

“Essential Eyes and Ears”

Canada’s Aircraft Detection Corps on Canada’s East Coast during

the Second World War

by Gerry Madigan

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Oh what a year

2020 was a year many would like to forget, a year that was truly defined by COVID-19. Beyond that, the year held many ups, downs, and tragedy too for Nova Scotians. 2020 did bring to light one good thing though, the importance of an oft forgotten group, our under-rated essential workers.

In some small way 2020 allowed this chronicler of the Second World War the time to reflect on the way the war brought a community together, especially in Guysborough County. In its closest terms, the war is most often remembered for the many young Guysborough men and women who went off to serve in the armed forces and merchant marine. But there were others who did their bit at home too.

This is the story of one small but important group in their time. They were very much like our essential workers today, who did their bit with little fanfare, reward, or recognition. This is the story of the “Essential Eyes and Ears”, needed for Canada’s security, the story of the Canadian Aircraft Detection Corp (ADC). Their members did a much needed and demanding task in the important defence of Canada on the Homefront.

[An overview](#)

At the very outset of the Second World War, the Strait of Canso and environs were sensitive areas requiring immediate protection and were amongst the first areas to be protected along Canada’s vast coastline. The Pictou Highlanders were called out for that task well before the war’s declaration.

The Pictou Highlanders’ heavy and demanding task was to protect the Strait of Canso, and all the vital assets along the railway and approaches to the steel mills at Sydney, St Peter’s Canal, and many areas along the Chedabucto coast.

Special attention was paid to the telegraph lines at the Commercial Cable Building at Hazel Hill, Nova Scotia, where a Platoon of Highlanders was kept in residence.¹ It is hard to visualize why these areas were so important, given their present decline, but in their day, they were indeed vital to Canada’s economy and security.

¹ Gerry Madigan, **End of the Idyllic Summer of ’39**, 15 Jul 2017, serialized and published in Guysborough Journal, 2017

In the coming days of the Second World War, Guysborough County's importance was recognized, and its fortunes rose again. Military action would be seen often, and close at hand. It was our proximity to the approaches to Europe that truly placed Guysborough, the Bay of Fundy, and environs, in the cross-hairs of an advancing enemy.

History Highlights Guysborough County's Key Importance

Guysborough County's strategic importance was quite evident early on in the 20th century, highlighted in the incredible events of aviation's history. On 25 June 1930, Captain Charles E. Kingsford-Smith began an epic journey from Portmarnock Beach, Ireland to Roosevelt Field, Long Island.

Kingsford-Smith's progress was closely monitored by an interested public. It was an epic journey, whose brave attempt was akin to the dangers and adventure of a lunar landing, was closely followed because of his brush with death and mishaps along the way. He was grounded for a time at Cape Race Newfoundland. But once airborne again, and along his broken journey, he reported "Found clear patch and am down 1000 feet. Now passing **County** Harbor, Nova Scotia, on our left."²

The newspapers of the day recorded; "It fell to the villagers of **County** Harbor, 100 miles from Halifax, on the Nova Scotian coast, to be the first to see the plane. The Southern Cross passed County Harbor, N. S., about 109 miles east of Halifax at 10 a. m. EST, today, according to a message picked up by the coast guard radio station here."³

The skies over **County** Harbour, actually Country Harbour, were suddenly kissed by the brush of history, technology, and the coming age of air travel and air power. Guysborough's residents were amongst the first to see the stretch in aviation's reach in shrinking our world. Even today, looking up into the skies overhead, you can see the contrails of modern aviation flying over the path pioneered by Kingsford-Smith.

² Santa Ana Register, California, untitled item; Southern Cross. Dated June 26, Page 1
Source: <http://www.newspapers.com/newspage/72295999/>
Accessed: 5 June 2015

³ Ibid Santa Ana Register, Dated June 26, Page 1

Advancing aviation technology and Kingsford-Smith's travels also foretold another story, that of an emerging threat to North American security. It wasn't easy to envisage by Kingsford-Smith's travels alone. However it was made clearer as our nation's attention was drawn to a new reality in 1934.

Major developments were contemplated by many great nation states, portended by the visitation of the German airship, Hindenburg.⁴ Now geographical features and protections of time and space were being surmounted by a new technology, airpower.



Nova Scotia Archives Photo Collection Transportation and Communication - 04 July 1936
(with permission NS ARCHIVES)

Technology brought with it our nation's attention to its alternate, potential uses, and applications in future wars. This altered perception was heightened by the ever-increasing bellicosity and sabre rattling of some nations. It was made even clearer by developments, especially in the rise of air travel, that gave evident warnings throughout the 1930s.

Engines and aircraft engineering greatly improved, which meant, range and flexibility, could be employed for other purposes. New technologies were installed in dirigibles and planes. Subliminally, there was a hype around aviation "firsts". These "firsts" were not solely about national prestige but perhaps, they were also the harbingers of a new technological arms race.

For example, when England flew their advanced R-dirigibles non-stop across the Atlantic in 1930, it was recognized as a technological achievement of great importance.⁵ It was a first step to opening routes across the globe and empire, much like modern airlines today. That event was witnessed by my paternal grandfather, William. He was amongst the throng of thousands that saw the R-100

⁴ Felicity Hanington and Captain Percy A. Kelly, M.B.E., *The Lady Boats – The Life and times of Canada's West Indies Merchant Fleet*, Canadian Marine Transportation Centre, Dalhousie University, 1980, pg. 39

⁵ Allan Coggon, *Watch and Warn*, Trafford Publishing Victoria, BC, Canada, 2004 2nd ed., pg. v.

dirigible land at St Hubert near Montreal. England was not alone in that quest to conquer the oceans by air. Nor was it alone in the desire to expand or link empire by spanning the globe.⁶



Figure 1Photo Getty Images (public domain)

Italian General Balbo ventured from Italy to Shediac, New Brunswick in 1933. He led twenty-four twin-engine flying boats enroute to the Worlds Fair at Chicago.⁷ If anything, Balbo's venture proved to be quite an impressive aerial armada!

Not to be undone, Germany also advanced air travel in their zeppelin fleet. Germany popularized passenger air travel through the voyages of Graf Zeppelin as well as the giant 800-foot Hindenburg airships. Germany scheduled flights to South America and to New York respectively, demonstrated its power, prestige, and reach.⁸

In fact, it was Hindenburg's journey to New York, that truly brought the attention and concern of Canadian authorities to a head. There was no planned stop over in Halifax, but the airship cruised over the harbour and city, and leisurely photographed the dockyard and all the city's fortifications.

It also continued with many other flyovers, notably St John, NB and St John's, Nfld. A simple fly-over by inquiring eyes demonstrated that Canada had to address

⁶ Leslie Roberts, **Mooring For The R100**, Maclean's, 15 May 1930

Source: [Mooring For the R100 | Maclean's | May 15, 1930](#) (archives)

Accessed: 27 Nov 2020

⁷ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, pg. x.

⁸ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn. pg. x

a prevailing security threat and that a better means of defence, transportation, and communication were required.⁹

The world also perceived the ever-increasing bellicosity prevalent behind all these advances. It was as if the world was moving prodigiously towards an anticipated war, with air power at its core, in airpower's ever-growing reach, means, potential use and danger.

Threats and concerns

STRANGE SHIP RAISES FEARS OF FISHERMEN

Two-Masted Craft, Low in the Water, Reported by Voluntary Police

Saint John, N.B., Sept. 14.—A radio warning was sent out yesterday by the Red Head wireless station to-day, after fishermen reported to Marine Agent H. F. Morrissey last night that they had sighted a craft which might have been a submarine.

Fishermen told Morrissey they had sighted the vessel—which they said was low in the water and appeared to have two masts—two miles south east of Grand Manan.

The place where it was reported seen is about 50 miles southwest of Saint John harbor.

