

Labrador Life

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Cover

The Flower-class Royal Canadian Navy corvette HMCS Arrowhead conducted a convoy escort from Quebec City to Goose Bay in October 1944. Meanwhile, a crew member aboard a German U-Boat watched the Arrowhead's crew, through a periscope, 'fishing with dynamite' off of Goose Bay. See story Page 6.

(Photo illustration)



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The crew of the HMCS Arrowhead, circa 1944. (Photo supplied)

Close Encounters

Another U-Boat story emerges in Labrador

story by Perry Trimper

During a convoy escort from Quebec City to Goose Bay in October 1944, the Flower-class Royal Canadian Navy corvette HMCS Arrowhead took a break on the Labrador coast near Rigolet – at one of Capt. Lester Hickey’s favorite stops. The interior bay was considered a safe haven from German U-Boats that frequently patrolled the coastal shipping routes. After a ‘tot’ of rum, the skipper declared they should collect some cod so he could prepare a ‘fish head’ stew. As the crew did not have a net or other tackle, an explosive charge was directed to be thrown overboard. Following a great meal and another serving of rum, the Newfoundland captain ordered secrecy as the Allies shouldn’t be ‘blowing up’ the local fishery.

A decade later, the Chief Petty Officer from the Arrowhead, Glenn Martin, was home in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. He was at the tuberculosis sanatorium getting an X-ray to determine if he was infected with this disease. Martin started a lengthy conversation with the attending physician that revolved around family, the weather, and then turned towards the subject of the war. As the questions went back and forth, he learned that the foreign accent of the doctor related to his being from near the Austrian/Czechoslovakian border. The doctor explained that he had spent much time around a vineyard that was taken over by the Nazis, had been conscripted, and served as a U-Boat medical officer. They next realized that they had been involved the same waters, albeit from different perspectives, during the Battle of the Atlantic, off the east coast of Canada and Newfoundland.

As if this was not incredulous enough, the doctor then said that he once watched the crew of HMCS Arrowhead, through a periscope, ‘fishing with dynamite off of Goose Bay’. Martin had to leave, but as he thought more about the amazing coincidence he wondered why the U-Boat had not fired on them. He later tried to find the doctor, but the sanatorium was a large facility and people were transient, so his efforts were not successful.

continued...

Over the years, Martin would recount this coincidence of events, but was often met with skepticism. He had also overheard German being spoken at a local 'tennis club' in Quebec City during a break in convoy duty, and he explained that the extensive Canadian and Newfoundland coast was difficult to patrol.

"It was pretty nervy of them, but there was no way to protect our shorelines at all."

In November 2012, the story was covered by the *Prince Albert Daily Herald*. The article was forwarded to the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, given the recent announcement of what appears to be U-Boat discovery in the Churchill River near Muskrat Falls by Brian Corbin and Raymond Pinksen (www.labradoruboot.ca).


As a volunteer researcher supporting Corbin and Pinksen, I contacted Martin to learn more of the details of this encounter on the nearby coast. The encounter demonstrated U-Boats were

venturing farther inland than believed. It also raised questions as why a U-Boat fire wouldn't on a corvette, its nemesis, at sea.

I continued to investigate, as there was a possible relationship to the wreck discovered near Muskrat Falls. In April 2013, I travelled to Saskatchewan to work more closely with Martin to gather his recollections and those of other veterans, and peruse the archives of the

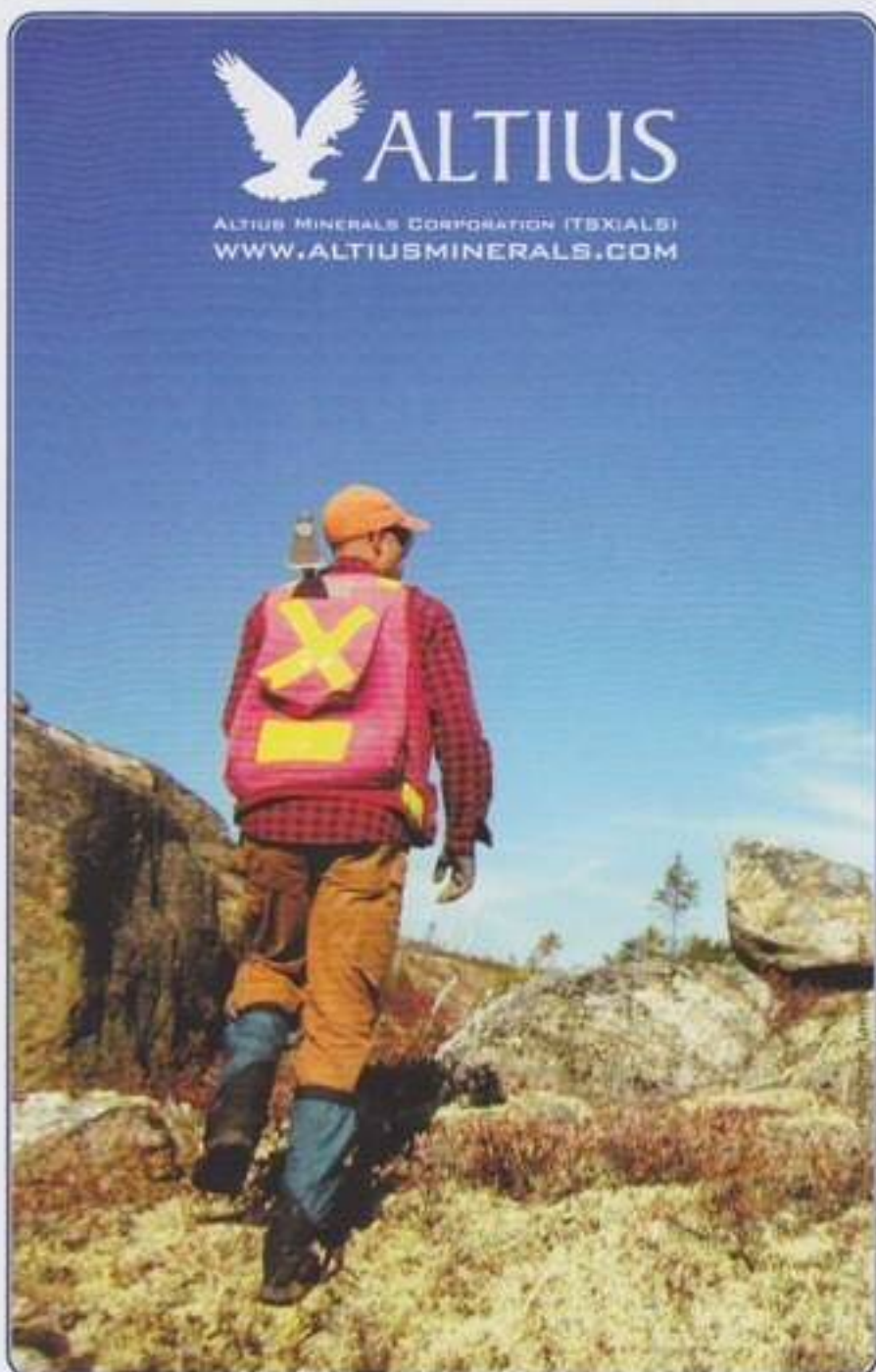
Prince Albert Historical Society. Together, we identified a list of doctors who could have overseen that X-ray in 1954.

