**The Saga of our WW2 ship HMCS Wasaga (Part 3 The Battle of Normandy- Operation NEPTUNE) Compiled by Sergeant (Retired) Anthony R. (Tony) Beresford, C.D.**

The first Sunday in June marks the traditional nationwide commemorative ceremonies of the Second World War’s ‘*Battle of Normandy’*. In the Southern Georgian Bay region, this commemoration is hosted annually by Royal Canadian Legion Branch 147 at their Branch Cenotaph located on St Vincent Road, Barrie, ON and attended by our local communities of veterans, active service, and cadet program. Much of this portion of the history of our namesake ship, the HMCS *Wasaga*, is compiled from official histories, news clippings, photo archives or the recollections of those involved: Stoker Chief Petty Officer (Ret’d), Donald Alexander Conron, RCNR formerly of Wasaga Beach, Lieutenant (Navy) (Ret’d) James Garfield Lorriman, RCNVR formerly of Orangeville, and Stoker First Class (Ret’d) Donald Parker, RCNVR formerly of Tiny Township. Other resources are listed at the end.

Operation OVERLORD commenced with the preparations for landing on the Normandy beaches east of Cherbourg to west of Le Havre known collectively as ‘*D-Day’* (D for Departure) 6 June 1944, but continued until all enemies west of the Seine River were withdrawn. The Allied landing areas were codenamed from west to east *Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno* and *Sword Beach* consisting of mainly US, British, Canadian and free French and Polish forces landing against the formidable defences known as The Atlantic Wall.

Canadian participation was key to its success with His Majesty’s Canadian Armed Forces participating in combined operations within the Allied force, under full Canadian command, or as independent units. Within the Eastern Task Force, Force ‘J’, the 21400 strong landings at *Juno Beach* by the Canadian Army 3rd Infantry Division, 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, with the addition of 48 (Royal Marine) Commando, is of course a major feature of this massive invasion, however all three Canadian military armed services, and our merchant navy, were keenly involved across the whole invasion front.

Operation NEPTUNE was the naval phase of the assault preparations for Operation OVERLORD. The Royal Canadian Navy supplied over 100 ships of various sizes and approximately 10,000 sailors. Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, the naval commander for Operation NEPTUNE, confided to his diary: "There is no doubt that the mine is the greatest obstacle to success." In the largest minesweeping operation ever undertaken, 247 Allied minesweepers were deployed in preparation to sweep ten approach lanes across the English Channel, clear the disembarkation, fire support sectors of the assault area, and then sweep the final paths to the beaches. To complete the numerous flotillas of sweepers required to clear the approaches, the Admiralty requested the support of sixteen Bangor Class Minesweepers of the Royal Canadian Navy.

Secrecy of movement was paramount. In January 1944 HMCS *Wasaga* would transfer from her then *Battle of the Atlantic* base at St John’s, Newfoundland with her 15 sister Bangor’s, first to Sydney Force at Cape Breton, NS, then by the way of the Azores Islands in the mid-Atlantic, then on to Plymouth England. They sailed for the United Kingdom in four divisions, *Wasaga* departing Halifax on 21 Feb 1944 in the accompaniment HMCS *Canso*, *Guysborough* and *Kenora*. The winter passage taxed their limited endurance of the 16, and in a couple of cases some of the ships reached the Azores fueling port in tow of others in the group.

After a roughly two-week passage they arrived at Plymouth in early March 1944. HMCS *Wasaga* initially deployed with the 32nd Minesweeping Flotilla, then transferred to the all Canadian 31st Minesweeping Flotilla. Unfortunately, there had not been enough Canadian minesweepers to form two full flotillas. The 31st would be known by the green Maple Leaf insignia on their funnels featuring a sweeping broom with arms (made famous in the Disney movie “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice”) centered surrounded by the numerals 3 and 1. Flotilla member ships each had a plaque with a named scroll for their ship underneath. We are fortunate to have a melton wool jacket version of this crest on permanent display outside of Council Chambers donated by CPO (Ret’d) Donald.A. Conron.

