up in the air or descend vertically in flames.
- (c) Aircraft forced to descend and captured.
- (d) Wreckage subsequently discovered which established beyond reasonable doubt the identity of the aircraft and that it actually crashed.
- (e) In single-engine aircraft the pilot seen to bale out.

An aircraft counted as "probably destroyed...if it was seen to break off combat in circumstances which lead to the conclusion that it must, beyond reasonable doubt, have ended in categories (a) to (e) above, although not actually seen to have done so." For the category of "shared" victories, "the destruction should be awarded

as shared between two or more pilots if":

- (a) The aircraft would have been assessed as 'damaged'...before the second pilot attacked.
- (b) Two pilots were attacking at the time the aircraft was destroyed, and both can show a reasonable claim to have hit it. (Camera gun evidence is normally required to substantiate the pilots' claim.)
- (c) The destruction of the enemy was the result of teamwork by two or more aircraft and cannot be fairly attributed to one more than another.

In each ship or station, an officer detailed by the Captain adjudicated all claims to those standards; in Victorious, this was likely the Commander (Air), Commander Sam Little, or an officer on his staff. Sheppard's 'probable' from 24 January 1945 seems to have been assessed as 'confirmed' within days of the operation, likely through viewing gun camera film or from discussion with another pilot who had witnessed the combat. And, although some historians have chosen to abandon the practice of totalling shared kills due to legitimate concerns about the accuracy of RAF reporting during the chaotic early months of the war, at the time Sheppard fought, confirming kills was strictly regulated, and totalling 'halves' was accepted practice.

Therefore, his two shared victories with Hay, which would fit categories (b) and (c) above, equal one. Thus, Sheppard's total, by the standards imposed by the Royal Navy at the time, was five, making him an 'ace'. Two historians have boosted his score to six, but they mistakenly counted each shared kill as a whole rather than a half. In contrast, the author of a biography of Lieutenant Bill Atkinson, RCNVR, a Canadian naval aviator who had five kills flying Grumman Hellcats from HMS Indomitable, does not even mention Sheppard's name, let alone his record, in a detailed analysis to identify his subject as "Canada's Top Naval Pilot of WWII", if any such judgement can indeed be made.

Sheppard's record stands for itself. Importantly, the author can recall no instance where Don Sheppard referred to himself as an ace; not because he harboured doubts about his achievements, but because it was the overall outcome, not the numbers, that counted.

Sheppard continued a variety of missions throughout May. The flying programme continued to be rigorous and 1836 suffered more casualties including the CO, LCDR James Edmonson.

Victorious was also hit by two kamikazes, which caused alarm but little damage. Long after the war, Sheppard reflected upon the tension impacting personnel "in a prolonged carrier operation" vulnerable to attack. Besides the understandable anxiety caused by fears of kamikazes. Sheppard thought aircrew felt additional strain, "particularly if they don't have the satisfaction of knowing for sure that the operations they are participating in are really inflicting enough damage on the enemy to warrant the loss of a fairly large number of aircrew to A.A. fire." This questioning of purpose seems to have gathered momentum through the remaining weeks of May when Victorious' air group suffered a steady attrition. According to Sub-Lieutenant Ray Richards, a New Zealander who flew Corsairs with 1834 Squadron, Sheppard played a key role in sustaining morale among Victorious' fighter pilots during this difficult time, using his quiet sense of humour to lift spirits.

On 25 May, Don Sheppard was able express relief in his logbook: "Last Op. flight for me in this tour – (I hope)." It was. After returning to Australia in Victorious, he embarked on a marathon of flights back to Canada, and on 21 July 1945 he walked up the front steps of 35 Weybourne

Crescent in Toronto. But for the dramatic end to the war only weeks later, he would have returned to the slog that was the Pacific war.

Despite the often harsh realities of war, Don Sheppard developed an affinity for the naval aviation experience. He joined the post-war RCN, where he had a successful career culminating with command of the destroyer escort HMCS *Fraser*, second-in-command of the bustling air station HMCS *Shearwater* and several years at NATO headquarters in Brussels. When retirement beckoned, he chose a quiet life farming in the Annapolis Valley. Don Sheppard passed away in 2018 at the age of 94.



Dedication of Hampton Gray Memorial Onagawa Wan 9 August 1989 Hampton Gray's colleagues: Messrs. Butterworth, Atkinson, Sweet from Formidable and Stewart McDaniel from Nelson BC. Credit: Dr. Anne George



The Crowsnest, The Royal Canadian Navy's Magazine Vol. 5 No. 2 December, 1952

MEMORIAL TO A HERO

New School at Shearwater Commemorates Naval VC Winner

S naval aircraft roared overhead in salute, HMCS Shearwater's Hampton Gray Memorial School, named after Lieut. Robert Hampton Gray, VC, DSC, RCNVR, was officially opened October 29 by his widowed mother.

Mrs. J. B. (Wilhelmina) Gray snipped a ribbon stretched across the entrance to open the 12-room, one-storey structure. Her son was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously after sinking a Japanese destroyer August 9, 1945. He was the RCN's only VC winner during the Second World War.

