

Metal Industries - Hamilton, Ontario

Ross Alfred Somerville, Leading Coder, RCNVR served Canada on four ships during the period 1941 to 1945: **HMCS Quinte**, **HMCS Morden**, **HMCS St. Thomas** and **HMCS Stettler**. He was on **HMCS Stettler** from the

initial workups in August 1944 until it was the last warship to cross the Atlantic carrying Canadians home from Londonderry to Halifax in August of 1945.

Prior to and during the war he and his two brothers and one sister worked at Metal Industries, the business co-owned by their father Alfred Somerville.

In recollections that he wrote in 1995, Ross noted that Metal Industries produced lantern standards for the High Level Bridge in Hamilton, the fountain for the King Edward Hotel, lamps for carnivals, thousands of shoe stands, and lighting for the Capitol and Palace Theatres. They also refinished the iconic Birks clock in Hamilton and the crystal chandeliers of the Basilica. And as you can see from the example here in the Stettler Legion, they also



The Birks clock.

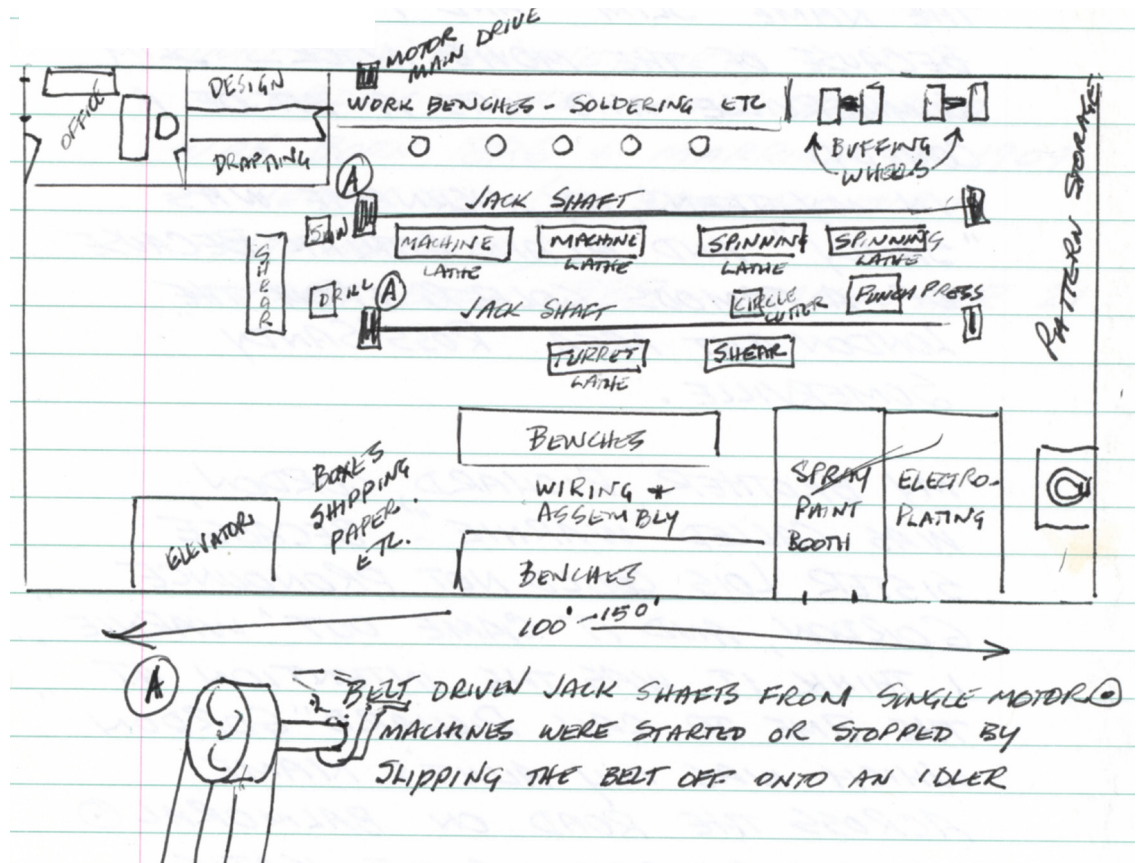


High Level Bridge lantern

made emergency lamps for corvettes. Ross recalled that *"Moodie of the Moodie Knitting Mills used to bring the hood ornament off his car hood to have it gold plated once in a while. I remember once a Salvation Army officer brought in a miniature guillotine made by a prisoner on Devil's Island to have Dad fix it"*. He also recalled silver coins being used for electroplating: *"To silver plate, Dad used to use new silver coins as anodes in the plating tank and before they wore down he would pay the workers with them."*

Ross quit school at 16 to work at his father's shop - there was no favouritism; he made 13 cents an hour and was the lowest paid

in the shop. His brothers Bill and Richard (Dick) also worked on the floor of the shop, and his sister Jeanne was the Office Manager. Ross drew a picture of the shop, shown to the right. Like many shops of that period, one motor powered all of the machines in the shop via jack shafts that ran the length of the working area.