Fishermen along the New Brunswick coast have been organized into a voluntary police group, with one of their duties to prevent any vessel.

Toronto Telegram, 14
September 1939

Aviation technology presented Canada with a tremendous strategic problem to consider. Canada has 3.9 million square miles of territory, but in the day, some 528,000 square miles were considered critical approaches that required surveillance.¹⁰ It was a massive area to defend. Looking at it from another perspective, the east coast, west coast, and artic approaches totalled some 151,019 linear miles alone at the shore. Hidden in this seemingly boundless area was a myriad of routes, with many sheltered spots, inlets, and so on.¹¹

⁹ a. Ibid Felicity Hanington and Captain Percy A. Kelly, 1980, pg. 39

b. Ronald J. Jack, Public Historian and Web-Publisher, Article No. 202, [ZEPPELIN SHADOW IN SAINT JOHN - The Hindenburg Overflight of June 1936](#), [The Lost Valley - An Internet History of Saint John, N.B., Canadian History Blog Registered with the Canadian ISSN Agency ISSN 2292 - 2601 History of Saint John \(St. John\), New Brunswick, 28th May 2014](#)

Source: [ZEPPELIN SHADOW IN SAINT JOHN - The Hindenburg Overflight of June 1936 | The Lost Valley - An Internet History of Saint John, N.B.](#)

Accessed: 7 March 2021

c. Geoff Bartlett, **The Hindenburg's final flight took it right over Newfoundland**, CBC News, Nfld. & Labrador, Feb 08, 2015

Source: [The Hindenburg's final flight took it right over Newfoundland | CBC News](#)

Accessed: 9 March 2021

¹⁰ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, pg.12.

¹¹ Wikipedia, Geography of Canada

Source: [Geography of Canada - Wikipedia](#)

Accessed: 30 Nov 2020

The problem of the day centred on a consideration of air-borne attack. These approaches could be used by a well-placed enemy with a view to strike vital points. It was a complex problem that posed threats to Canada's seaborne trade, ports, industries, and cities. This is what the advent and rapid technological advancement, in which the evolution and development of aircraft, truly portended.

Aircraft could now easily surmount geography, distance, time, and space. Aircraft could also carry tremendous loads over great distances, that was constantly evolving. The advancements in what became a large variety of air borne threats, clearly demonstrated the ever-changing number of sources or opportunities available to an enemy.

Despite the limitations of existing technologies, limitations could be easily overcome. Other means were available to a potential enemy such as overseas bases, or even aircraft launched from ships.¹² Thus, threats greatly concerned defence planners, particularly in the Strait of Canso Defence Area. There were far too many threats with far too few resources to deal with them all.

One threat of great concern was “long range aircraft”. This threat lent the possibility of engagement of targets of strategic opportunity throughout Atlantic Canada. That threat was seen as emanating either out of Norway or France, especially in 1944. A warning was given as a heads up to various commanders to plan accordingly, even though the tide of war had turned in our favour by that time.¹³

The enemy had long range aircraft at its disposal quite capable of one-way missions. But the potential threat was considered low during the war. Post-war analysis though concluded otherwise:

“The development of long-range bombers, ... produced in the Second World War very realistic fears of a sudden air raid, particularly from the North...A study of a globe or a polar projection map indicates that the air distance from Norway to the Soo is practically the same as to New York, and Norway....

¹² ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, p2

¹³ Canada, National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage, Dead files 142.61B86009(D2) (B.B.S. 1-2), OP Orders, instr. for 86 Coast Bty at Forts Beacon and Melford Jan 42/Feb 45, Pg. 40 of 75

that the direct route of approximately 3000 miles passes over terrain where observers would be few and far between and winter nights long".¹⁴

Fortunately for the Allies, a strategic long-range aircraft with roundtrip capability was never available to Germany. That development was greatly hindered by their lack of strategic materials and inter-service demands on them.¹⁵

A long-range strategic capability remained on the German drawing boards until the end of the war. So there always remained a possibility that such a strike, launched from and returning to German bases, existed, right to the bitter end. It was a most dangerous consideration that in the desperation of the turning tides of war, the enemy could launch a one-way, suicide mission.¹⁶ Consequently, large military commitments were required in Canada.

[Military Commitments](#)

Canada's defence, recruitment, internal security, and organization were based around military districts. Those military districts also held key responsibilities for the defence of strategic vital points, of strategic economic interest, that were often uniquely protected.

Military District No. 2 (Toronto), for example, employed two battalions of the 13th Infantry Brigade to protect hydroelectric installations in the Niagara Peninsula. This unit was also responsible for the protection of the Welland Canal locks from aerial attack. These installations were key vital points for energy, internal communications, as well as transport.

Military District No. 5 (Quebec, P.Q.), employed 307 all ranks, divided amongst eight different points. They safeguarded the Dominion Arsenal establishments at

¹⁴ Canada, National Defence Headquarters Ottawa, Directorate of History, **REPORT NO. 34, ARMY HEADQUARTERS 24 Jan 50 Canadian-American Co-operation in the Defence of Sault Ste. Marie, ~1941-1944** (released and declassified July 1986) , pg.4/40

¹⁵ Manfred Griehl, **Luftwaffe over America – The Secret Plans to Bomb the United States in World War II**, Greenhill Books, 2004, pg. 170-175

¹⁶ ibid Manfred Griehl, 2004, pg.174, 193-194.

Quebec and Valcartier, the Aluminum Company of Canada plants and power units at Arvida, and facilities on Isle Maligne on the Upper Saguenay.

These in-land districts could all be easily viewed as safe havens, as they were well protected within the heartland of Canada in our seemingly boundless geography. But Canadian authorities simply had to expect the unexpected, and plan accordingly.

Military District 11 (Bc and Yukon) guarded the west coast from the threat emanating from Japan. Significantly, once hostilities were declared with Japan, Canada faced a two front war that further challenged the allocation and disposition of its military resources at the time.¹⁷

The prime concern at the outset of the war was a focus on Canada's east coast. An immediate threat emanated from Europe between 1939-1941. Military District No. 6 (Halifax, N.S.) had 234 all ranks to defend Halifax, including 100 who guarded the Joint Services Magazine at Bedford Basin and 70 at the oil depot at Imperoyal. That is what was disposed in the Halifax harbour area alone.¹⁸

This quick account does not include the tremendous resources required in the Strait of Canso Area, Sydney, the eastern shore, nor all of Cape Breton and the Bay of Fundy. Nor does it include New Brunswick, where Military District 7 was responsible for local defence. Military Districts 6 and 7 shared responsibility for protecting the heart of the Bay of Fundy.¹⁹ All to say, the many demands greatly stretched Canada's resources very thinly with so much area to protect.

¹⁷ Anon. **Domestic Military Organization 1900-1999**

Source: www.canadiansoldiers.com

Accessed: 15 Jan 2021

¹⁸ **Colonel C.P. Stacey**, Official History of the Canadian Army In the Second World War, *Volume I*

SIX YEARS OF WAR ,The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific, **1948**

Source <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/UN/Canada/CA/SixYears/SixYears-5.html>

Accessed: 13 August 2010

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For access to full publication see:

<http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/UN/Canada/CA/SixYears/index.html>

¹⁹ Gerry Madigan, The Canso Defence Area- The Second World War on the Home Front , 23 August 2019, pg.19-22

The Establishment of the Aircraft Detection Corps

As Canadian resources were finite and fragile during the Second World War, they had to be measured carefully and used wisely. It became clear early on that the military would require help to safeguard Canada.

Canada was truly fortunate. There was an upwelling of public feelings in which, duty and national desire existed to assist in anyway possible. Many Canadians simply wished to do their part. Regrettably, not all were able to join the armed forces for various reasons. Some would have to serve in the vast arrays of needs in reserved occupations, manufacturing, agriculture, mining, and specialized trades.