The 31st Flotilla Senior Officer was 37-year-old Acting Commander Anthony H.C. (Tony) Storrs, RCNR onboard HMCS Caraquet (J38), later to become Rear Admiral (RCN) by 1963 and Commandant of the former National Defence College at Kingston, ON. A superb leader and seaman, Storrs received his early naval training in the RN during the mid -1920s but had spent most of the interwar years in the merchant service where he eventually earned his foreign master's certificate. He joined the Canadian naval reserve early in the war, and after commanding a number of vessels had been appointed senior officer of the minesweepers when they headed overseas.

Apart from the mine scares of Halifax and St John’s harbour in 1943 as discussed in our previous installment Part 2 *Battle of the Atlantic*, these 16 Canadian Bangor minesweepers had mainly been utilized as convoy escorts, thus their mine sweeping equipment, and their crews' ability to use it, grew rusty. Consequently, in early 1944 when the RCN agreed to provide sixteen Bangor’s to OP NEPTUNE for minesweeping, reportedly only one of them had any experience at that duty, our own HMCS *Wasaga*. Therefore, they all underwent a period of training, followed by flotilla workups, participation in pre-invasion exercises, and clearance of some small, overnight mine-lays by enemy coastal craft.

The training culminated in a number of major exercises including the six-day Operation GANTRY in which the Canadians, despite poor visibility and some equipment failures, successfully located and swept a large field of 150 dummy mines. Because sweeping formations closely adhered to the movements of the lead ship, Storrs' ability and experience were to be key factors in the Canadians' success.

HMCS *Wasaga* (J162) was under the command of Lt. John Henry Green, RCNR. As written in a poem after the landings called The Thirty First M.S. Flotilla by Lt Hugh Campbell, RCNR, who was the Commanding Officer (CO) of HMCS *Fort William* at the Baie de la Seine on 15th July 1944:

“Astern is seen John Henry Green,

*Wasaga*’s lucky Captain,

He’ll shoot a seven, and then eleven,

And fade you in a crap game!”

This is in reference to the final preparations briefing before the assault operations began. In late May, a Royal Navy Commander briefed the 31st’s ship’s captains onboard HMCS *Caraquet*. Lt Green was deeply disturbed by the man’s cold-hearted manner. First, he dismayed the captains with the news that, instead of clearing the invasion route for Force “J” (The Canadian landings at *Juno Beach*), the Canadians would be going ahead of the US landing between Port-en-Bessin and Isigny (around St Laurent) *c*odename *Omaha Beach*. He followed up this bad news by saying that the minesweepers leading the way into the beaches were particularly vulnerable to being crippled by shore gun battery fire and could expect heavy losses among their crews or even disabling their ships. In the latter event, he warned, the damaged vessel would be immediately blown out of the water so it would not get in the way of landing craft carrying troops and equipment to the beaches.

Briefing over, the ship captains proceeded to *Caraquet*’s quarterdeck to await boats that would take them back to their respective ships. For a time, nobody spoke and Green noted each man’s expression. Finally, one officer dug a set of dice out of his pocket, knelt down, and rolled them on the deck. A rough, hard crap game ensued with every man throwing in pound notes without the slightest care if the lost. At first, Green raked in the loot, then fell into a losing streak that continued until his wallet was emptied. However, the game had done its trick to break the solemn mood.

To best demonstrate the Canadian’s collective resolve, Vice Admiral Percy Nelles (RCN) addressed the *Caraquet*’s crew shortly after the captains briefing. VAdm Nelles calmly explained that the minesweepers were expected to suffer a 75% loss. As *Caraquet* would be in the lead, they expected the entire ship and crew would be lost. For that reason, he offered everyone in the crew a chance to stand aside without fear of penalty. They would be confined to shore until the invasion was launched for security reasons, and then reassigned to other duties. No one took up the offer.

