



**TREASURING THE TRADITION:  
The Story of the Military Museums**  
by Jeff Keshen and David Bercuson

ISBN 978-1-77385-059-7

**THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK.** It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at [ucpress@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ucpress@ucalgary.ca)

**Cover Art:** The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

**COPYRIGHT NOTICE:** This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence. This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

**UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY:**

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place.

**UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY NOT:**

- gain financially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work;
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work;
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work;
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.



**Acknowledgement:** We acknowledge the wording around open access used by Australian publisher, **re.press**, and thank them for giving us permission to adapt their wording to our policy <http://www.re-press.org>

# 3

---

## THE NAVAL MUSEUM—BEGINNINGS

Calgary was also the location of another Canadian Armed Forces installation. Her Majesty's Canadian Ship (HMCS) *Tecumseh* (commissioned in 1941) was a recruitment and training centre home to the Naval Reserve. The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) first used the site in the Second World War, from which some twenty thousand volunteers were sent for advanced combat preparation on both Canada's west and east coasts. Located on the corner of 17th Ave and 24th St SW, just west of Crowchild Trail, the main building of HMCS *Tecumseh* and several of her historical artifacts were destroyed by a fire in the spring of 1981. Fortunately, the Calgary Fire Department was able to save the three navy fighter aircraft—a Supermarine Seafire, Sea Fury, and Banshee—that were exhibited outside the buildings. All three aircraft had flown off of wartime and postwar Canadian aircraft carriers. They had suffered paint blistering and smoke damage in the fire. They had also been deteriorating in Calgary's harsh winters and were in desperate need of restoration and indoor housing.

The fire prompted an outpouring of support for the Navy and its long naval heritage in Calgary. Naval veterans and their families began offering their own personal artifacts to replace those lost in the fire. Many veterans offered to assist, and the need to establish a naval museum was born. The Commanding Officer of HMCS *Tecumseh* was Laraine Orthlieb and she rallied the naval community around the concept of building a naval museum. In 1984, when confirmation came that *Tecumseh* would be rebuilt at the existing site, then Captain (N) Orthlieb founded the Tecumseh Historical Society (THS) to undertake a fundraising campaign to

Royal Canadian Navy Hawker  
Sea Fury in the Naval Museum  
of Alberta.



build a separate structure to house the three fighter aircraft and to accommodate donated ship and historical artifacts. Two of the people most instrumental in managing this society were Captain (N) Bill Wilson and Lieutenant-Commander Frank Saies-Jones. The THS secured a lease on a piece of land from Department of National Defence to build a museum within the grounds of HMCS *Tecumseh*. The Naval Museum of Alberta (NMA) was to be a separate building from the HMCS *Tecumseh* re-build.

The THS began a robust fundraising campaign to build their facility and soon reached their target of \$300,000. These funds enabled it to construct and open the Naval Museum of Alberta in October 1988. This would house a vast repertoire of artifacts that were restored or donated after the fire. Funds were raised for construction from the naval community, the citizens of Calgary, the Province of Alberta, and the City of Calgary. In 1997, the new NMA building was further expanded to display considerable materiel on the Battle of Atlantic as well as naval guns weighing up to fifteen tons. Though located more than one thousand kilometres from salt water, the “Little Naval Museum on the Prairies” vied with the Naval Museum of Halifax as Canada’s largest repository of navy artifacts. This reflected the astonishing fact that, during the Second World War, more than half the members of the RCN came from the landlocked prairies.

The name of the Tecumseh Historical Society was changed officially and registered as the Naval Museum of Alberta Society (NMAS) on 9 May 1996. The NMAS still remains the owner of that first NMA building, but it is now called the NMA Annex. It contains storage space for museum artifacts and a workshop to support the present NMA.

The NMAS consists primarily of members of ten relatively independent organizations of Calgary’s Naval Community. These are the HMCS *Tecumseh*, Canadian Naval Veterans Association (CNVA), Naval Officers Association of Canada (NOAC) Calgary Branch, Chief and Petty Officers (CPO) Association, Naval Air Group, Merchant Navy Association, one Navy League Branch, and three Sea Cadet Corps. As a result of the increased visibility created by the new Naval Museum, these numbers increased by the creation of three additional Cadet Corps and two Navy League Branches.