These were required in a war economy, so were protected in part, to sustain our chances of winning the war! Then again, others were either too young or too old to serve.

Service to Canada was addressed in so many other ways. What stood apart in our protected areas, was the vast array of chores that had to be done, that were equally important in addition to war production. These too were essential to paving the way to victory. In fact many Canadians did both, through volunteerism and war work. Ironically, the war brought full employment to Canada. Anyone who wanted a job, got a job.²⁰

And yet, Canada simply did not have the luxury of establishing military facilities on every bit of shore, high ground, or vital point. The problem of surveilling a large expanse of land and sea though, was resolved in part by the establishment of an Aircraft Detection Corps (ADC).

A letter issued 26 March 1940 by Air Vice-Marshal (AVM) George M. Croil, (RCAF), provided some preliminary guidance to the establishment of the ADC. AVM Croil was a visionary. He had foreseen the need for the ADC and its civil volunteers.²¹

The Aircraft Detection Corps was vital war work, guarding our coasts from Newfoundland's Cape Race to Baffin Island. Not only was the east Coast protected, but also northward and westward in land as far as British Columbia's Queen Charlotte Islands. The ADC became the essential eyes and ears of our

²⁰ Pierre Berton, *The Great Depression: 1929–1939* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2001), 503–4.

²¹ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, pg. 2-3 & 10

home-front defence forces. Moreover the Corps was chiefly made up of unpaid civilian volunteers.²²

The Aircraft Detection Corps was a very rudimentary organization in the beginning. Air Vice-Marshal Croil was troubled with the pace and progress of it getting off the ground.

Croil required help to establish the Corps. Mr. E. B. Goodspeed, was recalled to the Royal Canadian Air Force in January 1940, to help in this task. Goodspeed was soon posted to Halifax as a Flying Officer (FO).

There Goodspeed assumed the duties and responsibilities from Squadron Leader Rogers, then leader of the start up team. FO Goodspeed eventually became the driving force and its acknowledged leader, responsible for 25,000 people, who scanned a 528,000 square mile area. That became the core task of Canada's Aircraft Detection Corps (ADC).

FO Goodspeed was also charged with developing and securing both the communication facilities and methods to make it work and be efficient. He was instrumental in coordinating the Corps to operating with the various telephone, wireless, radio, and railroad companies.²³

It was surprising that such a vital task was left to a member holding a very junior rank in the RCAF. FO Goodspeed must have been a driving force to be reckoned with. That was proven by the eventual success of the program, based on the dedication and hard work of those he enlisted, especially in Guysborough County.

But facing Goodspeed at the outset was how to capture and utilize all that pent-up energy and potential. Sometimes it was as simple as advertising in the local papers, other times it was by approaching civic leaders to encourage people to volunteer.

Then again, it was often about getting down into the grassroots of a community and then appealing directly to those who knew their communities best. These were the postmasters, clergy, school principals, ex-military officers, or political party chiefs. Such people were widely known and well respected. And then given the circumstances of the day, some volunteers simply came forward on their own volition.²⁴

²² ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn,2004, pg. x

²³ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn,2004, pg. 9

²⁴ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn,2004, pg. 13

A Pattern for Volunteerism

The Aircraft Detection Corps (ADC) relied heavily on the participation of willing volunteers. One such group for example, was led by Robert Hennigar who eventually became the Chief Observer in Upper Stewiacke, Nova Scotia. Hennigar recruited all his observers from members on the local party telephone line. Each member covered off one day of the week.²⁵

Hennigar's group was also located on what was a busy flight path, monitoring the comings and goings of aircraft from Operational Training Unit 31, just down the road at Debert. But there were other aircraft that traversed his area both on operations and training.

Nova Scotia's airspace was a remarkably busy place during the war. The ADC's work was vital to monitoring the airspaces. And there were indeed many incidents of crashes and lost aircraft.

The ADC was important to locating and monitoring, not only airplanes, but also marine craft in distress and enemy naval activity. The reporting of such incidents was conducted as quickly as possible, forwarding information to relevant authorities by telephone, telegraph, or wireless.

Their reports included information on location, time and description or identifying markings of the aeroplane or marine craft involved. There was little delay to any reporting, as all reports were expeditiously sent, toll free, and at no charge to the volunteer.

Observers for this important work came from every walk of life, housewives, doctors, schoolboys, trappers, woodsmen to name a few. High schoolers were the most successful volunteers amongst this dedicated group though. They were keen to learn, interested in, and recognized the aircraft types then employed.²⁶

But the reality was, as the nation emerged from the depths of the Great Depression, a telephone was a luxury. Few rural people had a phone, especially in Nova Scotia. This meant that the observer corps in rural areas had to be coordinated around its availability.

²⁵ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn,2004, pg. 13

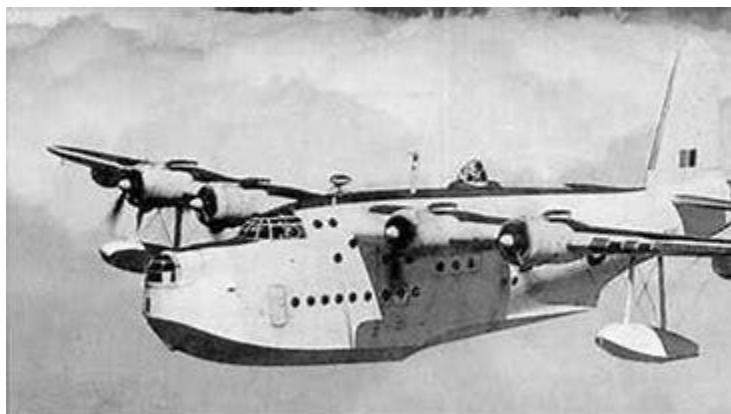
²⁶ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn,2004, pg. 25

All satellite posts had to be located near one and this is where the high schoolers came into their own. They were young, fit, and enthusiastic. They would rush written reports to the filter centre on foot or by bicycle to the nearest phone. It was a primitive set up and yet, it was a surprisingly effective system!

Observers reported as much as and as often as was required keeping the ADC updated. And more importantly in either case of a marine or air incident they were there, on the spot, to lend immediate assistance if a vessel or aircraft landed in their vicinity.²⁷

Amongst the earliest reports reaching the filter centers from Guysborough County though, was one of a seaplane in distress that had landed at Liscomb 2 January 1942. Henry B Hemlow reported a seaplane circled and landed in his vicinity. He went on to render assistance to the pilot who was lost.²⁸

Gertrude Pitcher, the young daughter of a local Anglican clergyman at Liscomb, also recalled this occasion. She often filled in as an Observer in her father's absence. What Gertrude observed laying in the water was a huge multi-engine flying boat, which landed some distance out from Liscomb. It then taxied into their tiny harbour.



Source: UBoat.net

It was likely a Sunderland flying boat, given that the witnesses stated it was probably from Britain because of the English speakers aboard. They were merely lost and wanted to know their location to get on with their mission. They picked up some water and a few things and were soon on their way.²⁹

²⁷ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, pg. 15

²⁸ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, pg. 26-27

²⁹ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, pg. 26-27

Dangers closer to home

The Aircraft Detection Corps (ADC) was useful in other ways too. Threats were many and not solely airborne. Danger approached Canadian shores in other ways, especially from the sea from 1940 onward. The German naval threat was very real. Formidable German naval units, particularly the pocket battleship, Admiral Scheer, began to roam freely in the North Atlantic.

The battle cruisers Scharnhorst and Gneisenau lay only 350 miles southeast off St. Johns in March 1940. These tremendous German naval forces made it incumbent upon the government and military to get its security measures up and running as quickly as possible.

German capital ships could have easily popped up off our shores at any time to bombard vital points if so desired. But it was the ubiquitous U-boat that was most bothersome and of concern to Eastern Air Command and Nova Scotians. A solution to keeping German naval threats in check, was our use of airpower.