Taking part in the opening ceremonies were senior officers of the armed forces, government officials and school authorities. Members of the Shearwater Home and School Association, who arranged the opening were present and their president, Mrs. Yvonne McGregor, was chairman of the ceremonies.

After an opening prayer by Chaplain (RC) J. P. Belanger, Captain Duncan L. Raymond, commanding officer of Shearwater, spoke of the naval career of Lieut. Gray.

"Hammy" Gray gave his life in an heroic and successful attack on a Japanese destroyer in Onagawa Bay. Earlier in his career he had taken part in attacks on the German battleship Tirpitz hidden in a northern Norwegian fiord, and had bombed and sunk a Japanese destroyer. He had been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and had been twice mentioned in despatches "for undaunted courage, skill and determination". He was 27 years old and the war was only six days from its close when he died.

The band of HMCS Stadacona took part in the ceremony and a massed choir of 275 pupils from grades one to nine sang the Naval Hymn, under the direction of Miss Mona Williams.

The guest speaker was Dr. L. A. De Wolfe, founder of the Nova Scotia Federation of Home and School Associations. He challenged the youth of the school to model their lives on those of heroes such as the late Lieut. Gray. The road to such heroism, he said, lay in following Christian ideals.

Mr. De Wolfe urged that the new school be used at night as well



Beneath a picture of her son, Mrs. J. B. Gray chats with Reginald L. Murphy, principal of Hampton Gray Memorial School, following the official opening of the school at HMCS Shearwater October 29. (DNS-9464).

as by day so it could become a centre for broader educational and cultural activities in the naval community.

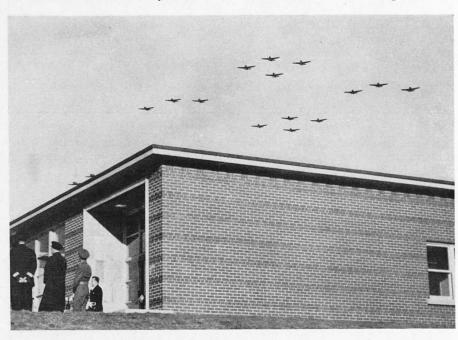
Mrs. Gray spoke of the two sons she lost in the Second World War. She lost a younger son, Jack, in 1942 when his bomber failed to return from a mission over Germany. On VJ-Day she received the news that Robert had been killed. At that time the family home was in Nelson, B.C., and Jack was the first serviceman from that town, and Robert the last, to be killed in the war.

Mrs. Gray told the school children that her sons had sacrificed their lives for their country, but the Son of God had sacrificed His for the salvation of the whole world. Faith in God had inspired her sons and the same faith should be sought by all today.

Grey-haired, 65-year-old Mrs. Gray has a daughter in Trail, B.C. Her husband died in January 1949. She lives alone in a small apartment in Vancouver. Commemorating the school for her son was a great honor, she said, and added that it meant even more to her than when she was presented to the Queen last year.

Chaplain (P) A. J. Mowatt said the closing prayer, which was followed by the National Anthem. Then the ribbon was cut. The fly-past of 29 Shearwater aircraft over the school climaxed the ceremonies.

The school has the most modern of teaching aids and is one of three constructed for naval dependents in Canada in 1951 and completed this year. Reginald L. Murphy, of Wolfville, is principal. He was principal of the old Shearwater school for three years.



Aircraft from HMCS Shearwater fly over Hampton Gray Memorial School to climax the official opening of the school commemorating Canada's only naval VC winner of the Second World War. The school, for children of service personnel stationed at Shearwater, was officially opened by Mrs. J. B. Gray, of Vancouver, mother of Lieut. Robert Hampton Gray, VC, DSC, RCNVR. (DNS-9563).

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By Colonel (Ret'd) John L. Orr

On 9 August 2025, the naming ceremony for HMCS Robert Hampton Gray will take place at the Irving Shipbuilding Inc. (ISI) shipyard in Halifax. This begs the question, "Who was Robert Hampton Gray and why has he been singled out to have a warship of the RCN named in his honour?"

In James Michener's novella about US naval aviation action over Korea, The Bridges at Toko-Ri, the fictional Carrier Task Force Commander, Rear-Admiral Tarrant, on learning of the death of one of the pilots from the USS Savo Island and the helicopter rescue crew sent to recover him from behind enemy lines, asked rhetorically, "Where do we get such men?"

An excellent question and one that leaders at all levels face when confronted by the death of an individual under their command. It is also a question that should

be asked by all those who send Canada's sons and daughters "in harm's way." What follows is a brief account of the life of one such man, Lieutenant Robert Hampton Gray VC DSC RCNVR, and his is a quintessentially Canadian story.

Hampton Gray grew up in the Kootenay region of British Columbia and after graduating from high school in Nelson, BC, he attended the University of Alberta (Edmonton) for two years and then transferred to the University of British Columbia (Vancouver) to take pre-med courses during 1939-1940.

