

*SIX DECADES OF THE TRAVELS & ADVENTURES OF HOSAQAMI*  
*The Extraordinary Life Of A Totem Pole*

*By Bill Shead*

From 1910 to 1960, the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) personnel were trained in the Royal Navy's (RN) training establishment, *HMS Excellent*, on Whale Island in Portsmouth Harbour, England. The Canadian graduates from *Excellent* wished to give the RN and *Excellent* something to remember Canadians and their friendly association over the RCN's first fifty years. The specifications for the gift were that it should be *large, useless and difficult to keep clean*. In 1959 they commissioned Chief Mungo Martin, a renowned Kwakiutl carver in Victoria, to carve a totem pole (subsequently known as *Hosaqami*) to be the gift. It certainly was large, weighing two tons and 25 feet tall, relatively useless and, in the end, proved very hard to keep clean – although the RN did succeed for three decades.



The carving of *Hosaqami* was started on May 1, 1959 and completed on July 10, 1959. The totem pole was transported from the West Coast to Halifax in *HMCS New Waterford*; and spent the winter of 1959-60 in the Canadian Navy's Gunnery School in *HMCS Stadacona*. On July 15, 1960, *Hosaqami* was embarked in *HMCS Kootenay* for passage to Portsmouth and Whale Island.

While *Hosaqami* would be a unique gift, the ceremony marking his presentation to HMS Excellent was to be equally unique and memorable. Fifteen RCN members of North American Indian ancestry responded to call for volunteers to form

a *Special Escort for Hosaqami*. The *Escort* members gathered in Halifax for the first time in mid-July. Seven members flew in from the West Coast, while the remaining eight came from the Atlantic Command. All joined *HMCS St. Croix*, *Kootenay's* sister ship in the Fifth Squadron, as regular members of her crew. They included:

Able Seaman (Medical Assistant) **Wilfred Beaver** - Six Nations  
Able Seaman (Medical Assistant) **Gus Bisson** - Ojibway  
Able Seaman (Air Fitter) **Russell Bomberry** - Six Nations  
Leading Seaman (Engineering Mechanic) **Don Cluston** - Crow  
Able Seaman (Weaponman Surface) **Jacques Fisher** - Cree  
Able Seaman (Air Rigger) **Eric Jamieson** - Six Nations  
Petty Officer (Radio Technician) **Fred Jamieson** - Six Nations  
Able Seaman (Weaponman Underwater) **Peter Jamieson** - Six Nations  
Ordinary Seaman (Radioman Special ) **William Kenoshemeg** - Ottawa  
Able Seaman (Radar Plotter) **Hal Lecoy** - Saultaux  
Able Seaman (Engineering Mechanic) **Gordon McBryan** - Shoswap  
Able Seaman (Electrician Mate) **John McHugh** - Blackfoot  
Able Seaman (Boatswain) **Charlie Rabbitt** - Sioux  
Able Seaman (Radar Plotter) **Dennis Timothy** - Six Nations  
Sub Lieutenant **Bill Shead** - Cree, Peguis First Nation



*Hosaqami's Special Escort*- Front Row: L to R - AB **Wilfred Beaver**, AB **Charlie Rabbitt**, AB **Hal Lecoy**, SLT. **Bill Shead**, AB **Gordon McBryan**, AB **Russell Bomberry** and AB **Eric Jamieson**. Back Row: L to R - LS **Don Clouston**, AB **John McHugh**, AB **Dennis Timothy**, OS **Bill Kenoshemeg**, PO **Fred Jamieson**, AB **Jacques Fisher**, AB **Peter Jamieson** and AB **Gus Brisson**.

At the outset no one really had any inkling of what role the escort would or should play. We came from several different Indigenous cultural and language groups from across Canada. No one was from the Indigenous peoples of Pacific Northwest with their rich traditions relating to totem pole carving and ceremony. There was no other 'common' tradition or ceremony that might serve as a model for our eventual role. However, as sailors and shipmates, we did have our naval training and its traditions in common. We realized that, in all probability, the British audience of 1960 would have very sparse knowledge of the diverse language and cultural traditions and ceremonies of the Indigenous peoples Canada. Their view of us, in all likelihood, would be coloured by the popular western movies of the day starring likes of John Wayne. We did have an important role to play and could not be passive participants. So, we simply worked out the details based on what a British audience might expect and play to their imagination using ideas we shared of what our people might do in similar gatherings of friends. En route to Portsmouth in *HMCS St. Croix* we carved *lances* out of mop handles from ship's stores and decorated them with feathers dropped on deck by passing seagulls. Charlie Rabbitt carved a *peace pipe*. We kept in mind that *Hosaqami* was the focus of the event. Our role would not distract in any way from the presentation; but add some levity to the event and add to the *Canadian Fun* every one was to enjoy that day.