Air bases were rapidly built all around the Maritimes; particularly at Sydney, Debert, Greenwood, in Nova Scotia, Summerside and Charlottetown, in Prince Edward Island and Pennfield in New Brunswick to name a few. These bases were developed for both operations and training, where even the training bases were used in a pinch.

This generated a lot of activity. There were some 300 aircraft crashes in Nova Scotia alone over the course of the war. That alone plus the regular monitoring of airspace kept the members of the ADC busy enough tracking throughout the war.³⁰ The ADC was a key component to assisting, rescuing, or locating many a lost crew. But it was also vital in monitoring German naval activity too!

The Observers were the eyes and ears on our coasts monitoring not only the air, but also enemy naval incursions and potential threats. The approaches off the Atlantic eastern and southern shores, thence on toward, the Gulf of Maine, and into the Bay of Fundy were surprisingly active.

There were plenty of targets of opportunity ranging from merchant ships transiting through the Strait of Canso, to the land targets at the telegraph station in Hazel Hill, No 5 Radar Unit at Coles Harbour, to the Navy's Loran Station at Queensport

³⁰ Nancy Kelly, **Military looking for memories of Valley aircrews, crashes from the past**, Kings County Register, 8 September 2008

all in Guysborough County. All held potential interest to the enemy either for destruction, immobilization, or acquisition of technology or facilities. The facilities at Hazel Hill held special interest to the Germans, as the Hindenburg overflowed and photographed the site in July 1936.³¹

In fact it was the specific threat of sabotage that was of prime concern to the military. There were plenty of inlets and coves to hide in and discharge enemy saboteurs and spies. The most prominent case was the landing of a spy at St Martins NB. And the only way there was via U-Boat.

On May 14, 1942 U-213 surfaced in the near shores of the Bay of Fundy. It approached to within 1,200 yards of the small coastal lumber village of Salmon River near St Martins to do exactly that!³² U-213 had to track in and out of the Bay, passing many local points along the way. There was always the possibility that a U-boat would be observed, and some were observed indeed.

Gertrude Pitcher recalled such an incident several miles off shore near the Liscomb Ridge. This geographic feature provided reliable catches for many a local fisherman.

Gertrude recalled from memory, one morning in April 1942, at daybreak, the Liscomb Ridge fishing boats were out on the water. The fishermen enjoyed camaraderie and group chatter. They hauled in the occasional haddock and cod. Suddenly, all were dumbfounded and became silent as a low grey conning tower of a submarine passed along through their midst. ³³

Gertrude's recollection may have been wrong in the timing. There were no known German U-boats in the vicinity in April 1942. But they certainly were there in May, with three U-boats on patrol off Nova Scotia 15 May 1942.

One U-boat's track was well near Liscomb as it was heading in towards or out from the Bay of Fundy. The others were extremely close as well. The U-boat that

³¹ Nova Scotia Archives , **An East Coast Port': Halifax in Wartime, 1939 – 1945 - German Airship Hindenburg flying over Halifax, March 2021**

Source: [Nova Scotia Archives - 'An East Coast Port': Halifax in Wartime, 1939 - 1945](https://nscollections.nsarchives.ca/cdm/ref/collection/nscollection/id/11100)
Accessed: 7 March 2021

³² Marc Milner, **U-boats And The Spy Who Came Ashore: Navy, Part 48**, Legion Magazine, 12 Dec 2011
Source: read:<https://legionmagazine.com/en/2011/12/u-boats-and-the-spy-who-came-ashore/>
Accessed: 27 Jul 2019

³³ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, pg. 27

was coincidentally near Liscomb was U-213 that had one day earlier, dislodged their “spy” near St Martin’s NB.

U-213’s patrol track was investigated to confirm her presence for its approaches, both in and out of the Bay of Fundy. The boat first approached Canadian shores 11 May 1942. It lay off the Atlantic facing Nova Scotia’s eastern shore. By 12 May, she was at the southern tip and eastern shores off Yarmouth, in the Atlantic, before heading in toward the Bay of Fundy. By 13 May the boat was deep inside the Bay of Fundy itself.

She pressed on with her mission towards New Brunswick, and on 14 May 1942, U-213 lay opposite New Brunswick’s coast near Saint John. Once U-213’s mission was completed 15 May 1942, she made her way out of the Bay of Fundy.

U-213 commanded by Oblt. Amelung von Varendorff, arrived at Position 44° 15'N, 66° 15'W, off Nova Scotia’s South Shore after exiting the Bay on 15 May 1942. By this time, as her mission had been completed, U-213 proceeded further off into the Atlantic. The next several daily position reports on 16 and 17 May confirmed U-213 was on her homeward bound journey, and after 57 days on patrol, arrived at her homeport in Lorient, France on 20 June 1942.



Departed Lorient on 25 Apr 1942. Returned to Lorient on 20 Jun 1942 (57 days on patrol)

of Fundy after it passed through earlier that was observed by Gertrude Pitcher and the fisherman from Liscomb.

The other two known U-boats off Nova Scotia’s shores were in positions north to south:

- U-588 commanded by Kptlt. Victor Vogel at Position 42° 27'N, 67° 18'W.; and
- U-566 commanded by Kptlt. Dietrich Borchert at Position 40° 39'N, 68° 30'W.

These two boats were close enough to sally into Chedabucto Bay or the Bay of Fundy. However, it was likely that it was U-213 transiting out of the Bay

U-213 made its final daily position report after its deep incursions upon exiting the Bay of Fundy 15 May 1942, off the tip of the south shore of Nova Scotia. Thus U-213's in and out routes and timings were confirmed. It came close in indeed!

Rumours, Myths, and Legends

U-boats were rumoured to be in plain sight not only all along Canada's east coast, but also in the Gulf of St Lawrence. They were observed in actual military operations, as well as through the public's own eyes and observations.

Facts were often hidden from Canadians as an expedient under the guise of war time censorship. But the presence of the ubiquitous U-boat and its operations, was an extremely hard story to suppress. For example, the Hamilton Spectator reported an incident in April 1942 concerning a Lunenburg schooner, one that was also recalled by resident, Marilyn Clair.³⁴ The Hamilton Spectator went on to record several sightings of interest.

But the piece de resistance was the case of yet another unidentified schooner, that was passed closely by a submarine. In this case the schooner's crew were met by the sight of German sailors grouped around the conning tower. These sailors allegedly waved as they sailed by.³⁵ There had to be something more to these incidents than mere rumour. U-boat activity was very real, and they were unable to remain submerged indefinitely.

The Home War Establishment (HWE) and Air Force received reports that German U-boats were entering the Bay of Fundy and Chedabucto Bay. Points of concern were at Country Harbour and in the lower shore areas. Thus there was a very real possibility that U-boats were present in these unguarded waters.³⁶

The fact is that there were U-boat actions in the deeper and wider approaches in the Gulf of St. Lawrence especially during 1942. And the German Navy did have a limited capability with a few U-boats specifically designed to enter enemy

³⁴ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, pg. 35

³⁵ Hamilton Spectator, **FISHERMEN ASSERT U-BOATS NOW BECOMING COMMON SIGHT**, 1 Apr 1942
<https://collections.museeeldhistoire.ca/warclip/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=5120149>
Accessed: 24 Nov 2021

³⁶ Files Gina Walsh, Sarah Mason Wilson, 11 October 1990

harbours and approaches, to stealthily lay mines or to lay in attack with torpedoes on enemy shipping.³⁷ So the threat was very real indeed!

How close indeed!

Canada experienced the sting of war inside its in-land waters during the spring of 1942, the first such case since the War of 1812.³⁸ U-boats approached the Gulf of St Lawrence, patrolled the estuary, and came within 600 km of Quebec City. U-boat activity in the Gulf became a cause for concern amongst many Canadians. It was an event for which we seemed to be grossly unprepared.

