



HMCS Uganda as pictured on the jacket of Stephen Geneja's book.

Local author documents HMCS Uganda

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By Jack Evans
The Intelligencer

Canada's largest and most powerful warship during the Second World War was the cruiser, HMCS Uganda. It was also a lucky ship which survived near-miss torpedoes and numerous bombing attacks under both Royal Navy and Canadian crews and skippers over a relatively long and distinguished period of service, says Belleville area resident Stephen Geneja.

Yet it is a vessel few Canadians know anything about.

Geneja believes it is such an important part of Canada's maritime history that he personally undertook to write a book about the ship's history, from construction, through RN command through RCN service and her final sale as scrap to Japan.

This is more than the story of a ship. It is the story also of a crew of more than 900 sailors, including Geneja and a former Ontario premier, John P. Roberts, and "men from every province in Canada," said Geneja.

She was severely damaged by a bomb in Royal Navy service off Malta, but her luck held. The 3,000-pound bomb which normally would have finished her, crashed through the hull and exploded a few feet below, allowing for a refit and return to service. But the blast claimed 17 lives.

She was narrowly missed by torpedoes on several occasions, and could well have been the victim of one of dozens of Japanese kamikaze pilots she helped ward off as a protective vessel for aircraft carriers in the Pacific. But she and her crew came back to Esquimalt in the closing days of the war.

Geneja believes then prime

minister Mackenzie King should have let the cruiser represent Canada at the surrender ceremony in Japan.

His book details the vessels' armament, including nine six-inch guns and eight four-inch guns plus torpedoes and anti-aircraft defences, length of 555 feet, 8,800 tons and her construction in Britain.

The cruiser has a special connection with the Quinte area as



Stephen Geneja

she was part of the invasion force in Sicily where The Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment was directly involved.

Geneja has researched the names of all of her Canadian crew-members, and done bi-

graphical sketches on some of them as well as a detailed account of her movements and battle engagements. He also includes technical and slang terms and discussions of the North Atlantic submarine warfare.

Geneja, recently retired from the land registry office for Hastings County, is a Belleville native, whose father and grandfather were both involved in the navy. He joined the RCN at the age of 15 by "fudging" his true age. Memories of his Uganda service were freshened in recent days by the regular ship's reunion held once every two years, this time in Thunder Bay.

The book is now available at Greenley Book Sellers, and also the Belleville Public Library.

Author, Canadian - Bel -
Clay