At the NMA, through items that included photographs, uniforms, badges, ship models, and recorded and transcribed testimony, visitors learned of Canada’s





PHOTO: JULIE VINCENT PHOTOGRAPHY

(ABOVE AND OPPOSITE)  
Supermarine Seafire in the  
Naval Museum of Alberta.  
Collection of the Naval Museum  
of Alberta.



**SUPERMARINE SEAHAWK Mk. IV**  
One of the last remaining Seahawks  
acquired from the Fleet Navy in January  
1965. PB-401 was flown by 803 Squadron  
operating from the Aircraft Carrier  
HMS *Ark Royal*. 803 Squadron was  
part of the 18th Support Air Group in  
SINGAPORE in January 1965 and was  
redeployed to 18470 on March 1st, 1965.  
The Squadron was disbanded in  
September 1965.



PHOTO: JULIE VINCENT PHOTOGRAPHY

(ABOVE)  
3-inch 50 Naval gun at the  
Naval Museum of Alberta.  
Collection of the Naval Museum  
of Alberta.

(OPPOSITE)  
Diorama in the Naval Museum  
of Alberta representing a mess  
deck on a Canadian corvette  
during the Second World War.

earliest naval contributions in the First World War, operations on the Pacific coast in the Second, the RCN's role at Dieppe and D-Day, the 1942 Battle of the St. Lawrence, massive contributions to north Atlantic convoy activities, and postwar operations, including the use of aircraft carriers and aircraft. Visitors could also avail themselves of the John Burgess Library and Ken McPherson Photographic Archives—named for preeminent Canadian naval historians—which, besides over 7,000 books, contained over 60,000 images, ship plans, and correspondence, one of the largest such collections in Canada. Since 2013, both the Burgess Library and



# THE MESSDECK



*It is difficult to describe the bouncing, rolling, pitching and staggering chaos that is a Corvette messdeck.*

The messdecks on vessels such as Corvettes were mostly wet and cold, noisy, poorly ventilated and smothered of damp clothes, digested-outdoor garbage, sweat and fuel oil — and the occasional sea-sick sailor. Larger vessels such as Destroyers fared marginally better.



As the "action goes," sounded without warning, crews remained in their clothes for days. In these small, crowded spaces men found whatever space they could to steal a few hours rest in their hammocks, or on the padded storage lockers—wherever space could be found.

Many vessels lacked refrigeration so fresh meat, bread, milk, vegetables and fruit were in short supply. Pickled or tinned meats and milk were used after the fresh food was gone, often after only a week or two at sea. Jam and hardtack, along with shelled tomatoes, canned meat such as spam and "bully beef" were often the main staples available to the crew.





Captain (N) Bill Wilson examines a naval anti-aircraft gun at the Naval Museum of Alberta.



McPherson photographic archives have been housed at The Military Museums in partnership with the University of Calgary.

Although dozens of volunteers and hundreds of donors worked to build this institution, one of the heroes of the project was the aforementioned Bill Wilson. Born in Winnipeg Bill had served on RCN corvettes and destroyers in the Second World War and had been present at D-Day. After the war, Canadian Pacific hired him. Driven by his love of the navy, his desire to care for his family, and his ambition of telling the story of the war and the navy to each new generation of youngsters, he devoted much of his spare time to building up the naval museum. At the same time he climbed steadily through the ranks of CP.

The collection at the naval museum grew rapidly. By the 1980s Second World War veterans began passing away in increasing numbers and their families were donating uniforms, medals, photographs, and documents. In the meantime, a search was initiated to locate guns, mortars, radar equipment, and other bits and pieces of Second World War and postwar ships that the RCN had relegated for scrap. Canadian Pacific was a very strong supporter of the military in the Second World War, through its many steam ships, trains, and shops, and influenced by Wilson were prepared to arrange the transport of naval artifacts that included massive items, such as a complete set of anti-aircraft guns and anti-submarine mortars.

