

Stockwell, Frank

□ MILITARY

# Love affair continues

*Frank Stockwell has storied history with the navy*

By Jack Evans

The Intelligencer

At age 74, and with 52 years experience as a sailor behind him, Belleville's Cmdr. Frank Stockwell still has a love affair with the navy and with sailing.

From a 14-year-old "boy seaman" (like an apprentice) with the Royal Navy in 1935, he worked his way up to commissioning and command.

One of his long-standing appointments was commanding officer of Canada's most famous fighting ship, the Second World War tribal class destroyer, HMCS Haida.

Stockwell's role was as training officer for cadets and naval reserve after the vessel was made a showpiece at Ontario Place — a role he held for 15 years from 1971 until he retired in 1986.

Most recently, he was on board one of Canada's newest warships, the Halifax-class frigate HMCS Montreal, on its commissioning voyage for two weeks through the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Halifax, a port he has visited many times during his long career.

That cruise aboard a unique, state-of-the-art vessel was completed just a few weeks ago.

And for a man who's seen the inside and outside of more ships than most, even Stockwell was impressed.

The comfort for both officers and crew is "out of this world," he said. "This is the most modern warship in the world."

Even with modern technology, the Montreal still requires a crew of 225, he said.

He revelled in the "stability" of the ship, the result of high-tech hull design, and particularly its mobility. "It can go from dead in the water to full 29 knots in one minute and 45 seconds," he said, "and back to a dead stop in one minute and eight seconds."

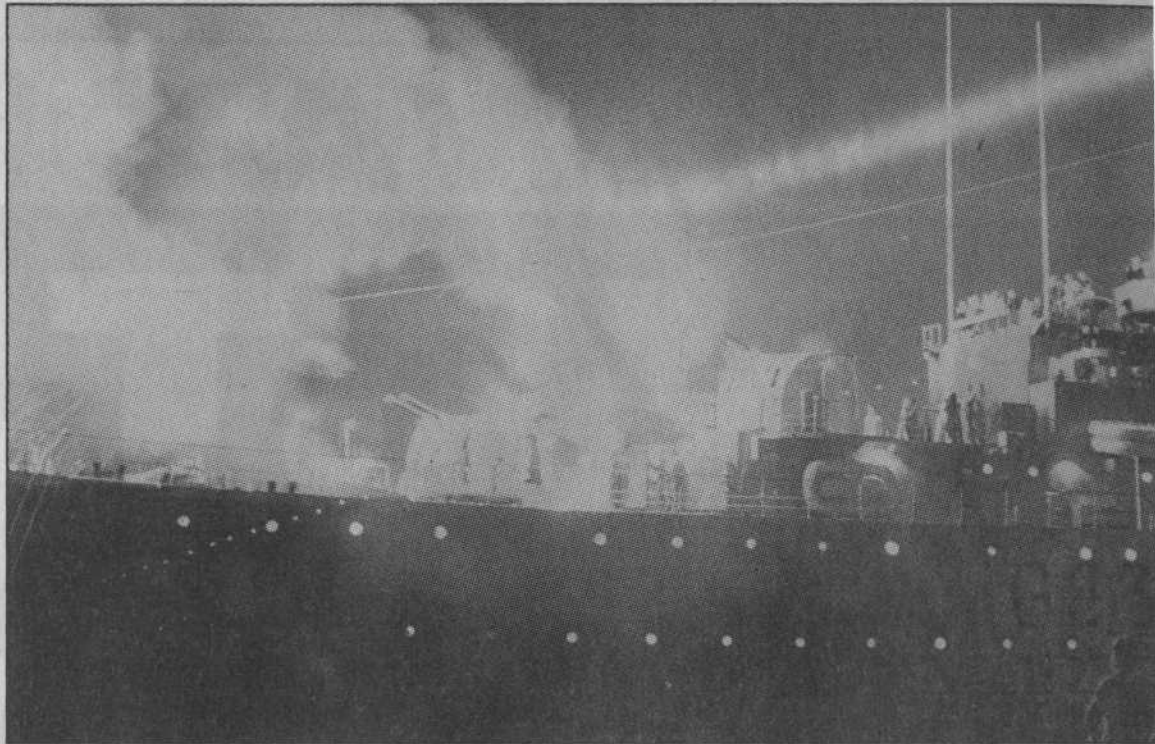


Photo submitted

**HMCS Haida fires its guns to provide cannon sounds for Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture performed annually at Ontario Place where the Haida is stationed.**

Its armament includes eight Sea Sparrow missiles, eight other missiles, four torpedoes, one heavy duty machine gun capable of firing 3,000 rounds per minute, plus anti-missile and equipment-jamming defences. "It's all computerized," he said.

Stockwell's recent cruise caps a career which spans humble beginnings to command rank. By 1938 he was a midshipman and he graduated from commissioning college as a junior sub-lieutenant in 1939 and shortly after was involved in the Second World War.

At one of the first major naval victories by the Allies, the Battle of the River Platte, resulting in

the scuttling of the German battleship Graf Spee, Stockwell was there — attached at the time to the New Zealand vessel, Achilles.

Later, assigned to Royal Navy fleet oil tankers operating in the Arabian Sea, his ship was torpedoed on Feb. 23, 1944 — a date Stockwell remembers well. "I was blown right off the ship and received serious injuries when I landed," he said.

Stockwell got some satisfaction in learning that the submarine which sank him was in turn sunk by RAF coastal patrol planes a week later.

After some time in hospital, he eventually returned to Britain. In 1947 he and his wife, Nancy, emigrated to Canada and Toronto. But by 1950, with a tip from some airforce friends with CFB Trenton experience about the Quinte area, they settled in Belleville.

His service in Canada included some time on fishing patrols with the HMCS Preserver, NATO exercises aboard HMCS Nipigon and active involvement in seamanship instruction for the Sea Cadets, plus naval reserve in Ontario and the Maritimes.

The Haida appointment came after Ontario purchased the vessel for Ontario Place and a joint program with the province, reserve and sea cadets was organized to use the vessel for training. "Over 10,000 cadets and reserve members have taken training on board," he said.

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