

A thick haze shrouded Juan de Fuca Strait, that hot morning of August 5, 1914. In Europe, the First World War had erupted the day before. In Esquimalt, officers and men of the 5th Regiment manned their guns at Black Rock, Duntze Head and Belmont Batteries. And waited. For, somewhere in the vast Pacific, prowled the formidable German Pacific Squadron . . .

B.C.'s SUBMARINE NAVY

By T. W. PATERSON

One of the young militiamen on duty at Duntze Head that memorable day was Cpl. G. Harold Llewellyn, of 941 Meares. Fifty-three years later, he vividly recalls the historic and amusing morning.

"We'd all been fallen in, manned and loaded our guns, and were told to stand down. I and some of the Duntze Head fellows had wandered round to Black Rock, the examination battery. There was a signaller and a man with a telescope, looking at a signaller on the examination boat, out in the harbor mouth.



GEORGE GILBERT (right, front row) and other old-time submarine men visiting HMCS Orillo. "There's absolutely no comparison," he says.

"These signallers had the old Morse flags, the short and the long, and were practising. I happened to be sitting on the ground alongside the man who was looking through the telescope. Well, we saw the signaller on the examination boat suddenly drop his flag, duck into the wheel-house, and come out with a pair of semaphore flags which are much faster."

Mr. Llewellyn chuckled at the memory. "And this man with the telescope said, 'What's the matter with that man? He's almost stuttering!'"

"And then he spelled out this message: 'Two torpedo boats—German!'"

Then the fun began! Instead of sailing forth to challenge the stranger, as was his duty — "We don't know whether the captain had been improperly instructed of his duties or whether he lost his head" — the examination vessel "turned round and beat it as fast as he could, siren screaming, into the harbor!"

Leaving the shore batteries with warning enemy ships were approaching Esquimalt. The alarm was sounded; Mr. Llewellyn and comrades ran to their battery. As the vessels neared, the anxious soldiers saw they were two submarines, riding on the surface. Still Duntze Head and Belmont batteries "waited and waited and waited for orders from Black Rock. But nothing came through."

Watching the craft through his telescopic sight, Mr. Llewellyn was thinking, "My gosh, if these are German submarines, what are those men doing, standing on the deck?" Then I spotted the leading submarine had a white ensign and reported it to my officer.

"And still we waited. Nothing happened, and these submarines came gaily into the harbor! Well, there was nothing we could do now, they were there."

On the 50th anniversary of the submarines' dramatic arrival, Major Kirkpatrick Crockett, who had been in command of Black Rock battery, recalled he had not ordered the batteries to fire when, at the last moment, he spotted one of the unannounced visitors was flying a Union Jack ...

And that is the true story of how British Columbia came to have her famous two-submarine navy in the opening days of the First

World War. But for an extraordinary stroke of luck, Premier Sir Richard McBride's historic purchase might have become a tragedy. For, had the batteries opened fire, Mr. Llewellyn emphatically maintains, the subs would have been sunk within minutes.

"That same year, we had fired in the annual artillery competition. In our series there were two guns, with 20 rounds between them. When we got the order to fire at the towed target, there were 20 rounds fired, 20 hits scored — in 35 seconds."

"We were just militiamen but we had some crack-jack gun teams and gun layers ..."

He blamed the fiasco on the fact "war happened so quickly."

"Cmdr. Ross, who was in charge of Esquimalt Station, was away with the Rainbow. And the naval officer left in charge had so many things piled on top of each other he just didn't know where he was. So it was an absolute surprise." And almost absolute disaster.

War found Canada sadly unprepared; in the first, feverish hours of hostilities, Ottawa apparently felt little concern for the West Coast, hence Premier McBride's famous action — without authorization of the Legislature and without regard to U.S. neutrality laws. The pigboats had been built in Seattle for the Chilean Navy but, as that nation had fallen behind in payments, the American builders jumped at B.C.'s offer of \$1,150,000. For three days, the province had its own navy, before the submarines were turned over to the RCN.

Another Victorian with graphic memories of B.C.'s submarine days is George Gilbert, 647 Moss. He came to Esquimalt aboard HMS Shearwater, liking Victoria enough to get his discharge here. This is his story:

When war broke out, I was putting in the underground cables for the police. I put in all the street lights in town; I was foreman for Hutchinson Brothers.

Down in the Yard, one of the storekeepers was off Shearwater, same as me, and knew I was in town. When they were looking for crews for these boats, they sent a fellow to ask me if I'd join up. Because it looked like war was going to break out, with that trouble in Serbia, I thought I might as well be in it. So when they wanted someone who knew electrical or torpedo work —

they didn't say anything about a submarine — I went down to the yard and joined up. I think it was the day after war was declared.

Then I found out it was for the subs. They were brought over here by a crew from the Seattle shipyard where they were built. Then they started to look for men to run them. We got three ex-Imperial Navy men off the Shearwater, Algerine and Egeria, which had remained here. We only had eight men when we started. Of the Americans who brought them over, five men on each boat, half went back to Seattle. Five remained, at the Empress, to familiarize us with handling them.

I was electrical, or torpedoman, and looked after the batteries and everything ... At first the hardest job was to read the nameplates, because everything was in Spanish. The ships were named Antofagasta and Iquique, after Chile's major cities. We named them CC-1 and CC-2.