The Western Task Force combined headquarters and communications command ship of Force ‘O’ was the converted troop ship USS *Ancon* (AGC-4) under the command of Rear-Admiral John Leslie Hall Jr., USN. The assigned 31st Minesweeping Flotilla’s escorts were the US Navy destroyers USS *Emmons* (DD-457) and USS *Doyle* (DD-494). Also attached to the 31st Minesweeping Flotilla were two Norwegian manned armed trawlers HMS *Gunner* (FY-568) and HMS *Green Howard* (FY-632), acting as danlayers, and 4 Motor Launches (ML) of the 15th ML Flotilla. ML 345, ML 454, ML 465 (Lost latter in a tragic fire 14 Feb 1945 in Belgium) and ML 473 were modified and reinforced as navigation launches.

The Canadian 31st Minesweeping Flotilla consisted 10 Canadian ships tasked with the sweep of Channel No.3 approaches at beach sectors *Charlie, Dog, Easy and Fox* into the American landing site at *Omaha Beach* centered on Colleville-sur-Mer during the Assault Phase. Adding to HMCS *Caraquet* and HMCS *Wasaga*, HMCS *Wasaga*’s literal twin sister (they were built and christened together, a first for Canadian Warships) HMCS *Minas* (J165) was commanded by Lt James B. Lamb, RCNVR, who went on to be the author of the book “Corvette Navy”. They were joined by HMCS’s *Blairmore* (J314), *Cowichan* (J146), *Fort William* (J311), *Malpeque* (J148), *Milltown* (J317), *Mulgrave* (J313), and the dan-layer *HMCS Bayfield* (J08). The remaining Canadian Bangor minesweepers, were detached to the British 4th (*Thunder*)at *Omaha Beach* or to the 14th (*Vegreville, Kenora, Guysborough* (Torpedoed by U-868 off Ushant and lost 17 Mar 1945), and *Georgian* (Named after our Georgian Bay)) and 16th Minesweeping Flotillas (*Canso***)** both at *Utah Beach*.

United States Naval Advanced Amphibious Base (USAAB) Portland-Weymouth was a major embarkation point for US troops, particularly the US First Infantry Division who landed at *Omaha Beach*. They are also known as *‘The Big Red One’* from their division shoulder patch. After poor weather had postponed OP NEPTUNE by 24 hours, in the early hours of 5 June 1944, or ‘D minus 1’, the Canadian 31st Minesweeping Flotilla departed Portland Harbour near Weymouth in coordination with the 9 other departing minesweeping flotillas (consisting of 255 Allied minesweepers and dan-buoy layers total) 5 miles ahead of the main armada along the English coastline. A total of 418,585 personnel and 144,093 vehicles would embark from Portland and Weymouth Harbours.

Departing the crowded harbour in poor weather, on such a momentous occasion, was not without its mishaps. As the ships weighed anchor HMCS *Wasaga*, standing on HMCS *Bayfield*’s port bow suddenly went full astern instead of full ahead and backed into the *Bayfield* with a mighty crash. At first *Bayfield* had a big hole in her port bow and shipped quite a good deal of water. It looked like she may not be able to sail, but Bayfield’s Engineering Officer and Damage Control Party managed to shore up the damaged bulkhead and rig collision matts over the holes in her bow. *Bayfield* soon caught up to the rest of the flotilla and the operation got underway on schedule.

The Canadian 31st Minesweeping Flotilla headed east up the Channel towards “Z-Buoy” (the junction area for the assault convoys south of Portsmouth which became famous as “Piccadilly Circus”) the starting point of their 130km sweep. Getting to Z-Buoy took most of the day, and it was not until evening that the flotilla and its attendant vessels formed up to clear and mark their path to the beaches. Crews were ‘Closed up to battle stations’ at 1300hrs (1 PM) on the 5th of June wearing anti-flash gear, helmets, gas masks and life jackets. The transports rendezvoused with them at 2300hrs (11 PM). By late evening the weather had cleared, although the sea continued to be whipped into high waves by the hard wind. The forwarded sections of the ships were sealed off to prevent possible mine casualties of the off-watch sailors so most spent time gathered around the heat of the ship’s funnel. Light and noise discipline were a must.