Unfortunately, none of the names could be traced to available German U-Boat crew lists from the Second World War. However, the progress of the collaboration was reported again by the *Daily Herald* and, for the first time, in *The National Post*.



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These articles caught the attention of Barbara Ishler in Alberta, the daughter of the Arrowhead's Chief Gunnery Officer, Jack Wampler, who had passed away two years earlier.

Wampler was the unofficial photographer on the Arrowhead, so Ishler was able to provide images of their life at sea; the ship's mascot Hamilton, a Labrador husky from the Goose Bay area; and scenes from that fateful day of fishing along the coast. She then linked everyone together with other surviving members from the ship and/or their family and friends – some of whom were able to confirm at least the 'fishing trip' component of Martin's mystery.

In pursuit of the identity of the doctor, I forwarded a short list of names collected from the Prince Albert archives to Ishler. Thanks to her advanced Internet search skills, within one week, she succeeded in finding the missing doctor - Ernst Oskar Henschel - in a tribute to "Milwaukee's Medical Giants." Unfortunately the doctor had died in Wisconsin in 1979, but the description of his life matched Martin's story.

Dr. Henschel was originally from

Vienna, Austria, spent a great deal of time on a family farm in Czechoslovakia and had received his medical degree from the German Charles University in Prague. He was in the Kriegsmarine and served as a medical officer on a U-Boat. He and his wife, Ann Bardeen, attempted to immigrate to the United States, but were blocked for several years as he had been associated with the German Forces. So he worked in Saskatchewan, treating tuberculosis patients - a condition he understood well as he had also contracted the disease attending to patients from Poland during the war. He moved from Prince Albert to Saskatoon in 1954, shortly after he had encountered Martin.

With great excitement, Barbara and I next located one of the doctor's daughters in Wisconsin - where the Henschel's had settled in 1960. Finally, the introductory telephone call from Labrador to Kira Henschel was made on May 25, 2013, explaining the chance meeting many years earlier in Prince Albert. The question was also posed as to why her father and fellow U-Boat crew had not fired on HMCS Arrowhead in 1944.

continued...



Ernst Oskar Henschel served as a medical officer on a German U-Boat off the coast of Labrador. Below: HMCS Arrowhead.

(Photos submitted)



That evening, Glenn Martin received the international call he had been waiting for, and the perfect corroboration of the details from his memory. Over the past few months, researchers have continued to work with German authorities in Berlin and a trunk full of papers, photos and film tracing the history of the U-Boat doctor from Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Wales, Saskatchewan, and finally Wisconsin.

Dr. Henschel's daughters are learning much about the history of their famous father, but still have not tracked down his military service records. Nevertheless, several members of the Arrowhead family, and Kira Henschel, met in Prince Albert this past October. The weekend was a great opportunity to compare notes and further explore the outstanding elements around the fall of 1944 and the amazing coincidence a decade later.

There are several connections to the Arrowhead across Canada, and more

continue to emerge. Those involved in what has now become an international research group plan to move forward with their efforts to learn more of the particulars around Dr. Henschel's Labrador tour of duty on a U-Boat while attending medical school in Prague, to further plot the movements of the Arrowhead during the Quebec-Goose Bay convoys late in 1944; and to investigate whether there is a relationship between this encounter and the possible U-Boat discovery near Muskrat Falls.

Editor's Note: The writer would like to acknowledge other researchers in North America for their efforts in making this story possible, namely Glenn Martin, Barbara Ishler, Kira Henschel and Mary Ann Bibby. ☺

LEFT: Barbara Ishler with a photo taken by her father, Jack Wampler, of the Arrowhead's mascot, Hamilton, a Labrador husky.