After about a week we went out and took a few dives. Skipper of the boat I was on was Lieut. Adrian Keyes, an ex-submarine man in the Imperial Navy. B.C. Electric rigged up a temporary charging plant on shore as we didn't do enough running of the main engines to charge the batteries, so they had two motor-driven DC generators ashore.

We'd take one boat out, run around to familiarize ourselves, take a few dives, then bring her in, put her on charge, and take the other one out. We'd take out one or more new men each time. They only carried a crew of 15 ... After about 11 days we had enough men for the two boats. I stayed on CC-1.

The first dive didn't make any difference to me, I was so darn busy working the switches and gear I didn't take any notice of it. It's just like going into a sealed room; you don't know whether you're down below or up above. It doesn't make any difference in the feel; only thing is, after two or three hours the air got quite foul because we had no way of purifying it.

We'd patrol off Flattery, back and forth from

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San Juan to Talooch. At that time the cruiser Leipzig was on her way here. All we had aboard were rifles. No torpedoes. After about two weeks we managed to get five torpedoes from Halifax. When we got them, we found they were no good to us; they were fitted for above-water discharge. This type of torpedo had special brackets which would not fit in a sub's tube. So they had to be changed.

Bullens (Yarrows) got the job. To get these brackets off, they had to heat them to break the solder seals. They did all right with most of them but they didn't know enough to check the air chambers . . . and one still had 1,100 pounds' air pressure in it. When they put the heat on it, it started blowing out like a balloon. That spoiled that one. Which left us only four torpedoes. Eventually more came along; they had them changed before they got here. We had the first four on CC-1, with CC-2 in reserve until the new ones arrived.

We had a pretty tough time out there, patrolling around. When it got too rough, we'd submerge for a little rest; down below is the best place to be in a storm. We weren't allowed to take much clothing or bedding aboard, just a blanket. There was no accommodation at all except eight racks with canvas laced to them, which we could lower from the side, and wrap ourselves in our blankets. Nothing comfortable. Most of the fellows lay on the batteries, the only clear area in a submarine. These subs were so small that we'd stay out a couple of nights and that's all we wanted!

We'd always come in after dark and go out about 4 or 5 in the morning so our movements were more or less secret. The coming in and going out was the worst part. They had a lot of militiamen stationed around the harbor with

orders to shoot anything on the water. We wouldn't go in to the wharf, but would tie up to four old Imperial Navy buoys out in the harbor. Then we'd row ashore in a skiff. Believe me, it was a job to row ashore — knowing we could get shot at!

We had the odd bit of trouble aboard the boats. Once, they were pumping fuel from the after tank to the forward tank to alter the trim. Suddenly a seaman shouted, "There's oil coming up through the forward deck!"

I ran forward. There the plates had all bulged up between the beams and oil was oozing up around the rivets. This seaman had started the pump and hadn't set it the right way — it was trying to pump more oil into the tank which was already full! This created enormous pressure and was bulging the tanks.

Another time, we took a dive off Albert Head. Almost our last! A mishap in orders to close the forward trimming tank caused the difficulty. Well, we started to take quite a steep dive. No orders came to close the valve, but I knew darn well something was wrong somewhere.

I couldn't see it, being inside, but I knew darn well by the slope of the deck we were down pretty steep! Our tender later told us; "You sure looked a funny sight. The stern was way up in the air, almost 45 degrees." By the time the air pressure was so great, it took two men to close the valve. Whew!

After that scrap where the Good Hope and Monmouth were sunk, the Leipzig came off the coast, then headed south. She could have come in here and smashed up the whole place; we had no defences except those guns at Esquimaux. The Rainbow was away.

The American navy at Talooch Island broadcast to American ships, in plain language, informing them to use caution approaching the Strait because Canadian submarines were operating off the coast. That German picked it up when

she got near the coast and headed south. That saved our bacon, really. If it wasn't for that, she would have come in here and blown the whole place to pieces . . .

A lot of people say those submarines weren't any good. But that's all hooey. Because when I got overseas in 1917, in Beardmore's Yard, they were building eight more like these. The same class of boats. Three years after we got them here! For instance: Ours had a remote control console, connected by cable, with which you could control the ship from any position, above or below deck. It was about as big as a soup plate. It had a little control for steering and on each side were controls for the engines, all electrically controlled.

They didn't have anything like that in the submarines over there.

The effectiveness of our famous submarines is, 50 years later, a moot point. However, it is known that the light cruiser Leipzig stalked close in to Cape Flattery during the second weeks of hostilities. Then she reversed course and joined her squadron, to die violently off the Falklands.

Esquimaux was a juicy prize, defended only by shore batteries. Ancient Rainbow was far to the south, off California, looking for the equally useless sloop Algerine and Shearwater, which had no wireless. It was later learned Leipzig narrowly missed Rainbow in San Francisco. Credit should be given the old trainer's valiant crew who, had they not been saved by a few hours, would have "done their duty" in the best Royal Navy tradition, although it certainly would have been suicide . . .

In 1917 CC-1 and CC-2 were transferred to the east coast. They spent the rest of the war in the Bras D'Or Lakes as training craft. They were sold for scrap in 1920.

The history-making sisters were the first warships to navigate Panama Canal under the white ensign.