During the summer of 1940, Gray was working at the Hudson Bay Mine near Salmo, BC along with two of his close friends, Peter Dewdney and Jack Diamond. When Germany launched its blitzkrieg through France and the Low Countries in May 1940, Gray, Diamond and Dewdney decided to join the Royal Canadian Navy.

Commandeering the Gray's family car, they drove overnight from Nelson to Calgary to enlist in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) on 18 July 1940. Gray did so not because he was obliged to serve his country but because, as he wrote in a letter to a friend in BC, he "was getting a little mad at Hitler."

While Dewdney eventually entered the RCN via the Royal Canadian Naval College HMCS Royal Roads, Gray and Diamond chose to enlist in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) and to enter a Royal Navy (RN) officer training scheme at HMS Raleigh in the UK. Upon successful completion of the course, candidates were loaned by Canada to

Bronze Bust of Lt. Robert Hampton Gray VC DSC RCNVR by Marlene Hilton Moore. Image by Marlene Hilton Moore

the RN to serve as officers in the British fleet.

As their training in the UK progressed, Gray and Diamond jumped at the opportunity to join the RN Fleet Air Arm as a way get into action sooner. Of note, Gray's younger brother, 'Jack' Gray, enlisted in the RCAF in April 1940 and served as a Flight Sergeant Wireless Operator/Air Gunner with No. 144 Squadron of the Royal Air Force (RAF). Sadly, F/Sgt 'Jack' Gray died on February 27, 1942 when his Hampden bomber aircraft crashed near Doncaster, England.

Hampton Gray underwent the usual flying training courses in the UK, and then spent several months at No. 31 Service Flying Training School RAF in Kingston, Ont., where he finally received his naval wings on 6 October 1941 and was appointed as a Sub-Lieutenant in the RCNVR.

Gray next completed operational flying training in the UK before being appointed to shore-based Fleet Air Arm squadrons in South Africa and East Africa beginning in May 1942. This began a frustrating 22 months in an operational backwater intended to guard against the possibility of the Japanese fleet threatening East Africa and the Suez Canal. However, Gray was gaining experience and after promotion to Lieutenant, assumed greater responsibility as a Senior Pilot (second-in-command).

On return to the UK in March 1944, Gray took long leave in Canada and returned to the UK in June. After refresher training and conversion to the F-4U Corsair, Gray was appointed to 1841 Squadron on 6 August 1944. The squadron was assigned to HMS Formidable and action in the Norwegian fjords against the German battleship Tirpitz soon followed. It was during one such attack in late August that Hampton Gray was awarded a 'Mention in Despatches.' The citation for his award reads "For air strikes against German Battleship "Admiral von Tirpitz" in August 1944."

In the fall of 1944, as the campaign in European waters slowly wound down, Formidable made her way to join the British Pacific Fleet as the RN and the United States Navy closed in on Japan. Formidable eventually arrived on station in April 1945 and was once again in the thick of the action, including attacks by Japanese kamikazes on 4 and 9 May 1945.

In July-August 1945, 1841 Squadron was engaged in

air strikes against the home islands of Japan. On 28 July 1945, Gray led an attack during which he engaged and sank a Japanese destroyer, an action for which he was awarded an immediate Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) although he did not learn of the award before his death. The citation read "For determination and address in air attacks on targets in Japan."

On 9 August 1945, Hampton Gray took off from Formidable leading an eight-ship strike package (RAMROD) against Matsushima Military Airfield in Northern Honshu. When he arrived over his primary target, he discovered that the airfield had already been attacked so he proceeded to Onagawa Wan where Japanese warships had been reported. As Gray led the attack, his Corsair was hit repeatedly by anti-aircraft fire and one of his two bombs was shot off. Despite this, he managed to deliver his single bomb from a very low altitude and sank the Japanese escort, Amakusa, before crashing into the sea.

Gray's Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Commander Bigg-Wither, wrote in a letter of condolence to Gray's mother that "The bottom fell out of life on board after it happened and the victory, when it came, seemed so hollow somehow. He was so well loved by us all and simply

radiated happiness wherever he went."

In his recommendation for the award of a posthumous Victoria Cross, the Captain of HMS Formidable, Captain Ruck-Keene stated:

"For great bravery in leading an attack to within fifty feet of a Japanese destroyer in the face of intense anti-aircraft fire, thereby sinking the destroyer although he was hit and his aircraft on fire, and finally himself killed."

In his endorsement of the recommendation for the award of a posthumous Victoria Cross, Vice-Admiral Sir Phillip Vian, Flag Officer Commanding, 1st Aircraft Carrier Squadron, British Pacific Fleet stated that:

"In recommending the award of the Victoria Cross Posthumous to the late Temporary Lieutenant R.H. Gray DSC RCNVR, I have in mind firstly, his brilliant fighting spirit and inspired leadership, an unforgettable example of selfless and sustained devotion to duty without regard to safety of life and limb; secondly, that

you may think as I do that a Victoria Cross is the just due of the gallant company of Naval Airmen, who from December last have fought and beat the Japanese from Palembang to Tokyo; and

thirdly, that the award of this highly prized and highly regarded recognition of valour, may fittingly be conferred on a native of Canada, which Dominion has played so great a part in the training of our Airmen."

