

94.19.10

TOWN OF COBOURG  
CAO'S OFFICE

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Oct. 12/94

*Roy Gray (Tweed St)*

The Mayor & Councillors,  
Town of Cobourg,  
55 King St.W.,  
Cobourg, Ont.  
K9A 2M2

Your Worship, Ladies & Gentlemen,

Though a part-time resident of Port Hope, I nevertheless appreciate the nearness of Cobourg, as our sister town. It was, therefore, with much interest that I read of the extraordinarily unique story of a former resident of your town which, if not already known to you and the people of Cobourg, should be. I suggest that there is here an opportunity to give prominence to an unsung heroine of this area - even though we Canadians are often loath to extol 'heroes'.

Attached is an excerpt from the book "Running the Gauntlet", published this year, from which I quote:

"The merchant marine was very much a male-dominated profession with only 2 percent of those working deep sea in 1938 being women, most as stewardesses aboard passenger ships. This percentage declined even further during the war. One exception to the rule was Fern Blodgett Sunde who grew up in Cobourg, Ontario. Although one would be hard-pressed to find women who served aboard Canadian ships - not to say there were none - such was not the case with some foreign countries such as Norway. Fern went to night school for eighteen months to train as a wireless operator and through a bureaucratic loophole signed on the Norwegian cargo ship 'Mosdale' at Montreal in June 1941. 'Mosdale', a fifteen-knot fruit carrier (the only one of six that started the war to survive) made ninety-eight crossings during the Battle of the Atlantic, more than any other Allied vessel. Fern Blodgett sailed on seventy-eight of them, eventually marrying the captain, Gerner Sunde, in Saint John, New Brunswick, in July 1942."

I cannot, of course, vouch for the accuracy of the above, but if it is true, it presents a wonderful opportunity to recognize a very worthy former Cobourg lady.

Yours very truly,  
*C. Ian P. Tate*  
(C. Ian P. Tate)



94.19.16

# THE GAUNTLET

AN  
ORAL  
HISTORY  
OF  
CANADIAN  
MERCHANT  
SEAMEN  
IN  
WORLD  
WAR II

**MIKE PARKER**

ISBN 1-55109-068-6

**NIMBUS**   
PUBLISHING LTD



Training School in Nova Scotia offered a thirteen-week course for cadet officers, and a six-week course for stokehold and engine room ratings was offered in Prescott, Ontario. Upgrading was provided at various locations for merchant seamen with the necessary experience and qualifications who wished to advance their careers as marine engineers or navigational officers. A twelve-month course for wireless operators provided tuition refunds on condition they serve for two years in a manning pool. Ship's cooks were to be trained in manning pool kitchens, but with only four pools available, numbers would be small and there were hundreds of ships to feed. Most cooks learned at the school of hard knocks as they went.

The welfare of all merchant seamen regardless of nationality also fell under the director's care. This was accomplished by enlisting the aid of many private service organizations. With the aid of government funding, the Navy League of Canada operated nine Allied Merchant Seamen's Clubs and four others specifically for merchant officers to provide social respite as well as meals, lodging and medical care. More than eighty thousand merchant men from thirty countries were housed at the Halifax club alone in one year.<sup>3</sup> By war's end, these thirteen clubs had serviced more than two million men.<sup>4</sup> In addition, a variety of auxiliary groups including the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Knights of Columbus, YMCA, Women's Canadian Club, IODE and women's naval auxiliaries supplied books and magazines, ditty bags of personal items, games and knitted clothing.

An effort was also made to standardize wages among Canadian ships, and by April 1944 a number of minor benefits and perks were promised to entice more Canadian seamen to join the manning pools rather than seek employment aboard foreign ships. This no doubt worked especially in the case of those going to sea for the first time, but many of the old hands who had been at it for some years by then remained independent, preferring freedom of choice to the regimentation of manning pools. Considering the risks incurred, one cannot blame them.

The merchant marine was very much a male-dominated profession with only 2 percent of those working deep sea in 1938 being women, most as stewardesses aboard passenger ships. This percentage declined even further during the war.<sup>5</sup> One exception to the rule was Fern Blodgett Sunde who grew up in Coburg, Ontario. Although one would be hard-pressed to find women who served aboard Canadian ships—not to say there were none—such was not the case with some foreign countries such as Norway. Fern went to night school for eighteen months to train as a wireless operator and through a bureaucratic loophole signed on the Norwegian cargo ship *Mosdale* at Montreal in June 1941. *Mosdale*, a fifteen-knot fruit carrier (the only one of six that started the war to survive) made ninety-eight crossings

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during the Battle of the Atlantic, more than any other Allied vessel. Fern Blodgett sailed on seventy-eight of them, eventually marrying the captain, Gerner Sunde, in Saint John, New Brunswick, in July 1942.<sup>6</sup>

A level of vigilance and battle readiness was maintained on both coasts throughout the war. However, even though a Japanese submarine torpedoed the Canadian-built (and U.S.-purchased) *Fort Camosun* off the Washington coast in mid-1942 and then proceeded to shell a lighthouse at Estevan Point on Vancouver Island, any threat to Canada from the Pacific was more perceived than real. This is borne out in the case of Imperial Oil tankers which carried no armament on the west coast.<sup>7</sup> Should the Japanese come, the Americans were there. That is not to say the west had no part to play in the supply war. West coast shipyards such as Burrard Dry Dock Co. Ltd. built a large number of Park ships and similar North Sands-style boats for the Americans and the British. Most, however, eventually found their way into the Atlantic via the Panama Canal as did the majority of Canadian merchant seamen.