The German Navy had no real plans for incursions into the St Lawrence. Those first incursions were merely accidental. The first boat, U-553 came to the Gulf only to make repairs so it could return to its patrol line in the Atlantic in May 1942. But that incursion likely encouraged broader action and operations by the enemy. The Gulf of St Lawrence suddenly became a true theatre of war!³⁹

These first accidental actions and successes likely emboldened the enemy to broaden its scope while testing our overall defensive posture. This led them not only to the Gulf of St Lawrence but also in towards the Bay of Fundy as well in 1942.

A U-boat presence was widely evident and known off Halifax, and from there, parts north and south in the Atlantic. But just how close inshore did they approach, especially to Guysborough County or environs?⁴⁰

³⁷ CBC News, **German U-boat found off Nova Scotia**, 14 July 2004

Source: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/german-u-boat-found-off-nova-scotia-1.471422>

Accessed: 9 Jun 2015

³⁸ Fabrice Mosseray, **The Battle of the St. Lawrence -A Little-Known Episode in the Battle of the Atlantic**, UBoat.Net 1995-2010, 29 Mar 2002.

Source: <http://uboot.net/articles/?article=29>

Accessed: 30 November 2010

³⁹ Ibid, Mosseray, 29 Mar 2002

⁴⁰ **Tristin Hopper**, **Group on mission to prove there is truth in legends that Nazi submarines went far inland from Canadian coast**, National Post, 19 April 2013

Source: <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/group-on-mission-to-prove-there-is-truth-in-legends-that-nazi-submarines-went-far-inland-from-canadian-coast>

FISHERMEN ASSERT U-BOATS NOW BECOMING COMMON SIGHT

Reports of Six Separate
Meetings in Atlantic
Are Reported

NO ATTACKS MADE

Halifax, April 1.—(CP)—Fishermen sailing out of some Nova Scotia ports are getting to look on meetings with submarines as just part of the day's work, judging from stories reaching here from the south shore harbours in the last couple of weeks.

According to the accounts, some of which arrive here second or third hand and are difficult to verify, subs have been sighted off the coast by fishing vessels at least six times recently. The stories all agree that the underwater vessels made no attempt to attack the fishermen.

The schooner men generally agree that the subs they saw were enemy craft. Two of them are claimed to have actually hailed schooners, one of them asking for food and having its request turned down.

Here are some of the stories:

1. The crew of the Lunenburg schooner Marilyn Clair were dressing fish one night by the light of a brilliant cluster of electric bulbs on deck when a sub came to the surface nearby and an officer stepped out. He asked in good English the reason for the lights and, when he was told, the submarine dived back under.

2. A German sub surfaced beside another schooner—unidentified—and asked in fairly good English for food. After a week on the banks, the ship had only enough for a quick trip back to port, and its crew said there was none to spare. The submarine left without taking further action.

3. The schooner Robertson II, out of Shelburne, reported being trailed for some distance by a submarine, which made no attempt to molest it.

4. The Robertson I, also from Shelburne, sighted one at dusk, but it quickly vanished in the darkness. This schooner's crew also reported seeing last week two flashes of light that they took for a ship torpedoing.

5. A big submarine passed close to another schooner—this one unidentified—and then dived beneath the surface.

6. Another schooner, again unidentified, brushed so closely past a sub that sailors grouped around the conning tower waved to them as it went by.

Hamilton Spectator, FISHERMEN ASSERT U-BOATS NOW BECOMING COMMON SIGHT, 1 Apr 1942⁴¹

having good cause to do so. But never say never. There was always, a possibility, especially that of one boat, U-751 in January 1942.

Kptlt. Gerhard Bigalk (Knights Cross) in command of U-751, a Type VIIC U-boat, surfaced on 31 January, 1942, several miles east off Green Island, Chedabucto Bay. Departing Chedabucto Bay, U-751 attacked the 8096-ton tanker Corilla whose crew spotted the U-boat.

Corilla turned sharply away just as Bigalk fired. Corilla immediately sounded an alarm broadcasting her position on her radio. She also engaged U-751 with her stern mounted gun. Bigalk was greatly impressed with Corilla's accuracy.⁴¹

There is one unverified claim from Evert Hudson of a U-boat observed in the Country Harbour River and Estuary at some time during the war. That may give some insight on possibly how close their approach was. If not in the river itself, they were certainly awfully close at hand, especially in 1942, proven by enemy action in the immediate vicinity and that supports Evert's claim!

Quite possibly an undocumented U-boat had indeed entered the Country Harbour estuary. Evert described a surfaced U-boat coming up the Harbour, backing around, and then turning out to sea again. Such a drill would have been an extremely dangerous undertaking by any U-boat Commander.

The vessel and crew would have been placed at extreme risk and thus, placed very much in harm's way without

Accessed: 14 June 2015

⁴¹ Michael L. Hadley, **U-Boats Against Canada – German Submarines in Canadian Waters**, McGill-Queen's University Press, Kinston Montreal, 1985, pg. 73-75

Corilla escaped U-751's clutches for a short while. At times, Corilla disappeared completely from U-751's view. But later she was re-acquired, and U-751 trailed her unobtrusively for an hour and a half until Corilla finally reached the vicinity of the Country Island Light.

There, U-751 engaged Corilla once more, this time with a triple torpedo salvo from 2500 m. Two shots went wide of the mark. But the centre fired salvo, struck Corilla at a point precisely forward of the bridge, after a run of 140 seconds (2100 m). That torpedo exploded sending a tall blast up the ship's side.



The Nova Scotia Atlas 5th ed. Plate. 52- Z3

Corilla was in deep trouble and once again sounded a distress call. Coming to her aid was a nearby escort heading full speed towards her. U-751 spotted the escort and "outmanoeuvred" it. Still the corvette's presence preoccupied those on the U-boat's bridge watch. Suddenly another hazard was sighted, a warning buoy 500 m distant to starboard in 60m of water. U-751 veered off to avoid running on to "the Rocks."

The "Rocks" was a familiar local feature also known as "The Sunken Rock," or as "Split Rock", located 2.3 miles northeast of Country Island. It was a treacherous area surrounded by dangerous shoals, ledges, and banks. In the meantime, Bigalk concluded that he fatally injured

Corilla and broke off that engagement. He departed the area and worked his way southward. But the hunter had now become the hunted.

After midnight 4 February 1942, U-751 picked up the flashing light of Little Hope Island. This was another boulder-strewn islet, 2 miles east of Joli Point, at the entrance to the small harbour of Port Joli.⁴²

⁴² Ibid Hadley, 1985 pg. 73-75

Here U-751 picked up another target of opportunity, the British Tanker Silveray, that was promptly sunk. Then another target was identified, but U-751's attack was foiled by an RCAF overflight. U-751 was then pursued relentlessly, often, and deep into the coastal shallows of Canadian waters. As for Corilla, she was saved and lived to fight another day!

So it was quite possible that Evert Hudson's undated claim of a U-boat in Country Harbour River was quite possibly, a fact! As U-751 was pursued into Canadian coastal shallows, Kptlt. Gerhard Bigalk may have done the unexpected, giving his pursuers the slip by coming up the Country Harbour River.

That is mere speculation and an uncorroborated possibility, but a possibility, nonetheless.

The keepers

The eastern and south shore of Nova Scotia's Atlantic coast, in addition to the Bay of Fundy, proved to be both active and hostile places. Alert and vigilance had to be constantly maintained against any possible intruder, especially the U-boat threat.

Donald Crooks was an Observer on Country Island, several miles off the mouth of Country Harbour River. That post was isolated, lonely, but equipped with the latest innovation to monitor his area.