In October 1988, on the 183rd anniversary of Admiral Nelson's victory at the Battle of Trafalgar, Lieutenant-Commander Frank Saies-Jones, the Society's first president, invited Her Honour, the Honourable Helen Huntley, Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta, to officially open Canada's newest naval museum. Under Frank Saies-Jones' direction as its first "curator," the museum subsequently became the country's largest naval museum. By the time the new museum opened, it was full of photographs, paintings, ship models, naval armament, and, of course, the three naval aircraft, now completely restored and painted. High above all the displays was a mock bridge replicated from a Second World War RCN destroyer complete with voice pipes, a SONAR and RADAR shack, signal flags, wheel, and compass.

The main gallery of the Naval Museum of Alberta from the mock bridge.





(ABOVE)

A model of an RCN revised Flower-Class corvette, the HMCS *Halifax*, as it would have sailed in the Battle of the Atlantic, in the naval exhibit.

(OPPOSITE)

A Banshee naval jet fighter as flown from the aircraft carrier HMCS *Bonaventure* in the naval museum.







Bill Duce pictured in his winter uniform on gate duty. Date and place unknown. University of Calgary Archives, Naval Museum of Alberta Collection.

## PETTY OFFICER WILLIAM DUCE

Royal Navy Canadian Volunteer Reserve  
(RNCVR), First World War

In October 1917, William (Bill) Duce answered his country's call to service in the Great War and volunteered for the Royal Navy Canadian Volunteer Reserve (RNCVR) at the Cardston, Alberta, post office. On 17 November of that year he left Lethbridge with a party of recruits and was posted to Rainbow Division on the West Coast where he qualified as a 1st Class Seaman.

He was later posted to the Atlantic Coast where he served in Niobe Division as Ship's Cook. Bill Duce ended the war as a petty officer on one of the small coastal vessels at Saint John, New Brunswick—the *St. Helena*. His war had involved minesweeping and fireboat service, and he escorted troops halfway into the Atlantic.

The Naval Museum of Alberta received his uniform as a donation from his son in 2014. Naval uniforms from the Great War are extremely rare, and the fact that not only is this one complete but we know who owned it—and have a picture of him—makes it one of the more special items at The Military Museums.

Bill Duce's uniform consists of a Class II duck tunic complete with blue naval tri-striped denim collar which is sewn onto the tunic. The tunic bears the Petty Officer rank (blue cotton on white) on the right upper sleeve, and blue piping on the cuffs and tunic bottom. The tunic is complete with the original lanyard and a black silk. The trousers are white summer duck RN trousers, five buttons, laced at the aft waistband. Interestingly, the trousers still have the remnants of the "seven seas" folds on the lower legs. The uniform includes a black peaked cap with a Petty Officer's cloth cap badge, and a white cloth weather cover. Collection of the Naval Museum of Alberta.



PHOTO: JULIE VINCENT PHOTOGRAPHY



## SECOND WORLD WAR NAVAL GUNS

4" (102 mm) QF Mark XVI on a twin Mark XIX Mounting on exhibit at the Naval Museum of Alberta. This gun was manufactured at the Canadian Pacific Munitions Department, Ogden Shops in Calgary.

Railway shops like this were a major part of Canada's war effort during the Second World War, since they were already set up to make heavy machinery. Collection of the Naval Museum of Alberta.



PHOTOS: JULIE VINCENT PHOTOGRAPHY



12-pounder, 40-calibre Quick Fire/Low Angle Mk V gun on a Mk IX Mounting. These guns were installed as the main armament on the forecastle of most Canadian Bangor Class minesweepers and fitted as secondary armament on many frigates. They were also installed on defensively equipped merchant ships (DEMS). This gun was manufactured at the Canadian Pacific Munitions Department, Ogden Shops in Calgary. Collection of the Naval Museum of Alberta.



PHOTOS: JULIE VINCENT PHOTOGRAPHY



A diorama featuring cooperation between infantry and armoured units in the fall of 1944, as seen at the entrance to The Military Museums.