Ross described his job at Metal Industries: "I worked in the assembly room most of the time, wiring sockets, plugs, and putting lamps together. Once in awhile I got to run the machines - a turret lathe, making finials for the top of lamps. The turret would drill, tap (thread), shape, and cut off. The finial was made from brass rod. I also ran the punch press, stamping out plates to hold shoes on shoe racks for display in shoe store windows." In 2017 Dick recalled working with his big brother Bill: "I worked in my Dad's shop, as a summer student when I was 14 and 15. And course that way I worked with my brother Bill, because he was permanently employed there, Course my Dad when he died in '43, Bill didn't get along with many people, and as soon as my Dad died he was out of there. He joined the Navy. And a lot of things that happened...I used to help Bill as a summer student and he was a metal spinner. And amazingly, you know, they have these copper discs, they'd already been cut out, and they'd centre punch it, and as this lathe was running, he'd hang onto this thing and then suddenly, he'd put the tail stock into it, and the thing's spinning...And he got a bad - I wasn't there at the time, but the thing flipped out and caught him on the hand, and cut his fingers badly. Anyway, one day, my Dad was on holidays, he used to go to Muskoka for the week; and so of course I'm helping Bill, I was the annealer. He had a big steel plate on the floor, and I had this live gas torch. And Bill would do these things in stages. You know he'd work the thing down so far on a matching mold, that he put on ahead of time, like a wooden mold, and then I'd have maybe 15 or 20 of these things to anneal. I had to get them cherry red, and of course I'm working away there, and 'cause my Dad's away I can't remember the name of the guy, but the boss comes down, he says to me "there's a truck come in, go down and unload it." And I said OK. And I said to Bill I'm going down to unload the truck. And Bill says "no I'll go down, you keep annealing". So anyway shortly after that this guy come around, says "where's Bill?: how come you're not down at the truck?" And I said "well Bill went down, because I'm behind." He gave Bill shit. Bill took no shit from anyone. So he just walked out. So my Dad comes home after his holidays, on a Saturday afternoon sometime, and first thing he says to me is "how's the shop going?". Weeeeelll, I says "Bill quit." "What do you mean Bill quit?" "Well, I said, he got in an argument with so and so, and Bill just walked out." So of course, Dad takes off. My Mother, she gave me shit. "Listen, she says; when your Dad's on his holidays, don't you tell him a thing about that job!". Well I says (laughing) "he asked me!" "I don't care", she says, "you tell him it's running fine!". Anyway, Bill was back to work on Monday. And he was right, I couldn't even see why the thing got started, I think that they guy who was bossing people around thought when he says something, you don't change it. I don't care if it buggers it up.

It was a big experience for me, because as a young guy, I'm working in a factory. And I don't remember; he put me on a punch press; that punched out various holes for the lantern doors, and the guy that set me up wasn't Bill, I remember; it was the first year I ever went there; and he says "well - you slide this in there; there's guides in there, and then he says; you take your hands out, you step on the treadle. And of course it was all belt driven. Everything in there was off one live drive. And he says you'll hear a dog come out; that's what that foot thing does; comes out of that big wheel. A big open sucker. And he says, as soon as you hear that "click click" your hands are going to be nowhere near that machine. And he says "I don't care whether you've got it in cockeyed, or flipped out, or whatever the hell." He says "do not put your hands near there". Because down come this bloody big punch press - BANG! So anyway, I remember years later, when I got involved in our machinery, how the safety features came along. I'm thinking "yeah, it's probably a good idea".

I worked for my Dad in his shop two summers as a summer student, and I was probably getting 15 or some cents an hour and my mother said to me, the last summer I worked there before, she said to me one day she says "now, you talk to your Dad. You tell him you're going to make 25 cents an hour at the flower shop so you're not going to work for him this summer." I looked at her - I knew that the driver at the flower shop permanently was making 25 cents. I thought that was out of the world. "Nope", she says "you tell him." So I took a few weeks to get up enough nerve. He used to pick me up at the Tech and one day I said to him "Dad, I'm not going to work for you this summer because I'm going to make 25 cents at the flower shop." And he didn't answer me. So we get home, he's pretty quiet - next day when he picked me up he says right away "you're working at the shop - gonna pay you 25 cents." So I get home and I'm all excited. I say to Mom "wow he's going to pay me 25 cents -" She says "I knew he would; you just had to tell him!" (Laughs) "otherwise," she says "he wouldn't pay you!". Isn't that something?

So of course I worked there 2 years, of course I got to know Bill well, because he worked there permanently, I got to be his helper. And he looked after me, and that was valuable time to me."

Alfred Somerville died of a heart attack in 1943 while Ross was at sea on **HMCS Morden**. Bill then quit Metal Industries and joined the Navy, serving on **HMCS Grou** until the end of the war. Dick, being younger, joined the Sea Cadets but the war ended when he was 17 1/2 years old so he did not see active service. Not long after that John Mills purchased the name and assets of Metal Industries. Mills Architectural Lighting is still in operation.