In March 1943, his station was equipped with a radio telephone manufactured by Halicrafter Radio Corp. His prime contact was the coastal station at Glasgow Head (Canso). Donald's call sign was Hilltop 235. And by all accounts, his post saw considerable action.

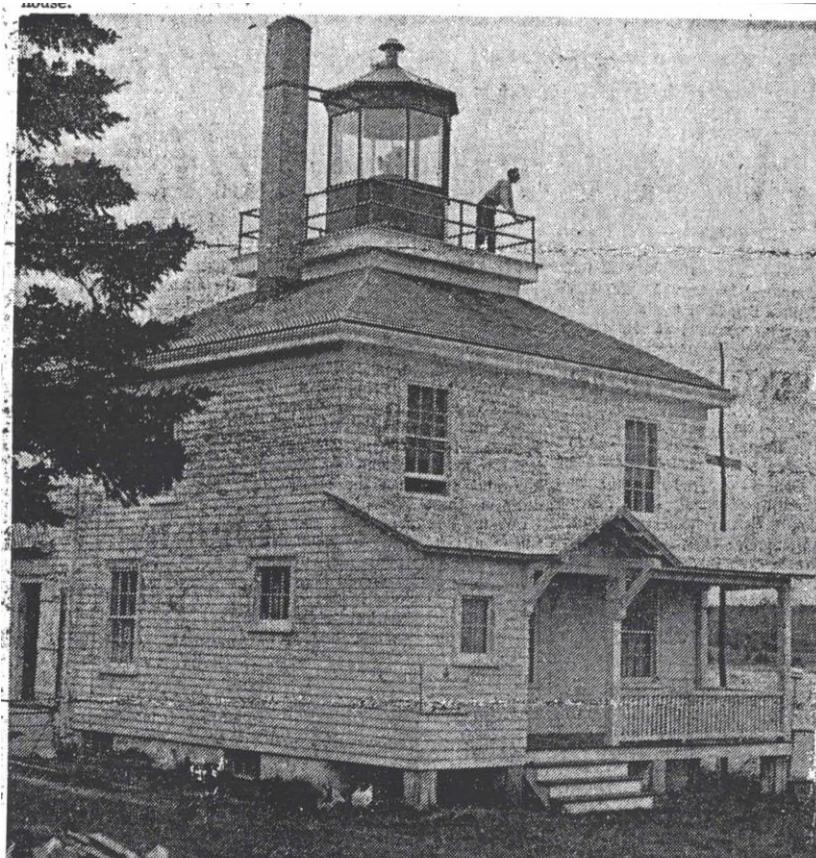
Another RCAF Ground Observers Corps station, again near Country Island, was operated by Ernest Davidson. Davidson operated the Isaac's Harbour Light House Station throughout the Second World War. The lighthouse is located at the very end of Isaac's Harbour overlooking the Bay leading into Country Harbour. Its call sign was PAPA ALPHA 2 0 BLACK.⁴³

Ernest Davidson's lighthouse was active since 1874. At the time, the station was nothing more than a simple light, a mere lantern in the beginning. The light had

⁴³ Norma Cooke, Letter 25 Jan 2017

improved greatly in the meantime, and by the time Davidson assumed the duties of light house keeping in 1938, it was up to modern standards.

Davidson assumed his duties one short year prior to the out break of war. Ernest would eventually become the principal observer, assisted by his wife, Beckie, and their children.



Isaac's Harbor lighthouse, above, was built in 1929 and just this spring an automatic light was installed. Ernest Davidson, who was keeper for 28 years, is shown atop lighthouse.

Photo Sarah Mason Wilson **Light Keeper Retires**, Guysborough Journal (presumably), Friday June 3 , 1966

But his children where the key asset. They could run fast, enabling any message to be delivered to the local exchange that much sooner. The light was situated approximately one and a half miles from Isaac's Harbour, at the end of a long rough road entirely bordered with heavy foliage. The road had not been well maintained, and in winter, was left unplowed. In the winter, the children had the better legs to deal with any urgent calls!⁴⁴

The Davidsons lived an extra busy life during the war. Ernest was also the local Platoon Commander in the Reserve Army. Beckie recalled with a

touch of pride, that their home was used as an arsenal.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Sarah Mason Wilson, **Light Keeper Retires**, Guysborough Journal (presumably), Friday June 3 , 1966

⁴⁵ ibid Sarah Mason Wilson, 3 June 1966

There was always the potential that the Davidsons were continually in harms way. That was highlighted one night when the Army issued an alert. An armed raider (German) was to pass by their light that night.

The Davidsons and the community were needless to say, ready, willing, and waiting to do their duty should any enemy make an appearance at the dock. Luckily, the evening passed without incident, but the Davidson family was prepared for the worst. The children were not put to bed nor could Mrs. Davidson go herself. They all waited in apprehension that the possibility of a shooting war would erupt around them, something quite unheard of, in the quiet village.⁴⁶

[Witness Reliability](#)

There was always much skepticism concerning any account of U-boat sightings, especially when rendered by the inexperienced citizen. Such witnesses were often considered unreliable.

But it would have been foolish to ignore both warnings and sightings of any enemy encounter though, even if proven to be a false alarm. For whom was more familiar and who had better knowledge of local conditions, traffic, boats, and trappings than the local man, woman, girl or even an inexperienced young boy? That fact was discovered by F/Lt Kelly (RCAF), while employed on Aircraft Detection Corps (ADC) duties.

During 1942, Kelly was stationed in Newfoundland for a time, employed on a task separate from his ADC concerns. He made unofficial contact with Aircraft Detection Corps observers though. Kelly found them to be very enthusiastic about their duty. Kelly was greatly concerned with the seemingly frequent and unfounded reports concerning “submarines”. He had one observer in particular in mind, the keeper at Horse Chops (fog alarm station) Trinity North.⁴⁷

Kelly did his due diligence and for seven days checked through the observer’s logbook, questioning his frequent reports on submarines. Kelly was impressed by the answers to his questions. All answers were based on the seagoing experience of the Observer. He gave Kelly a clear perception of what was distinguishable at the varying distances by what was seen and heard.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ ibid Sarah Mason Wilson, 3 June 1966

⁴⁷ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, pg. 39

⁴⁸ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, pg. 39

It was the keeper's observances on the calm clear nights that impressed F/Lt Kelly most. This observer heard heavy diesel engines and also reported radio interference. This interference was believed to be caused by U-boats charging batteries while surfaced. Further, this observer recognized every coastal steamer and schooner on his patch. Most importantly, the man was aware that coastal trade had been reduced to a fraction of what it used to be. So like a Sherlock Holmes' deduction, what was left for consideration, however improbable, was likely, probable.⁴⁹

But there were other potential areas of concern too, particularly the possible incursion of enemy aircraft! In April 1942, the Canso Defence Area received an interesting and provocative report. Some unidentified aircraft led to a report in their records titled, "The Mysterious Appearance of an Unknown Aircraft Louisbourg".

That report from local school teacher, a Ms. MacDonald, was dated 22 April 1942, and only recorded several days after the fact. She raised an alarm, after observing some unknown aircraft 15 April. But Ms. MacDonald only reported her sighting 20 April. Regardless, her delayed sighting had to be investigated.

Standing orders and threat assessments in the Canso Defence Area highlighted the threat of potential enemy air incursions. So any suspected sighting of an enemy or unidentified aircraft in the area was a cause for immediate alarm. The conjecture at the time, was that enemy aircraft could be launched either from a ship, or submarine.

Ms. MacDonald, when interviewed, could not identify any aircraft from silhouettes presented to her. She insisted though that the aircraft had black cross markings on it. Her fear of an unidentified aircraft was understandable. A deep psychological impression had been made on the Canadian public through propaganda, both ours and theirs.

