

A VISIT WITH ADMIRAL RALPH HENNESSY AND HIS WIFE DIANA

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Imagine if you can, a young inexperienced prairie boy from Selkirk, Manitoba, as an aspiring Naval Officer with 19 others in a class at HMCS Kings, Halifax, Nova Scotia, in early 1944. Our Commanding Officer, already "larger than life" was A/LCdr R.L. Hennessy, DSC, RN who had been the XO in HMCS Assiniboine when she engaged U-210 in a deadly surface battle in August, 1942.

The story tells of an ever more present danger when a major fire was started by the sub's shelling of the boat deck and the bridge. The captain ordered Hennessy to go below and take command of the Fire Party. He obeyed instantly, but all the exits from the bridge were blocked by fire.

He managed to exit the bridge by leaping to a mast and sliding down to the boat deck. He and the crew finally got control of both the deck fire and the bridge fire, and then he went throughout the ship doing damage control. In the meantime, the captain had rammed the submarine, sinking it. There were other stories as well, but this was the one that grabbed the imaginations of many of the young officers, including me. This was the way, we thought, to demonstrate one's mettle. What I realized, much later, was that the ability to rise to such challenges requires more than just courage. It demands intelligence, training, fortitude, but most of all integrity, not just in challenging situations, but in the performance of one's everyday duties.

Somehow, although it was the "daring-do" exploits which first captured my imagination, I realized that this officer had, in more subtle ways, demonstrated those characteristics which predated success, and which I had attempted to make my own. As a member of HMCS Sarnia, involved in the rescue of the 27 survivors and the retrieval of the 13 dead from HMCS Esquimalt, his example was what I tried to emulate.

I left the Service and made my way as a civilian. He went on to a brilliant career in the Navy. I thought of him from time to time, appreciating

more and more what an example he had been to me so long ago. Never, in my wildest imaginations did I think that I would have a chance to speak to him and to thank him for what he represented in my life as a young officer, and also much later as a mature citizen of Canada.



Lou and Admiral Hennessy remembering old times.

In early May, my wife Hyacinthe and I were guests of the Navy at the Battle of the Atlantic Gala Dinner at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. Before the activities started a word of mouth message was passed around that Admiral Ralph Hennessy had arrived. I quickly moved to where he was with his wife, hoping to speak to him. I realized however that this was not the proper time nor

place for a long introduction, so I asked permission from his wife to have my picture taken with him.

Shortly after this first encounter, I contacted Mrs. Diana Hennessy asking if a visit could be arranged. She kindly complied and we met her at the Rideau Perley Veterans Residence. We entered a cheerful room filled with pictures and mementos of a distinguished life and were greeted with a firm handshake, alert demeanour, a welcoming smile and a still commanding presence.

I told him a bit about my history and of my experience at Kings. He listened most attentively and was delighted to see the 69 year photo of our graduation where he immediately spotted and named his Executive Officer, Lieutenant J.L. Bird and his Divisional Officer, Lieutenant C.M. Carruthers. As we talked further about my life aboard Sarnia, he immediately connected it to the sinking of Esquimalt and went on to ask "that was Macmillan, wasn't it?". Of course he was bang on. Lieutenant Commander Robert (Bob) Macmillan was the captain of Esquimalt, and the Admiral knew the whole story. It was a prodigious feat of memory after 68 years and with so many men under his command during that time.

His wife, Diana Faulkner Hennessy has been the Admiral's worthy companion for the past 22