Gray was the last Canadian to die in combat during the Second World War as well as being the last Canadian to be awarded the Vitoria Cross. Putting his loss into perspective is a challenge, but the numbers tell their own poignant story:

- On the War Memorial in Nelson, BC are inscribed the names of those who gave their lives in the First and Second World Wars and Korea. For the Second World War, these include J. B. Gray and R. H. Gray VC. 'Jack' Gray was the first serviceman from the City of Nelson to die during the Second World War and Hampton Gray was the last;
- Of the three friends who drove to Calgary in July 1940 to join the RCNVR, only Peter Dewdney survived his wartime service. 'Jack' Diamond died in a flying training accident on 10 July 1942 and of course, Hampton Gray died over Onagawa Wan on 9 August 1945;

- Of the seven RCNVR pilots appointed to squadrons onboard HMS Formidable for the Pacific campaign, five lost their lives and only Lieutenants Bill Atkinson and 'Charlie' Butterworth survived to return to Canada; and
- Of the 260 Canadians who served with the RN Fleet Air Arm during the Second Word War, 38 died. Their names are recorded in Commonwealth War Graves Cemeteries or on Memorials around the globe, including the sixteen men with no known graves whose names are inscribed on the Halifax Memorial in Point Pleasant Park, including, of course, Robert Hampton Gray.

To return to the question "Where do we get such men?" posed by the fictional Rear-Admiral Tarrant in The Bridges at Toko-Ri, the answer is that they are all around us.

It was a real US carrier Admiral, Fleet Admiral William F. 'Bull' Halsey Jr., who reportedly stated during the Second World War that: "There are no great men. There are only great challenges which ordinary men are forced by circumstances to meet."

Hampton Gray was one of those 'ordinary' men who overcame the great challenges that he faced - and we are in his debt.

"Nor law, nor duty bade me fight, Nor public men, nor cheering crowds, A lonely impulse of delight Drove to this tumult in the clouds;"

W.B. Yeats, "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" The Wild Swans at Coole. New York: 1919.

Finding Robert Hampton Gray

By Colonel (Ret'd) John L. Orr



Memorial to Lt. Robert Hampton Gray VC DSC RCNVR BC Aviation Museum, Patricia Bay, BC Credit JANDCORR

The previous article began with the question "Where do we get such men?" This article will deal with the question, "Where do we find sources for the study of Robert Hampton Gray?" While one could say, "The sources are all around us," the answer is a bit more complicated.

The best sources are official, contemporaneous, primary-source material. The best of these are usually found in Service Records and in the case of Hampton Gray, his service file from the Second World War is now available on-line through Library

and Archives Canada at https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=kia&id=43988&lang=eng&e-copy=sww-29373-gray-robert_hampton-v13438>

There are other official records such as the recommendation for the award of a posthumous Victoria Cross to Hampton Gray. This record is held in the UK National Archives behind a paywall. Reference: ADM 1/24300; Description: Ty. Lieut R.H.Gray, R.C.N.V.R: recommendation for posthumous award of Victoria Cross. Official histories are generally reliable as the historians are granted access to material previously unavailable or unpublished and have a wide perspective on the

matters being discussed. The standard official history of Canadian naval aviation is "A History of Canadian Naval Aviation 1918-1962" by J.D.F. Kealy and E. C. Russell and is available on-line at https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/themes/defence/caf/militaryhistory/dhh/official/book-1965-naval-aviation-en.pdf

Pilots Log Books, Ship's Logs and Squadron records usually round out the official documents but these are not always definitive as the information regarding a particular mission or incident may be missing important details. For example, Sub Lt Inge Storeheill of the Royal Norwegian Navy, serving in 1841 Squadron onboard Formidable, was Gray's wingman on 9 August 1945. In his Log Book, he records his flight with Hampton Gray as "RAMROD against Destroyers 1 sunk, 2 Damaged. Lt. Gray shot down in flames." Unfortunately, there are no further details which could have confirmed launch and/or recovery times. These normally appear as entries in the respective Squadron's Fair Flying Log but in the case of 1841 Squadron, this document has disappeared and has led to intense speculation about the side number of the Corsair Gray was flying and, more importantly, what time Gray launched from Formidable and when he died.

For personal insight, contemporaneous unofficial letters are hard to beat and in the case of Hampton Gray, there is a wealth of material available on-line through the generosity of the Gray family and the Canadian Letters and Images Project managed by Vancouver Island University. See https://www.canadianletters.ca/search/site/Gray%252C%2520Robert%2520Hampton