And then again, Pearl Harbor was still very fresh in everyone's memory. And an air threat was very real. It was one reason why No. 5 Radar Squadron (RCAF) was eventually stationed at Cole Harbour in Guysborough County.

Further afield during the summer of 1942, a U-boat was observed by one excited young man of Natashquan, a small, isolated town on the North Shore of Quebec astride the Gulf of St Lawrence. His alleged U-boat sighting was reported to his

⁴⁹ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, pg. 39

local mayor. He in turn tried to illicit some action from RCAF authorities at Mont Joli, the nearest airbase. It finally took an intervention from Ottawa to get Mont Joli to despatch an airplane. But by then, it was too late either to locate or to confirm the U-boat after seven hours.⁵⁰

Local residents recalled that German U-boats were all around the St. Lawrence River, Cabot Strait, and Strait of Belle Isle. Their suspicions and conjectures were confirmed when torpedoes were used to attack shipping and other facilities, for example, in the Strait of Belle Isle, on 27 and 28 August 1942.⁵¹

Many recalled that in one day alone five ships were sunk in the Gulf of St Lawrence, so locals were well aware and attuned to the dangers and the importance of rapid reporting.⁵²

This U-boat incident was not a solitary case. Another U-boat was observed surfaced at or near an old lighthouse again, near Natashquan.⁵³ Interestingly this boat was observed for well over an hour while its crew went for a swim. That in of itself seems unbelievable. Any one who has had some experience of swimming those waters, even at the height of summer, will find the experience to be an excruciating one. The extremities turn blue in short order. But perhaps given the desperate conditions in a U-boat, any chance to clean the body; however uncomfortable, may have been a welcomed distraction.

Many U-boat observations were made along the coasts in Maine, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia that year too. On 03 July 1942, the Station Commander at O.T.U. 34 was alerted that two submarines were sighted somewhere one-half mile off shore at Robbinston, Maine by a Shore Watcher. A strike force was requested and sent off from Pennfield, NB.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, pg. 64-65

⁵¹ Wikipedia, [Convoy LN-7](#), page was last edited on 29 June 2017, at 11:06 (UTC).

Source: [Convoy LN-7 - Wikipedia](#)

Accessed: 1 Feb 2021

⁵² ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, pg. 64-65

⁵³ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, pg. 64-65

⁵⁴ Pennfield Parish Historical Society, post 3 Jul 1942 U-Boat Sightings Bay Of Fundy

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/141841559219547/permalink/3945725088831156/>

Two weeks later O.T.U. 34 received another alert on 18-July-1942. The Controller, at Eastern Air Command (E.A.C.) reported a U-Boat sighting in the Bay Of Fundy. O.T.U. 34 was once again to send a striking craft. That request was refused owing to adverse weather conditions, compounded by the fact that the unit was also experiencing mechanical problems. Several of its Ventura aircraft were grounded.⁵⁵ So these U-boats, if present, got away unchallenged.

Apart from the prominent case of the spy landing at St Martins, NB on May 14, 1942; Nova Scotia had its own case of a suspected landing. Elizabeth Swim then only a youngster of 7-8 years old, recounted a story of the insertion of a spy at Bridgewater on the LaHave River. Elizabeth and her family lived downstream from this point.

Elizabeth recounted that a spy was landed from a U-boat but was caught somewhere near Harlow's Hill.⁵⁶ Spies were indeed landed in 1942.⁵⁷ In fact, Germany landed two spies in Canada that year. One was Werner Alfred Waldemar von Janowski who landed near New Carlisle, QC, on November 9, 1942. Janowski was captured soon after landfall was made.⁵⁸

The other spy was Alfred Langbein (alias Alfred Haskins), who was indeed landed from a U-boat earlier, but at St. Martins, NB in May 1942. Langbein was a man disillusioned with the political situation in Germany. It became his personal mission to escape, rather than spy in Canada. It was his way of escaping the Nazis.

Langbein was more successful in evading capture, quietly making his way first, to Montreal and then, to Ottawa. Langbein lived an unassuming life, attracting no

⁵⁵ Pennfield Parish Historical Society, post 18Jul 1942

⁵⁶ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, pg. 122-123

⁵⁷ Tristin Hopper, **The world's worst Nazi spy: The German agent caught by Canada in a matter of hours**, National Post, 21 Apr 2016

Source: [The world's worst Nazi spy: The German agent caught by Canada in a matter of hours | National Post](#)

Accessed: 9 Dec 2020

⁵⁸ Giselle Jakobs, **Book Review - Cargo of Lies: The True Story of a Nazi Double Agent in Canada - Dean Beeby (1995)**, 8 Jan 2018

Source: [Book Review - Cargo of Lies: The True Story of a Nazi Double Agent in Canada - Dean Beeby \(1995\) \(josefjakobs.info\)](#)

Accessed: 9 Dec 2020

attention. He gave himself up when his money ran out 1 November 1944. He was interned and subsequently repatriated to Germany at war's end.⁵⁹

But what is of real significance to Elizabeth's recollection was this "After the war we were told the U-Boats would come up the mouth of the LaHave River, where I believe, there were many isolated areas where they could surface without being seen."⁶⁰

Given the spate of German activities in our waters in the spring, summer, and fall of 1942, it is quite possible then that many of these sightings actually happened. However in the reality and exigencies of war, such sightings were likely to be denied by authorities as unreliable or as "never happening" to protect intelligence. A hidden truth was likely kept from the public, to prevent fear and panic under the guise of wartime censorship.

Still not all observers' reports were believable. There was considerable hysteria and war fever was rampant. Ghosts and phantoms abounded everywhere. Imaginations sometimes ran wild. So authorities remained skeptical of the observations made by local inhabitants.

Treks, musings, and limits of technology

We have no clear idea how deep inland the dreaded U-boat ventured. Rumours and anecdotes though, suggest that they did wander far afield, and that is something to be explored. Their presence may be more fully exposed as German archives are translated, researched, and published.⁶¹ Regardless, we are able to obtain a select sample from what is publicly available that indicates how close to Guysborough County they did come.

⁵⁹ Ibid Giselle Jakobs , 8 Jan 2018

⁶⁰ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, pg. 122-123

⁶¹ Tristin Hopper, **Group on mission to prove there is truth in legends that Nazi submarines went far inland from Canadian coast**, National Post, Apr 19, 2013

Source: [Did Nazi submarines go far inland from Canadian coast? | National Post](#)

Accessed: 9 Dec 2020

U-Boat	Date	Rough Location	Source
U-82	28-Jan-42	160 mi SE Cape Sable Is.	Hadley pg. 73
U-751	31-Jan-42	Green Is. GuysCo NS	Hadley pg. 73
U-751	02-Feb-42	Country I. Guys. Co	Hadley pg. 74
U-136	08-Apr-42	Off Light Ship Halifax Harbour	Hadley pg. 256
U-213	14-May-42	St Martins,NB - Lands Abwehr agent Alfred Langbein	Uboat. Net U-213 Patrol log 25 Apr -20 Jun 1942
U-432	17-May-42	South Yarmouth Sunk - Foam 43° 20'N, 63° 08'W - Grid CB 1885	Uboat. Net U-213 Patrol log 30 Apr -2 Jul 1942
U-432	23-May-42	Off American east coast Zurichmoor at 39° 30'N, 66°	Uboat. Net U-213 Patrol log 30 Apr -2 Jul 1942
U-432	30-May-42	Seal Is. - Yarmouth and Barrington -Sunk Sonia	Hadley, pg.95
U-432	31-May-42	Liverpool Packet 15 miles west of Seal Island, Nova Sc	Uboat. Net U-213 Patrol log 30 Apr -2 Jul 1942
U-553	02-Jun-42	At 40° 14'N, 66° 01'W - Grid CB 1885 South oy Yarmout	Uboat. Net U-213 Patrol log 19 Apr -24 Jun 1942
U-432	03-Jun-42	170 miles east by south of Thatchers Island sunk Aeol	Uboat. Net U-213 Patrol log 30 Apr -2 Jul 1942
U-432	09-Jun-42	south of Cape Sable and damaged Malayan Prince	
U-1231	20-Dec-44	Country I. Guys. Co	Hadley, pg 257
U-806	20-Dec-44	Chebucto Head, Halifax Co.	Hadley, pg 257
U-806	22-Dec-44	Egg Is., Guys Co.	Hadley, pg 259
U-1230	22-Dec-44	Half Is. Pt Guys Co	Hadley, pg 259
U-1231	24-Dec-44	Egg Is/Jeddore Rock, Guys Co	Hadley, pg 259

Selected Sample U-boat Positions 1942-1944

U-boats were primitive machines by today's standards, surfacing frequently to recharge their batteries. They couldn't stay under water for months at a time. They did break down and may have had to surface and withdraw to hidden waters to effect repairs from time to time. A certain vigilance therefore had to be maintained to expect the unexpected. The U-boat war raised officialdom's concern as a consequence.