Chapter 1 is an overview of merchant navy life as seen through the memories and experiences of three war veterans. Merchant seamen were a breed apart from any of the other forces. The conditions under which they toiled dictated that they must be. "Without uniform, unrecognized, back and forth across a hostile sea they sailed..."<sup>8</sup>

## Paul Brick

As soon as war broke out, all Canadian shipping and all British shipping came under the Admiralty rules. In certain areas they even took over the running of American ships. The Admiralty had to tell us what cargoes they wanted and where to go. They designated actually when they built a ship, it would be hull sixty-two and people would be jumping in for priorities. They'd say, "Well, that one's going to be called a Fort boat and a company called Cunard will be managing that ship." The next one would come off the line and it would be called a Park boat, "The Canadian Pacific Steamship will be managing that one." Then the Americans come into the war and they didn't know what the hell they were doin'. It was easier to hang their hat on the British, the British were running it anyway. Just make up the convoys, and you're going to South Africa, you're going to the Mediterranean, you're going to Britain and you're going to Murmansk. And you're going to carry a cargo of so and so. The company would proceed to get her loaded, crewed and everything else and put her out in convoy. After that, she was guided by the British Admiralty. There was no great fuss. It was a very complex organization and the British did it very, very well.



# ALUMNI

The honour and traditions of a school are reflected by its alumni. No school can point with more pride to its alumni than C.C.I.

Since the graduation exercises, the grads have taken their respective posts in life.

The following schools now contain some of our ex-students:

Whitby Collegiate: Glen (Curly) Dopking.

Peterboro Normal School: Dorothy Moon, Violet Van Luven, Bernice Alderidge, Helen Carruthers and Marion Nichol, who gave the valedictory address at the closing.

Toronto Normal: Helen Harris and Jennie Lawless.

Shaw's Business School: Marion Pratt and Betty Kennedy.

Port Hope Business School: Helen Cooper.

Private Schools: Junetta Jennings and Jean Boggs are at Alma College in St. Thomas, while Betty Hall is at Havergeral in Toronto. Kenneth Wesley is at Pickering College, Newmarket.

Universities: Warren (Doc) Wilkins and George Kidd are studying at Queens. Isobel Lloyd is at Toronto Conservatory of Music.

Our nurses in training are: Hazel (Koko) Kidd is at Women's College Hospital, Toronto. Betty Parkinson at the Toronto General. Fern Blodgett is training at the Ottawa Civic. Ruby Bolster is at Kingston General. Ruth Henderson is at St. Joseph's Hospital in Peterboro. Marg. Coogan is at St. Joseph's.

Lots of luck to Aldora Wilkins, at the Toronto General, and to Ruth Woodger, who intends to study (?) at the Conservatory in Toronto next year.

Those who have joined the ranks of ladies of leisure are: Audrey Dufton,

Jessie Young, Jean Leonard, Jean Charleton and Mildred Riley.

The banking business seems to attract the lads: Ross Booth and Norm Holder, Commerce; and Murray Dines and Mickey McBride, Dominion.

Others working:

Catherine Duffin is a successful stenographer in Toronto.

Bev Barnes is at Knox's Jewellery Store in town.

Marg Nicholls is helping her mother run the Book Store.

When we last heard of Harry Payne he was carrying Anthony Eden's brief case around.

Clifford (Brad) Bradbury is with the air-force in Cranwell, England.

Lillian Thomas is working for Central Finance in Peterboro.

Eddie McLeod is clerking part time at the Selrite.

Roy Burnham is working at the Coubourg Dye Works, and expects to be made manager any day.

Don Flannigan expects a promotion up there too.

Joe Fowler at A. & P. store.

Marg Bulger is at the Fashion Shoppe.

Soap Bulger is a member of the car ferry crew.

Dave Houston is in the bicycle business.

Alfred Rollings is accountant at Campbell Motors.

Jessie Grieve has plenty to do in the Fisher Studio.

Petite Jack Garry always seems to be busy.

Ruth Payne may be found at Nicholl's Book Store.

Jack Clarke, along with his brother, has opened a men's clothing store here.

Marie Elliston has gone to work at the Wesclox in Peterboro.

Winnie Henley is working out at the Dye.

Bill (Smell) Bateman is working at the Stock Exchange in town.