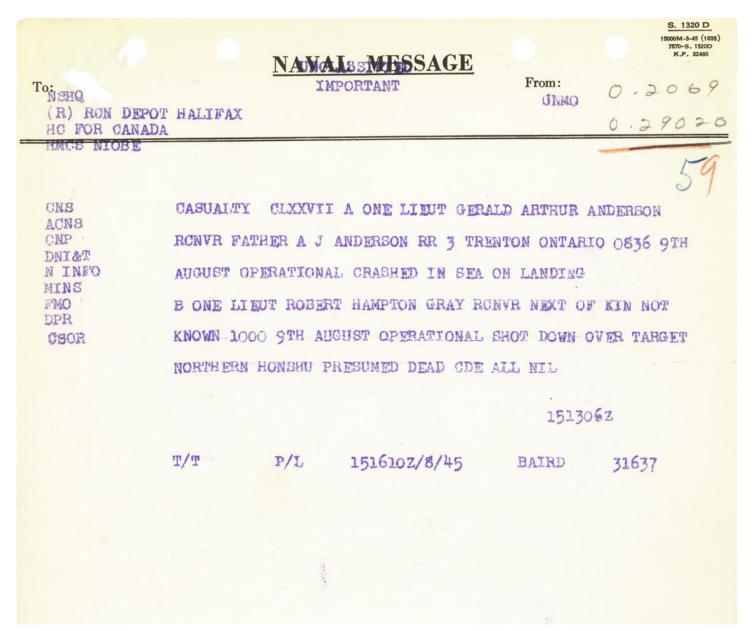
Next in priority are collections of official, and unofficial, documents copied from various sources. Mr. Chuck Rolfe, a Canadian researcher, was particularly energetic in this area and has left a collection of various official documents such as the log of HMS Formidable and the 1841 Squadron Diary as well as other unofficial material including the 1841 Squadron Line Book - a somewhat irreverent account of personalities and events in the squadron. Best line about Hampton Gray? "He favours the INDIAN LOPE as his favourite way of travelling from his seat to the bar where he is often seen exuding his philosophy - - "I WANT THIS TO BE A HAPPY SQUADRON."

Copies of Chuck Rolfe's collection of material can be found in Ottawa at the Canada Aviation and Space Museum as well as at the Shearwater Aviation Museum and the CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum. The Esquimalt Museum in particular has digitized a great deal of material concerning Hampton Gray along with other Canadian naval pilots such as Bill Atkinson, Bill Martyn, and Roy Baker-Falkner, all of whom served in the RN's Fleet Air Arm. Material relating specifically to 1841 Squadron can be found at https://navalandmilitarymuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/CFB-Esquimalt-Museum-Complete-1841-Squadron-Diary.pdf

Secondary sources or unofficial histories fall in the next category. Stu Soward, a former member of the RCN Air Branch, is probably the most well known in this category. His two-volume "Hands to Flying Stations" is a recollective history of Canadian naval aviation in the post Second World War era. Soward also wrote "A Formidable Hero: Lt. R.H. Gray, VC, DSC, RCNVR." This is well researched, not surprising since Sowards's father was the Professor of History at UBC. However, on page 140 of Formidable Hero, Stu Soward states that another Canadian pilot of 1841 Squadron, Lt. 'Andy' Anderson, "became the last Canadian to die on operations in the Second World War."

Based on recent research using the Service Files for both Anderson and Gray, material not available to Soward at the time of the writing of Formidable Hero, it is now apparent that an official Casualty Message of 15 August 1945, contained in the files for both plots, states categorically that Anderson died on 9 August at 0836 "CRASHED IN SEA ON LANDING" while the same message states that at 1000 Gray was "SHOT DOWN OVER TARGET NORTHERN HONSHU PRESUMED DEAD." The details of the Casualty Message were repeated to each set of parents in an official letter from the Secretary of the Naval Board so there can be no doubt as to the accuracy and authenticity of the Casualty Message.

Next come a variety of magazines that relate the story of Hampton Gray with varying degrees of success. The best of these are published by magazines such as "Vintage Wings" and the "Canadian Aviation Historical Society." Don MacNeil, who has a strong connection to the Shearwater Aviation Museum, has written an excellent article about Hampton Gray entitled "Robert Hampton Gray – The Last Canadian VC" https://www.vintagewings.ca/stories/the-last-vc There are



Casualty Message: Canadian Naval Musion Overseas (London) to Naval Service Headquarters (Ottawa) 15 August 1945

many other articles about naval aviation at Vintage Wings, all of a high standard

Local histories yield a wealth of information as do University and High School yearbooks. In the case of Nelson, BC, Sylvia Crooks has written an excellent account, full of detail, in "Homefront & Battlefront: Nelson, BC in World War II." Finally, I would be remiss in not mentioning "The Last Battle

of Hampton Gray' a film directed by Hampton Grays third cousin, Ian Herring, which provides a vivid account of Hampton Gray's life.

There are also other books and papers that are found in other collections. The Shearwater Aviation Museum Archives for example, holds a number of collections including the Lt. Charles E. Butterworth fonds which will be the subject of a later article by Heidi

Schiller, our contract archivist in the SAM Archives. Butterworth was a shipmate of Gray's onboard HMS Formidable (1842 Squadron) and was part of the Onagawa air raids on 9 August 1945. The collection includes Butterworth's flight logs, photographs and negatives, as well as personal papers and newspaper clippings.