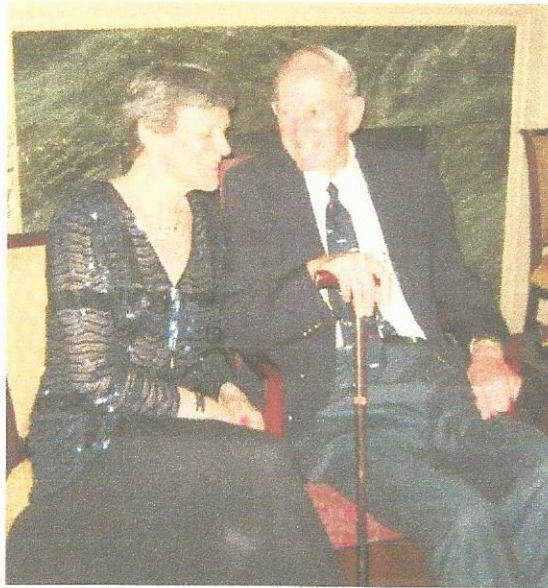
years. She, instinctively, made Hyacinthe and me feel as if we had known them for always, setting a tone of gracious informality and warmth that was memorable. Her father was LCdr. J.A. Faulkner, MID, RCNVR, while her mother was Commandant, Red Cross Transport Corps, in Halifax during the war. Growing up in such an environment, Diana was fully aware of the demands that the Senior Service made, and still makes, on the wives and families of officers and personnel. She is obviously a proud and

supportive spouse, and their mutual love and respect is evident in every word and look they exchange.

Finally, in the quiet of his room, after 69 years I was able to thank the man who had, unknowingly, influenced my life in such a profound way. It was an emotional moment. As we rose to leave, he firmly gripped my hand, looked me in the eyes, thanked us for coming, and asked that we come again. I was about to say "Thank you Admiral", but he interrupted me and said, "Lou, call me Ralph".

Vice Admiral Ralph Hennessy had a distinguished naval career in wartime and peace and continues – along with his wife Diana – to serve and support the Navy family through deeds and donations, including support for HMCS Sackville, Canada's Naval Memorial.

VAdm Hennessy joined the RCN as a cadet in 1936, underwent training with the Royal Navy and returned to Canada in 1939 becoming 1st Lieutenant in HMCS Assiniboine in 1941. In 1943 after serving as 1st Lieutenant in HMCS Restigouche, he was posted to HMCS Kings officer training establishment (located on the University of King's College campus, Halifax) and assumed command six months later. During 1944-45 he commanded HMCS Gatineau, Assiniboine and the newly commissioned Micmac. Promoted commander in 1948,



VAdm Ralph and Diana Hennessy enjoying a private moment at the Royal Ottawa Golf Club

he served in Naval Service Headquarters (NSHQ) and in 1951 was appointed Commander (XO) HMCS Quebec, later assuming command on promotion to Captain. Other appointments in the 1950s included CO of HMCS Algonquin and the First Canadian Escort Squadron, Deputy Naval Member, Canadian Joint Staff, London; and Director Naval Training at NSHQ. In 1960 on promotion to Commodore he served as Deputy Chief of Naval Personnel and in

1963 as Commodore, Personnel to Flag Officer Atlantic Coast. In 1964 he served as Chairman of Military Manpower Studies and in 1966 on promotion to Vice Admiral was appointed Comptroller General of the Canadian Armed Forces and Principal Naval Adviser.

Prior to his retirement in 1970 he served as Chief of Personnel in CFHQ.

In civilian life VAdm Hennessy served as founding Executive Director of the Standards Council of Canada and became actively involved with the Ottawa Branch of the Corps of Commissionaires, including serving as Chairman of the Board of Governors. For a number of years he and his wife Diana were co-publishers of the Defence Association's National Network News and later as members of the Canadian Naval Centennial Steering Committee. He also found

time to pursue a BA degree in history.

Now a resident at the Perley Rideau in Ottawa, VAdm Hennessy recently celebrated his 95th birthday. Surrounded by paintings, photos and other naval memorabilia he maintains a strong connection to the Navy and all those who have and continue to serve.

Many happy returns Admiral!

Article in part from the Perley Rideau Veterans newsletter.



Christmas Day is not far off, so seriously think about shopping at our gift shop. We have golf shirts, baseball caps, Christmas cards, many books on naval history, limited edition prints such as "The Easterners" and "The Westerners" which have been greatly reduced in price, and of course our excellent **2014 naval heritage calendars**. Look at our web site to see if there is anything that appeals to you to send as a gift, or treat yourself to something: you know you deserve it! **Merry Christmas.**