On arrival in Portsmouth on July 27, 1960 throngs of people were seen on the shore while many others cruised by in numerous pleasure craft that played around the ships as they entered Portsmouth Harbour. On July 28, the weather was rather dreary but improved as the day progressed. The morning was spent preparing for the official presentation that afternoon. The RCN *entourage* left the Dockyard at 1430. A Royal Marine Band led the procession. A guard followed with *Hosaqami*, borne on

modified gun carriages, bringing up the rear. The escort members manned the outboard positions of the drag ropes of the gun carriage. The streets of Portsmouth to Whale Island were crowded with people watching the strange procession. On a signal, the escort would run through the crowds shouting and giving out the odd war-whoop. Here is one news report:

*"Portsmouth, England, July 29 - Fifteen full-blooded Canadian Indians "invaded" this English seaport yesterday and some of the residents are still wondering what happened. It's not that the Indians scalped anyone-a nightly feature on British television-or shot up the city with arrows, but they clearly did the next worse thing. They fouled up the bus queues. Running through the narrow streets of Portsmouth, waving their lances and feathers, the Indians delighted thousands who knew what they came for. It was the few who didn't know, who were worth watching. 'Here,' shouted an old lady, as she jumped with fright from her spot in the bus queues, 'they should get rid of this lot, they should'."*



The audience formed a huge circle around *Hosaqami* on the cricket pitch in front of the Wardroom. Following the introductions, Captain Dalglish, the Commanding Officer of *HMS Excellent*, was given a headdress and a blanket to wear. The 'Peace Pipe' was lit and passed around. Finally, there was a form of round dance. Captain Dalglish and others took part. The escort did not look out of place; however, the captains and commander certainly did. Nevertheless, they participated with good will and good humour. After the speeches, a barbeque styled as a *Potlach* was held. The Royal Navy provided two barbequed pigs and barrels of *Brickwood's Best*- a local ale while the RCN supplied hot dogs and 500 bottles of *Oland's Ale*, a Nova Scotia brew favoured by the RCN.

In the end the Escort accomplished its objective. Our participation contributed to the success and fun of the event - thanks to support we received from our shipmates & families and the senior RCN officer associated with all aspects of the *Hosaqami* project. I was fortunate and grateful to have had the complete support and friendship of my colleagues who formed the *Special Escort*. If it were not for their willingness and cooperation, the small part we played in this event would not have been so well received - nor as much fun!

*Hosaqami* remained at Whale Island after the RN closed *HMS Excellent* in 1985. The totem suffered from rot due to the UK climate and was virtually destroyed in a major windstorm that swept the UK in 1987. It was returned to Halifax in 1990 aboard *HMCS Algonquin*. There it was determined that it would be a challenge to restore *Hosaqami* so it was returned to Esquimalt aboard *HMCS Protecteur* in 1992.

Chief Mungo Martin was assisted in carving *Hosaqami* by his grandson, the late Tony Hunt Sr. who had gone onto become a well-established artist and carver in his own right. Following *Hosaqami's* return to Esquimalt Tony advised the Navy to allow *Hosaqami* to return to its natural state in a place of honour. *Hosaqami* lay behind the memorial wall in front of the Chiefs & Petty Officers Mess at CFB Esquimalt where a small model of *Hosaqami* is on display inside.

On 30 April 2012 *Hosaqami* was moved to Government House in Victoria to serve as a model for a new *Hosaqami* – a replica of the original carved by Chief Tony Hunt Sr. It is a gift of Lieutenant Governor Steven Point to the people of British Columbia and to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The original *Hosaqami* is *returning to nature in a place of honour* at Government House.



Three of members of the 1960 escort – Hal Lecoy, Gordon McBryan and I – accepted the Lieutenant Governor's invitation to attend a blessing and dedication

ceremony for the original *Hosaqami* and the *Pole Raising Ceremony* for the new *Hosaqami II*. His Honour Steven Point is an Indigenous person, an Honourary Captain RCN and former judge. He wore his naval uniform to underline the RCN's connection to *Hosaqami*. At the blessing ceremony for the original *Hosaqami* the escort members presented the Lieutenant Governor, Admiral Truelove and Tony with a book of photos and stories of the original *Hosaqami*. I also gave Admiral Truelove the *lance* I had carved from the mop handle from *St. Croix's* ship's stores.