The sweepers carefully advanced maintaining formation through darkness and a strong cross tide, specifically a "G" Formation, which was not unlike that used by snowplows clearing an airport runway or multilane highway. Two Fairmile "B" motor launches led sweeping ahead of the leading Bangor, Commander Storrs' HMCS *Caraquet*, on the extreme starboard boundary of the channel. 800 yards astern and 200 to port followed the *Fort William*, then *Wasaga* 3rd in echelon to port with their sweeps overlapping, followed by *Cowichan, Minas,* and *Malpeque*. To the rear of the actively sweeping ships trailed *Blairmore, Mulgrave* and *Milltown* ready to replace any ships that fell out due to breakdowns or enemy action. In the midst of this formation, HMCS *Bayfield* and *Green Howard* laid dimly lit dan buoys every 8 minutes to mark the swept channel, *Gunner* following in reserve with the remaining two ML’s.

The ships advanced at 7.5 knots and cleared a lane just over a thousand metres wide. Complicating matters, the channel route wasn’t straight and had a series of doglegs, and the tidal current reversed half way through the approach causing the whole flotilla to reverse course within the cleared channel and switch equipment to the starboard side to commence the approach sweep again. Amazingly only one danbuoy was cut during that amazing ship handling maneuver.

Because it was critical that the formation remain intact so that no mines would be missed, vessels were under strict orders to hold their course even if heavily engaged and, for fear of alerting the enemy, mines that rose to the surface were not to be exploded unless they directly imperiled other ships. According to one officer in HMCS *Georgian*, "we were to hold our course, no matter what was ahead - there must be no holes in our sweeping as ships loaded with troops would be following on us, and would be depending on us”. Final confirmation would be a midget submarine standing off Omaha Beach shores to flash a recognition beacon as they drew near. The 14th Minesweeping Flotilla with the *Georgian* were in so close to *Omaha Beach* in they could distinguish individual French homes and were not detected. The only enemy activity seen by the crews was the anti-aircraft barrages triggered by the allied bombings.

Twenty minutes past midnight on 6 June, the 31st Flotilla reached the terminal point of the assault channel about fifteen kilometres off the French coast. They then began the tedious work of clearing the transport area from where soldiers would disembark from their assault ships and sweeping the channel that warships would follow to their bombardment positions. These tasks entailed steaming parallel to the shoreline, close under enemy guns. At one vulnerable moment, when making a turn about two kilometres offshore, the moon emerged from behind the clouds to expose the Bangors in its pale glow but after thirty excruciating seconds the moon retreated behind cover; the defences remained mute.

That assignment finished, the Bangors returned towards the transport area to begin their final assault task. It was said birds could have walked across the English Channel on Allied vessels. Hundreds of ships, from great battle ships to landing craft filled the area following the sweepers in. Amid the awesome sight of the invasion fleet appearing in the increasing early morning light, the 31st formed into line abreast and turned south. Sweeping to the ten-fathom line off Omaha beach, they cleared the way for the assault craft about to head for shore. Only at this time did German shells begin to plunge into the sea nearby. The opening of the attack broke the tense silence in the scattered moonlight on Pointe-de-Hoe, while pathfinder aircraft dropped their red and green markers. All during these interminable hours of sweeping, they expected all hell to hit, but it never did.

While recovering her sweeps- *Caraquet* and *Fort William* had to release theirs whenthey became entangled in wrecks- *Blairmore* found herself close under the guns and concussions of thebattleship USS *Arkansas* (BB-33) as she fired right on time ordered for 0550hrs, 40 minutes before H-hour (0630hrs). H-hour was the name given to the airborne assault on the invasion flanks by the US 101st Airborne Divisions at Utah Beach, 82nd Airborne Divisions at Omaha and Utah Beaches, and the 6th British Airborne Division at Juno and Sword Beach. The USS *Emmons* (DD-457) had started the day escorting the 31st’s minesweepers clearing a path to Omaha Beach. She was about 3,000 yards offshore and waiting to begin her shore bombardment, when a German gun opened fire. Shells straddled the destroyer. She returned fire, momentarily silencing the Germans. Then she became floating artillery.