In the end, ignoring any warning and sighting, even from unqualified witnesses or untrained observers, may have held the potential for dire consequences that may have led to certain disaster too. This was the very real problem. It was dealing with the unknowns, the possibilities, and the potential outcomes, that gravely interfered with our internal freedom of movement and international trade. But vigilance would not last forever, the end was in sight too.

The end is in sight.

On 4 March 1944 at the height of the Second World War, a plane out of RCAF Station Dartmouth was returning from an operational anti-submarine patrol. It was in-bound to its home base when it came to certain distress.

A Ventura Bomber was passing by Country Harbour at about three o'clock that afternoon after crossing Nova Scotia's shore, at some unknown point, following a long patrol. The aircraft and crew were low on fuel looking for a place to land.

They radioed their plight to Flying Control Unit within the Aircraft Detection section of Eastern Air Command.

Flying Control immediately alerted several observers in the district of Country Harbour where they believed the aircraft to be flying. The observers subsequently filed two reports from the vicinity of Goldboro, NS very shortly after receiving that warning. They confirmed that the aircraft was indeed seen flying over. This important information was most likely conveyed to the aircrew. It was now possible to fix their location, to track their course, and to report their progress from that point on.

This particular case was documented in two separate articles published in the Guysborough Journal in 2015, “Mystery on the Lake” and “What’s in a name” of the forced landing of this aircraft on a snow-covered lake. The lake was initially mis-identified as Stewart Lake by the crew. In fact the aircraft had landed on Archibald Big Lake at Cross Roads Country Harbour.

In the end both the men and the aircraft were safely rescued off Archibald Big Lake. But the tale behind the scenes was very indicative of the work and organization conducted by the citizens of Guysborough County, including the Aircraft Detection Corps, RCMP, and military amongst many people who made the rescue possible.

The question on how to rescue these stranded men was sought and resolved through local knowledge. Flying Control initially contacted the ADC Observer at Goldboro, a Mr. Davidson (Light House Keeper – Isaacs Harbour), and Constable Osborne of the RCMP at nearby Sherbrooke for their assistance.⁶²

Flying Control told Mr. Davidson, and Constable Osborne where the aircraft likely was. They wanted to know the ways and means of getting in to the lake by surface travel.⁶³

Their call initiated a great effort that had to be coordinated, a task that fell to Miss Laurie Sears, the Chief Telephone Operator at Sherbrooke, NS. Miss Sears quickly used her own initiative to coordinate the rescue.⁶⁴

⁶² with files from Norma Cooke, 8 June 2015 “Aids in rescue, March 1944” (newspaper and author not identified) scrap book – from her personal scrap book.

⁶³ Ibid Norma Cooke, 2015

⁶⁴ Ibid Norma Cooke, 2015

Miss Sears made the very first call for help after she received news from the reporting centre that a plane was in trouble over her area. She alerted several observers who she knew to be in the path of the laboring aircraft. Their contacts and reports were immediately passed through her to the reporting centre.



Files Gina Walsh, Cross Roads Country Harbour, 8 June 2015

Miss Sears became the clearing house and action centre for the rescue through what turned out to be a two-week ordeal.⁶⁵ It was said that “Miss Sears practically took over and handled the alerting, the securing and passing of information herself until the men were finally rescued.”

The Aircraft Detection Corps Observers assessed her actions as extraordinary. Miss Sear’s contributions to the rescue of the crew and aircraft that crash landed on the lake near Country Harbor Mines, N.S. in 1944, were highly praised. She was credited as the successful rescue “should go to Miss Laurie Sears the Chief Telephone Operator at Sherbrooke, NS.”

This likely was the highlight of the activities of the ADC in Guysborough, an action that all who were involved in, should be extremely proud of. But the end was soon in sight.

By November 1944, the Chief of the Air Staff ordered the organization disbanded. At the time, some 30,000 members had been recruited with 23,000 observers then on strength. It was decided that radar could replace the ground observers entirely.⁶⁶

Robert Leckie, Air Marshal Chief of the Air Staff, signed the letter to discontinue the reporting of aircraft movements over ADC posts. That directive basically ceased the reporting of incidents.

ACM Leckie then acknowledged the work of the ADC observers with a “Certificate of Service”. Each member was issued one as a memento for their voluntary work, that also acknowledged their sacrifices rendered on behalf of their

⁶⁵ Files Gina Walsh, Cross Roads Country Harbour, 8 June 2015, “Salvagers go on a wing and a hunch by Brian Hayes 21 August 2000.”

⁶⁶ ibid Allan Coggon, Watch and Warn, 2004, Chapter 12

country.⁶⁷ But in the end, there was some respite, not all were to be “immediately” released.

Lighthouse keepers in the eastern area were asked to remain on duty to pass on information on any aircraft in distress. Included in that duty was the reporting of any other untoward incidents in their zones. Such incidents were to be directed to the nearest RCAF station.

Radar was far from perfect. There was still an enemy to contend with, although it was acknowledged that the war was winding down slowly and cautiously at this point. That wind down commenced with the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) that saw reduced recruiting and base closures. Then movements were made to align the Canadian economy to a post war configuration.

Epilogue

Canadians often have the impression that little, or nothing happened here at home during the war. The prevailing view is that our shores were largely protected and safe from the enemy, that we suffered little. That is far from the truth.

The preceding vignettes cast a vastly different light. The battle on the Homefront was one of action, bravery, conducted with diligence, duty, and dignity. In fact Eastern Canada was more often than not, on the very front line of the war fought here in North America.

A war was fought on our very doorstep, particularly in Nova Scotia, often recognized in the euphemism, the “East Coast Port”. But that “tag” was an understatement, the war was especially active in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia’s eastern and southern coasts, Guysborough, and communities all along the Bay of Fundy too!

All to say that the citizens of eastern Canada acquitted and distinguished themselves quite well and with honour. There were no medals issued for those who fought on the home front. There should have been. It was these people that made the difference in securing our shores and future as the “Essential Eyes and Ears”.

Big things did happen in small town and rural Nova Scotia, that’s a big part of our history that should not be forgotten. Bigger still, like today, the battle was fought

⁶⁷ ibid Allan Coggon, 2004, Watch and Warn, Chapter 12

by ordinary people, the people in the community who stepped up to the plate and who are, the essential workers.

We owe a big debt of gratitude to all our essential workers, both past and present who have made a difference and made us all safer and secure. We also owe it to ourselves to investigate and preserve our history. There are many more stories to preserve, find, and tell. I leave that as a challenge to the younger members of our community. You will find it to be a worthy challenge and a noble service on behalf of us all.

Addendum: The War Amps film of *Watch and Warn*, a quick oral history, is available at <https://vimeo.com/47879983> and is highly recommended for your viewing pleasure.