It is unlikely that *Hosaqami II* (or any other totem pole) will equal the adventures and voyages of the original *Hosaqami* having sailed in four different ships of the RCN – crossing the Atlantic Ocean twice and transiting the Panama Canal twice. *Hosaqami* surveyed the *Stadacona* parade square in Halifax over the winter of 1959-60 and stood for over a quarter of century at the entry to Whale Island in Portsmouth.

- A cedar log from British Columbia Rain forest brought to Victoria, 1959
- Carved by Chief Mungo Martin, Henry & Tony Hunt, Victoria 1959
- Moved through Victoria to Esquimalt Dockyard 1959,
- Sailed in *HMCS New Waterford* - Esquimalt to Halifax 1959,
- Transitted the Panama Canal Pacific to Atlantic 1959,
- Moved through Halifax - Dockyard to *HMCS Stadacona* 1959,
- Overlooked Stadacona Parade Square 1959-60
- Moved from Stadacona to Dockyard 1960,
- Sailed in *HMCS Kootenay* - Halifax to Portsmouth 1960,
- Hosaqami's Special Escort embarked in *HMCS St. Croix* 1960,
- Paraded through Portsmouth - Dockyard to Whale Island 1960,
- Remains of Mungo Martin carried to Alert Bay in *HMCS Saguenay* 1962,
- At *HMS Excellent* on Whale Island Portsmouth Harbour 1960-1990,
- Damaged by major wind storm Whale Island 1987,
- Moved from Whale Island to Dockyard Portsmouth 1990,
- Sailed in *HMCS Algonquin* - Portsmouth to Halifax 1990,
- Sailed in *HMCS Protecteur* - Halifax to Esquimalt 1992,
- Transitted Panama Canal Atlantic to Pacific 1992,
- At rest near *Memorial Wall* Chiefs & PO's Mess 1992-2011,
- Moved – Esquimalt Dockyard to Government House Victoria 2012,
- *Returning to nature* at Government House Victoria from 2012 – present.



Tony's son, Tony Jr., assisted in carving *Hosaqami II*. One of Tony Sr.'s grandsons also danced at the Pole Raising Ceremony. In all - five generations of Tony's family – from his grandfather Mungo Martin to his grandson - have been involved in the two *Hosaqami* projects over half a century!

*"May it be known by all that owner of*

*HOSAQAMI perpetuity shall be the Commanding Officer, Officers and men of Her Majesty's Ship Excellent. A totem pole represents a family story. It stands for kinship.*

*This totem bears three devices which symbolize our common purpose and the contribution we need must make to our two Navies.*

*The Killer Whale stands for the sea, for its dangers and challenge.*

*The Thunderbird is the hunter who seeks out his prey in the sea.*

*The Speaker holds the staff of authority; he speaks with knowledge, he is the instructor.*

*Thus, our strength at sea lies firmly based upon the man who teaches and who leads. In the Kwakiuti tongue the name Hosaqami means that he who owns this pole is a man of integrity in his society.*

*HOSAQAMI was carried from British Columbia to Nova Scotia in HMCS New Waterford and to Portsmouth in HMCS Kootenay. It has been erected in Whale Island this twenty eighth day of July, Nineteen Hundred and Sixty by officers and men of the Royal Canadian Navy as the gift of the Gunnery Branch. It is to commemorate their appreciation of a half-century of good comradeship and valuable training. May it ever proclaim the warmth of the bonds that join us."*

## The Story of *Hosaqami*

In 1959, the Royal Canadian Navy, as a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary event, commissioned artist Chief Mungo Martin to carve a totem pole and gifted it to the Royal Navy in recognition of the enduring relationship between the two navies.

The pole, *Hosaqami*, was displayed on Whale Island in Portsmouth, England until the late 1980s, where it was severely damaged by the weather. It was sent back to Canada to see if it could be restored, but the extent of the damage was too much and Chief Tony Hunt, who assisted his father Henry Hunt and his adoptive grandfather Chief Martin in carving the original, recommended it be returned to the earth and a replacement be carved.