At what was later termed “*Bloody Omaha Beach*”, bombing by the United States Air Force and the supporting naval bombardment proved to be largely ineffective, with most enemy gun emplacements and machined gun pillboxes remaining operational. The amphibious tanks to support the Infantry had not arrived. The tide was at least 12 feet higher than expected. In the rough seas 27 of the first 29 Duplex-Drive (DD) amphibious tanks had sunk. The soldiers of the American 1st Infantry Division and 29th (Blue and Gray) Infantry Division were trapped at the water’s edge being raked by machine gun, small arms fire and mortars and were in desperate need of help.

Stoker First Class (Retired) Donald Parker of HMCS *Wasaga* described in his eyewitness account in the Wasaga Sun 9 June 2004 for the 60th Anniversary of D-Day “We were stationed there for three days (*Omaha Beach*), and saw everyone coming and going. By the day noon came around, the water was looking full of people and debris, boxes, bags and clothes.” After the war he married a school mate, Margaret and owned a hardware store in Woodbridge. They retired to Tiny Township in 1979. He was a long-time member of the Midland Pipes and Drums.

The Operation NEPTUNE plan had to be changed. Destroyers were ordered to risk grounding by steaming close to shore and firing their 5-inch guns as supporting fire for the men on the beach. Without orders being given, the Destroyers moved off station, going nearer to the beach, firing on the German fortifications at point-blank range to give close covering support to the assault troops. The USS *Emmons*, USS *Doyle* sailed in as close as 1,000 yards from the beaches. They were joined by other allied destroyers such as HMS *Vespra*, HMS *Wildfire*, and HMS *Sheerness* which also moved closer to Omaha Beach, saving the lives of many American Troops.

Jutting over the *Omaha Beach* landscape was a landmark that showed on the D-Day maps as the Colleville-sur-Mer steeple. The commander of the fire support group, believing the steeple was a German observation post, designated it a new target. The *Emmons* demolished it.Navy gunners, aided by the highly classified top-secret Bigot maps, knocked out eight gun emplacements covering *Omaha Beach* exits.

Shortly after mid-day the 31st Minesweeping Flotilla received it’s orders to complete sweeping the *Omaha* fire support channels. The heavy congestion in the assault area made this slow going and it took until 2300hrs to complete. Their job done the flotilla anchored off *Omaha*. The D-Day minesweeping was a tremendous success. The Bangors remained an important component in this process by maintaining the cleared passages off the beachhead and across the Channel. Indeed, of the 261 mines swept in the Western Task Force area between D-Day and 3 July, over one hundred were swept by the Canadians.

Given this accomplishment, it is fitting that the last word should go to the commander of the Western Task Force under whose orders the RCN sweepers sailed. In his final report on Operation NEPTUNE, Rear Admiral Alan Kirk concluded, "It can be said without fear of contradiction that minesweeping was the keystone of the arch in this operation."

A bronze monument dedicated by the Canadian Battlefields Foundation to the Canadian 31st Minesweeping Flotilla rests today near the American *Omaha Beach* Cemetery at Colleville-Sur-Mer, France. Sadly, as of 23 May 2017 it is now in very poor condition.

In October 2006 Orangeville resident Lieutenant (Ret’d) James Garfield Lorriman stood before council and presented the Battle Ensign that flew on the HMCS *Wasaga* on D-Day. Lt Lorriman was the navigating officer on the HMCS *Wasaga* on that day and has been the custodian of the flag for many years, having won the right to care for it in a draw held by the ship's crew. He said he couldn't think of a better home for it than the Town Hall of its namesake. He was one of the founders of the Toronto Brigantine Association to help keep tall ship sailing fundamentals alive. Lt Lorriman passed away at RVH Hospital in 2014 just short of his 100th birthday. The D-Day Battle Ensign now resides framed in a prominent location at Town Hall at the entrance to Council Chambers as a tribute to this heroic little namesake ship’s crew on that infamous day.