The ship's company of HMCS Ottawa and local dignitaries visit the memorial to Lt. Robert Hampton Gray VC DSC RCNVR overlooking Onagawa Wan, Japan. Credit: S3 Saunders

Finally, on a personal note, nothing, absolutely nothing, compares to having direct contact with family members. I wish to record my thanks to the Gray family, and especially Dr. Anne George, Hampton Gray's niece, who has provided me with invaluable assistance in relating the story of Robert Hampton Gray. (Any errors, of course, are mine alone.)

Letter of Condolence to Mrs. Wilhelmina Gray

By Lieutenant-Commander Bigg-Wither, CO 1841 Squadron

1841 Squadron c/o British Fleet Mail Sydney N.S.W.

16th August '45

Dear Mrs Gray,

I find it terribly hard to write to you and express the feelings of all of us on the loss of 'Hammie' a few days ago. I don't think it would ever be possible to do so in words so I won't try and hope you will understand.

I am sure you would want to know something of what has happened and of the final action on August 9th which cost him his life. As you probably know he has been a very dear friend and my right-hand man ever since those days over Norway a year ago. There couldn't have been a happier squadron and he was so largely responsible for making it so and also working it up into the grand team we were able to put into the field on those operations which, though we little knew, were to be the last naval air battles of the war.

We started our strikes with the Americans on Japan on the 17th of July. The targets were airfields and aircraft on the ground in a belt across Northern Honshu on the first day and in the well defended area of Tokyo plain on the second.

From there we moved down for a series of operations in the Inland Sea area where the remainder of the enemy fleet was based. Targets were warships, merchantmen and again airfields. On the 28th Hammie led a flight of eight on an armed reconnaissance sortie and himself scored a direct hit on a destroyer which went on fire and was later reported to be sunk. This was apart from numerous aircraft destroyed on the ground and merchant shipping sunk or damaged. Admiral Vian sent us a signal, it read 'Well done Gray's strike.' It was for these actions that he was given the immediate award of the D.S.C. though he never knew of it.

During the first days of August we waited ready to strike again but the weather was against us and eventually we went back to our original area in N. Honshu on the ninth.

Our Targets were mainly airfields and it was known that the Japs were concentrating a very large force of bombers there ready for an all-out assault.

Hammie went off just after 8 oclock that morning leading seven others as before. The proposed landfall was Kinkasan point – a small island on the end of a promontory which sticks out well from the mainland and is some 30 miles N.E. of the large town of Sendai.

The weather was not too good but after a flight of some 150 miles they hit the coast some five or ten miles north flying over a craggy inlet surrounded by hills called Onagawa Wan. Here he saw two destroyers, two destroyer escorts and some other shipping. As the main target was aircraft he flew on for some miles only to find that the airfield allotted him had already been attacked and almost all planes and installations destroyed.

So he decided to go all out for the big game and returned to Onagawa. He must have known that it would be heavily defended – in actual fact they had A.A. guns all round on the hilltops apart from a very heavy concentration from the warships themselves. Nothing opened up on them until they started down in their attack and then it all came. Undaunted by this Hammie went right down and dropped his bombs at very low altitude getting a direct hit. Almost immediately afterwards he was hit in one wing which was seen to be on fire. His speed at this time was very high and this may have had the effect of turning the aircraft on its back for it was seen to hit the water upside down.

This display of cool courage and determination in the face of heavy odds and the loss of their leader inspired the others who pressed on in two further attacks putting paid to the first destroyer which rolled over and sank. The two destroyer escorts were hit and badly damaged. Later that day we sent another strike there to sink the remainder and on the 10th I flew over but could find nothing afloat.

That is the story – it hurts very much to write about. The bottom fell out of life on board after it happened and the victory when it came seemed so hollow somehow. He was so well loved by us all and simply radiated happiness wherever he went.

I hope that one day in my travels I may have the pleasure of meeting you all – I have heard so much about you. I can only send you my deepest sympathy I wish I could do more

Yours sincerely

Dick Bigg-Wither

Into the Delta

AVERLING Errol June 2025
PATTERSON William Cameron April 2025
MYERS Edgar Alexander March 2023
CHIDDENTON Joan Mary July 2025
FAIRBAIRN Evelyn July 2025

Yesterdays Dream by Bob Fralic April 1985

A model of a Barracuda dusty in the store The clerk behind the counter says three dollars and four For a cab his grandad flew many years before; Clutching the prize in his tiny hands Dreaming of adventure in foreign lands. Home in the quit of his room Dreams of days when a voice of doom Echoing on the wireless in every room; Racing down flight decks of morning dew Lifting from Puncher those gallant few. Silence broken by the pilot and tech Running for a number aft on the deck Engine smoke, heart beats, radio check Blinking light green "go ahead flight climb to the heavens, bank to the right" Days at sea always the same Scanning the skies, then erasing a name Studying the face of a new one who came; Time foe a tea, the shaking of hands For many who flew were from other lands. Wave after wave to test Hearts of Oak Filling the cockpit curling black smoke White mushroom shape, some unlucky bloke; Earthward to waters of dark channel green Praying for God his battle was seen. Aloft from his window, the little boy sighs prising the old man scanning the skies remembering the past through tired, weary eyes; His friends, England, all miles away Sun bleached crosses and peace for today.