Metal Industries Buoy Lamp



Metal Industries Starboard Lantern



Metal Industries Overtaking Lantern



Metal Industries Masthead Lantern (from **HMCS Stettler**).



Metal Industries Port and Starboard Lanterns



Jeanne Somerville



Nell and Alfred Somerville



Richard (Dick) Somerville



Bill and Ross Somerville

HMCS Stettler



Postcard of HMCS Stettler.



Officers of **HMCS Stettler**: Front: SLt Francis, Lt Brown, Lt Dalton. Rear: Lt Robinson, SLt Menzies, Lt (E) Padgett, LCdr King, - C.O., Lt Toller - 1st Lt, Lt Quimet, Lt (P) Simpson.



Some of the **HMCS Stettler** crew. Ross Somerville 5th from left in top row.



Looking aft on **HMCS Stettler**.



Depth charge astern of **HMCS Stettler**.



Torpedo damaged ships, Dover, England as seen from **HMCS Stettler**.

S. 1320f

NAVAL MESSAGE

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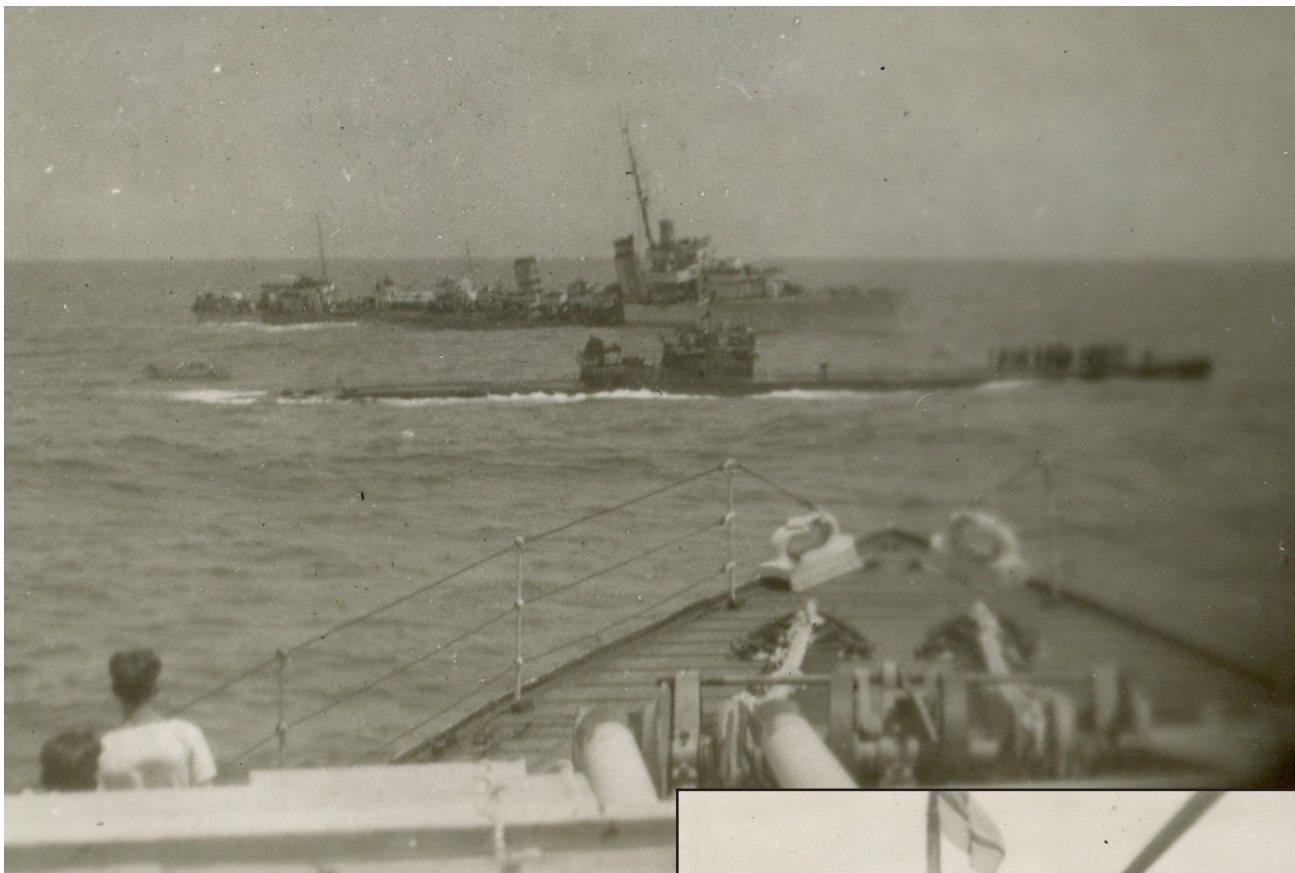
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7/5/45

The Naval Message indicating the end of the war, received on HMCS Stettler and decoded and recorded by Ross Somerville.



HMCS Stettler approaching surrendered U-boat.

Right: Aboard the surrendered U-boat at sea.