N.B. This is part of a series to highlight the wartime history of our namesake ship and some of the crew. From the records reviewed thus far Wasaga did not lose one crewman during their eventful time onboard this lucky little ship. More detail on her post D-Day operations to come. Lest We Forget.

Reference Resources:

1. Town of Wasaga Beach Archives (WBA) files:
   1. WBA 324.69 HMCS *Wasaga* (D. Conron) Photo Album
   2. WBA 644 HMCS *Wasaga* News Articles and Ephemera
      1. 1944-1945 *Battle of Normandy*
         1. 19440609 The Ottawa Citizen 09 Jun 1944 Pg 6 Clipping- Birds Could Have “Walked” Across English Channel on Allied Vessels- By Sub-Lieutenant Wesseley Hicks, RCNVR (JPG file scan)
         2. 19440715 THE THIRTY FIRST M.S. FLOTILLA Poem by Lieutenant (Navy) Hugh Campbell, RCNR- Baie de la Seine 15th July 1944 (PDF file scan)
         3. 19470600 B.R. 1736 (42) (2) Battle Summary No 39 Vol II OPERATION “NEPTUNE” LANDINGS IN NORMANDY JUNE 1944 APPENDICES-DATED JUNE 1947 (PDF file Scan)
         4. 20040609 The Wasaga Sun Wednesday, June 9 , 2004 Pg 11 *FeatureFOCUS*- HMCS *Wasaga* under American Command on D-Day- Able Stoker (Retired) Donald Parker Interview by Janis Leering (JPG File/ Original clipping)
         5. 2004 JUNO BEACH, CANADA’S D-DAY VICTORY Book Mark Zuehlke Excerpts Pgs 104, 105, 123, 124, 125, 353, 354, 355 (PNG files)
         6. 20061101 Barrie Advance article- Ensign Home With Namesake- Presentation of HMCS *Wasaga* D-Day Flag to council (24 Oct 2006) by Lieutenant (Retired) James Garfield Lorriman. (JPG Files Scan- Original Photos description and Battle ensign are located outside council chamber)
         7. 20120123 Canadian Military History Vol 3, Issue 1 Article 7 1-23-2012 “There must be no Holes in our Sweeping”: The 31st Canadian Minesweeping Flotilla on D-Day, Michael Whitby, DHH (PDF file)
   3. WBA 645 HMCS *Wasaga* -Naval Museum of Halifax Collection DVD
      1. Wasaga Short History (MS Word doc)
      2. 31 flottila(sic) -Wasaga plaque (TIF File)
      3. Wasaga 3 O-78-106 HMCS Wasaga in March 1944
2. MINESWEEPERS OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY 1938-1945 by Ken Macpherson, Vanwell Publishing Limited, St Catherines (c.1990) Hardcover ( <https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Minesweepers_of_the_Royal_Canadian_Navy/m1zYPQAACAAJ?hl=en> )
3. The Juno Beach Centre (<https://www.junobeach.org/>) Various Articles
4. The U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command (<https://www.history.navy.mil>)
   1. War Artist Dwight C Shepler (1905-1974)
   2. Description: Painting- Under the Nose of the Enemy, Watercolor on Paper; by Dwight C. Shepler; 1944; Framed Dimension 25H X 30W
   3. Accession #: 88-199-ES
5. For Posterity’s Sake, A Royal Canadian Navy Historical Project – HMCS Wasaga J162 (<http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_WASAGA_J162.htm> )
6. Roger Litwiller (Author)- Petty Officer (Ret’d) Ross E. Milligan, RCNR photo collection HMCS *Wasaga* (<https://www.rogerlitwiller.com/?s=HMCS+WASAGA>+ )
7. Royal Canadian Navy History- HMCS *Wasaga* (<https://www.canada.ca/en/navy/services/history/ships-histories/wasaga.html> )
8. The British Friends of Normandy Trust- Operation NEPTUNE (<https://britishfriendsofnormandy.org.uk/normandy-campaign-history/operation-neptune1/> )
9. Canadian Battlefields Foundation- June 6, 1944: D-Day (<https://www.cbf-fccb.ca/the-cbf-battlefield-tour/learn-canadas-role-in-world-war-2/northwest-europe/june-6-1944-d-day/>)
10. Saskatoon Star Phoenix- Poor Condition of D-Day Plaque like ‘Slap in Face’.23 May 2017 Morgan Modjeski (<https://www.pressreader.com/canada/saskatoon-starphoenix/20170523/281487866291426> )