WALL OF HONOUR

The tile used is made from high quality marble which is 12 inches square. The tile can be sand blasted in various ways to suit your wishes. All lettering will be in upper case and the tile will be mounted in the diamond orientation as opposed to a square orientation. All Text will run horizontally across the tile.

Option A - \$300 Option C - \$600

One half tile 12" X 12" x 17" and triangular in shape with up to 5 rows of 3/4" letters for a maximum of 60 letters and spaces. The longest row can accommodate up to 20 letters and spaces. The remaining 4 rows will decrease in length as the border/edge of the tile dictates. It should be noted that the upper half of the tile will start with a short row and the bottom half will start with a long row.

The full tile with up to 10 rows of 3/4" letters for a maximum of 120 letters and spaces. The two centre rows can accommodate 20 letters and spaces. The remaining rows will decrease as the edge of the tile dictates.

Option D - \$600

Option B - \$600

The full tile with up to 6 rows of 1" letters for a maximum of 55 letters and spaces. The two centre rows can accommodate up to 16 letters and spaces. The remaining rows will decrease as the edge of the tile dictates.

The "Buddy" Tile - sold only as a full tile. This tile is divided into 4 quarters - each 6" X 6". Each quarter can accommodate up to 6 rows of ½" letters for a maximum of 48 lettersand spaces. The two centre rows can accommodate up to 12 letters and spaces with the remaining rows decreasing as the tile edge dictates.

Wall Tiles may be purchased through monthly installments. Half Tiles - \$100 day of purchase - \$100 per month for the following two months. Full Tiles - \$200 day of purchase - \$ 100 per month for the following four months.

| 12 16 20 20 16 12 8 4 | Engraving request The colour of the tile will be 'Belmont Rose'. If the submission requires any alteration, the subscriber will be contacted by phone or email by the coordinator for further discussion. REMEMBER TO COUNT THE SPACES! | | | |
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| | Planned Giving ———————————————————————————————————— | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| ing a gift of money or securities a to the Foundation. Remember, a any Tax Benefits of a gift to the F | ich gifts may be made to the Shearwater Aviation Museum Foundation: by gives a Gift (Inter Vivos) or by making provision in your Will for the giving of a gift Will *speaks* for us from the date of death, since Wills are revocable and thus bundation, through a Will, cannot be realized until one dies. A gift (Inter Vivos) a reduced rate of Income Tax . So don't wait for Spring — DO IT NOW! | | |
| Requests made by Will | In your Will, you may leave a lump sum bequest or bequest of a specified percentage of the remainder of your estate, or a bequest specified as "the rest and residue of your estate" to the Foundation. You may also make a gif of property or securities (stocks, T Bills, bonds, GIC's) to the Foundation by means of a provision in your Will. | | |
| Income Tax Benefits | A bequest made by your Will confers an important advantage to your estate when the bequest is made to a Charitable organization such as the Shearwater Aviation Museum Foundation. Your lawyer or financial advisor can advise you on such advantages and the implications or limitations or such bequests. | | |
| Request of Life Insurance | The gift of a Life Insurance Policy can be an effective way of offering a benefit to the Foundation on your death. You may either give an existing policy which you may no longer need, or a new policy obtained specifically for the purpose of making a donation to the Foundation. In both cases the Income Tax benefits of such gifts can be very important to the foundation and to you. Consult with your Insurance Agent of the specifics of such benefits. | | |
| Or BY MEANS OF A SIMPLE which can be added to your prese | CODICIL TO YOUR CURRENT WILL. (The following is a simple Codicint Will.) | | |
| *Codicil to the Last Will and Testamer | at of | | |
| Which Last Will and Testament is dated | this Day of I hereby add to that said Will as follows: | | |
| I give, devise and bequeath to the Shea | water Aviation Museum Foundation the sum of \$ to be paid out of my | | |
| general estate. | | | |
| Signed and Dated this Day of | 20 | | |
| In the City of Provin | ce of Postal Code | | |
| Witness: Wi | tness: | | |
| Address:Ad | dress: | | |
| | | | |



| Name | Address | | | |
|--|--|----------------|--|--|
| City Prov | Postal Code Email | | | |
| Phone | | | | |
| Membership year is January 1st to December 31st | | | | |
| Status: Patron \$250 yr Sustaining \$100 y | yr Regular \$50 | | | |
| If "In Memory or Honour" please provide name and address of recipient for the family to receive a letter of acknowledgement from the office administrator. | Building Fund In Memory or Honour Warrior Magazine | Dinner Auction | | |
| Name | Address | ress | | |
| City Prov | Postal Co | ode | | |
| Payment Method | | | | |
| Money Order Cash Cheque E-Trai | nsfer to samf@samfounda | tion.ca | | |
| Visa/Mastercard Card # | Exp. Date/ | Exp. Date/ | | |
| 3 Number Security Code Located on Back of Card | | | | |

SS TEGEAN

By: Ron Beard

SS Tegean was originally built in May of 1943 as a US liberty ship in Galveston Texas and was christened as James W. Fannin.