The original *Hosaqami* was moved to the Government House grounds where it now lies. The new *Hosaqami* stands in front of Government House where it will remain in perpetuity.



## *Hosaqami*

a replica of the original pole carved in 1960  
by Chief Mungo Martin



Carved by Chief Tony Hunt

and

Raised on 8 September 2012

in the presence of

The Honourable Steven L. Point, OBC  
Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia

in honour of

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee  
and dedicated to all Aboriginal Veterans

This pole was made possible thanks to the generosity of the Government House Foundation and in cooperation with the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations, on whose traditional territory the pole sits.

Postscript:

In the summer of 1959 I was a Midshipman on the West Coast. While in Victoria I did see a team carving a totem pole at Thunderbird Park. I did not realize until much later that it was Mungo Martin with Henry and Tony Hunt carving *Hosaqami*. In September I was posted to *Stadacona* in Halifax where *Hosaqami* and I spent the winter together. Over the next sixty years I would see *Hosaqami* at almost every stop that *Hosaqami* made on his journeys. The most important event was the 1960 presentation at Whale Island.

I saw *Hosaqami* at Whale Island last in 1977 when I attended a mess dinner *HMS Excellent* as a guest of David Poole, a shipmate from our 1967 summer in the Royal Yacht *HMY Britannia*. In 1991 I saw *Hosaqami's* remains in Halifax. In 2004 three members of the escort, Don Clouston, Gordon McBryan and I, were in Esquimalt where we saw *Hosaqami* at rest. In 2010 I presented a two-foot replica of *Hosaqami* to the Maritime Command Museum in Halifax to commemorate the Centennial of the Navy and the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the presentation of *Hosaqami* to the RN. Three of members of the escort, Hal Lecoy, Gordon McBryan and I, attended the raising of *Hosaqami II* in September 2012.

Contact has been lost with Wilfred Beaver, Gus Bisson, Jacques Fisher, William Kenoshemeg and Dennis Timothy. Sadly, John McHugh, Charlie Rabbitt, Gord McBryan and Fred, Peter and (perhaps) Eric Jamieson have passed away. I spoke on the phone to Eric Jamieson in Onieda in early 2012, but almost immediately lost contact with him. I met Russell Bomberry in Six Nations of the Grand River in 2014. I believe Don Clouston lives in Sooke, B.C. and Hal Lecoy in Vancouver.



Tony Sr assisted his father Henry Hunt and his adoptive grandfather Mungo Martin in carving the original *Hosaqami*. Mungo Martin passed away in July 1962, just two years after the 1960 *Hosaqami* presentation. His remains

were carried to his home at Alert Bay in *HMCS Saguenay*. Tony's son Tony Jr. assisted him in carving Hosaqami II. Sadly, both Tony and his son passed away in 2019. Four generations of skilled totem pole carvers, all associated with *Hosaqami*, have passed.

It may be incomprehensible today that a young and inexperienced naval officer would be given the responsibilities that I had for the *Escort* and the role we played in the 1960 presentation event. The senior naval officers were prepared to take risks. They never questioned the role that we defined for ourselves; and they were confident that whatever we proposed to do we would do well. In the end we did succeed and ever since have fond and enduring memories of the event.

While in a Portsmouth pub I had an interesting chat with a veteran member of the famous WWII Dam Buster Squadron that conducted the successful low-level bombing raids against the German hydro-electric dams on the Ruhr River. At the time of the raids he would have been about the same age as the members of the *Escort* with about same length of service - less than five years! It still amazes me what young and inexperienced people (both men and women) can achieve - if only given the opportunity, support and 'license' to get on with the task at hand. Success usually follows more often than disaster.

In my remarks on behalf of the *Escort* at the presentation, with a light-hearted intent; I said, 'We don't say 'How!' anymore. We say 'Chance!' We know how, we just want a chance!' That was as close as we came to a 'political' statement. Fifteen years later that remark turned out to rather prophetic. In 1975 I was seconded from the Navy to head the Public Service Commission of Canada's Office of Native Employment. There I led a team of Indigenous personnel to develop a policy to increase employment opportunities across the Public Service of Canada for Indigenous People really, to give Indigenous People a 'chance' to demonstrate that they know 'how'.



Bill Shead holding the 'lance' that he carved for the 1960 event while at sea in HMCS St. Croix. He had given it to RAdm Bill Truelove at the 2012 dedication of the original Hosaqami at Government House.