NOTES:

1. Contact mines are anchored to the ocean floor with cables that keep them floating just beneath the surface. To neutralize them, the mooring cable must first be severed, to allow the mine to bob up and become visible. Minesweepers drag along a steel wire that ends with a torpedo-shaped floater. Not far from the floater is a steel frame with angled fins, called the “otter” that keeps the wire under water at the proper depth as the minesweeper moves along. The wire is fitted with cutters. When a mine cable touches the wire, it slides along it until it hits a cutter. As the cable breaks, the mine is freed and bobs up to the surface. It must then be destroyed by firing at it with guns or rifles. This is known as the “Oropesa” technique. Dan-buoys are then laid to mark the cleared channel approaches for the following invasion forces.
2. Minesweepers also have an electrical system used to reduce their magnetic field, in order to avoid detonating magnetic mines. Other devices were used to create a field strong enough to detonate mines at a distance. Against acoustic mines, minesweepers used a sound-making machine made of a hammer hitting on a case. Accuracy being essential, they relied on highly accurate electronic aids to navigation and could not use any evasive tactics. Their silent efficiency of light and noise discipline allowed them to accomplish their mission undetected, even though they were within range of the German coastal artillery, part of the famous Atlantic Wall, and despite good lunar light.
3. Fairmiles were originally designed for the Royal Navy (RN) by W.J. Holt of the British Admiralty and built by British boat builder Fairmile Marine, during the Second World War. Eighty-eight Fairmile B motor launches, with slight modifications for Canadian climatic and operational conditions, were built in Canada for service with the RCN in home waters. During the Normandy landings a number of MLs were designated as navigation launches. These motor launches guided the landing craft onto the correct beaches. For this task the craft were fitted with splinter mats at the front for added protection. An Oerlikon 20 mm cannon was fitted amidships and a Bofors 40 mm gun was installed at the stern. Smoke canister apparatus was installed at the rear of the craft and the number of depth charges was reduced.
4. Text of the Canadian Battlefields Foundation Colleville-Sur-Mer, France plaque:

*“Minesweepers. vital to the successful Allied landings in Normandy, formed the spearhead for the Western Task Force landing on Omaha and Utah Beaches. Bangor-class minesweepers of the Royal Canadian Navy, from the beginning of May until D-Day, June 6, 1944, cleared passages across the English Channel. HMCS Caraquet’ Commander A.H.G. "Tony" Storrs, RCNR, Cowichan, Malpeque, Fort William, Minas, Blairmore, Milltown, Wasaga, Bayfield and Mulgrave formed the 31st Canadian Minesweeper Flotilla. HMCS Thunder, Vegreville, Kenora, Guysborough, Georgian and Canso joined the British 4th, 14th or 16th Flotillas. Just after midnight on June 6, they began opening up the way unto Omaha and Utah beaches. To achieve the necessary accuracy, using electronic navigation aids of extreme precession, they were unable to use any evasive tactics. Even though they were within range of coastal guns on Germany’s vaunted ‘Atlantic Wall’, and in spite of moonlight that “provide ample illumination” for German gunners, the minesweepers worked with such quiet efficiency that they remained undetected and successfully cleared the assault channels. It was the 31st Canadian, with the British 4th and 14th Flotillas that swept the channels for Omaha Beach.* *Dedicated to the memory of those who served the cause of freedom.”*