She survived WW11 and in her civilian role as a bulk freighter. In 1947 she was sold and renamed St. Malo. Once again, she was sold to a Greek company in 1963 and renamed as Tegean.

On the night of the 27th of November,1966, while approaching Halifax, she mis miscalculated and ran aground on the sisters, a shoal off Sambro. On the morning of November 28th SeaKing 4017 was scrambled to the area. Because of the high sea state, the crew had no way to leave the ship. It



was decided lift them off by hoist. We went into the hover and airlifted 2 crew men into the a/c and none of the remainder would come up that way, so we returned to Shearwater.

Later that evening another A/C went out and brought the remainder of the crew off.

On the morning of December 3rd, while doing hoist training, I convinced our pilot we should recover the ships flag that was still fluttering on the stern. I lowered the second crewman to the ship and he was successful. The flag flew in the squadron canteen for some time and to this day in the crewman's rec room.

There she stayed until she broke up approximately around the 20th December 1966.

A salvage crew was taken to the ship and it was later decided to blow her remains off the rocks as it became a hazard to shipping. Over the next few days salvage crews were transferred back and forth from Shearwater. While they were aboard several cases of explosives were taken out to the ship and lowered to the salvage crew. (6trips)

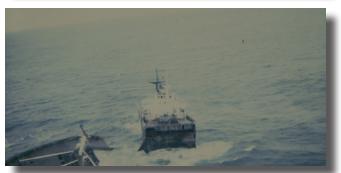
On December 23rd 1966 all was in place and we removed the salvage crew and the explosives were detonated. The stern section had already sunk and the remainder was totally gone the next morning.















- VU 32:-

The "Chorehorse" Squadron in 1956

Bowing to the inevitable, in November of 1952 all RCN air squadrons took on the cloak of uniformity with the United States Navy by adopting the American-style squadron pseudonyms. Thus, 743 Squadron – which up until that time, had been the "Fleet Requirements Unit" (743 FRU), and a part of "No. 1 Training Air Group" became "VU 32." The "V" stood for "heavier than air," while the "U" signified "utility."

As of 1956, Shearwater-based VU 32 was equipped with TBM Avenger AS 3 Mk 1s and the advanced AS 3Ms and AS 3M2s. Its primary task was air-training Observers and Observer's Mates at the Observer School. The use of the Avengers was appropriate because the type was the same one that the graduates would be flying during their operational careers before converting in short order to the DeHavilland Tracker. The training in VU 32 was dominated by some 250 pilot hours per month making radar runs on the Sambro lightship conveniently stationed in the nearby approaches of Halifax Harbour.

Further to its utility function, the squadron also served as



Adapted from "Atlantic Command: VU 32 Squadron" by J.R. de B.W., *The Crowsnest* Vol. 5, #6, 1956.

a personnel transport. The creature comforts offered by the Avenger fell somewhat short of those experienced in the tailor-made Canadair North Star airliner. The good news was that the customers in the TBMs were spared the gawd-awful earsplitting racket emitted by the North Star's choir of four Rolls-Royce engines all giving voice at the same time. Other roles included working with the

Army through No. 1 Ground Liaison Group and in providing aircraft for the Ground Observer Corps' occasional weekend spotting exercises. Finally, VU aircraft were aloft in formation fly-pasts during the annual Navy Days and civic functions.



CANADIAN NAVAL&HEROES

LIEUTENANT

ROBERT HAMPTON GRAY

1917-1945

ROBERT HAMPTON GRAY WAS BORN IN TRAIL, B.C., AND ENLISTED IN 1940. BY SEPTEMBER 1941, HE WAS A NAVAL PILOT WITH THE RANK OF SUB-LIEUTENANT. HE WAS SENT TO THE AFRICAN THEATRE OF OPERATIONS WHERE HE SPENT NEARLY TWO YEARS FLYING HURRICANES AND OTHER AIRCRAFT FOR VARIOUS ROYAL NAVY SHORE-BASED SQUADRONS.





IN 1944 HE WAS ASSIGNED TO 1841 SQUADRON ABOARD HMS FORMIDABLE AND HIS FIRST ACTION INVOLVED FOUR ATTACKS AGAINST THE GERMAN BATTLESHIP TIRPITZ WHILE IT WAS HOLED UP IN A NORWEGIAN FJORD. IN THE FOURTH ATTACK, ON AUGUST 18, GRAY LED HIS FLIGHT IN A DARING LOW-LEVEL STRIKE AGAINST SHIPS PROTECTING THE BATTLESHIP.

BY APRIL 1945, HMS FORMIDABLE AND THE COMBINED ALLIED FLEET'S FIRST MAJOR ACTION INCLUDED STRIKES AGAINST JAPANESE AIR BASES SUPPORTING JAPAN'S DEFENCE OF OKINAWA. AIRCREW LOSSES WERE HEAVY – THE BRITISH CARRIERS LOST 47 AIRCRAFT TO ENEMY FIRE AND OPERATIONAL CAUSES. GRAY'S ABILITY TO LEAD UNDER SUCH HEAVY PRESSURE WHILE REMAINING RELAXED WAS REMARKABLE.

