

Mark Simonsen sent out a Group Emailing on 15 September 2014 to all the CNDA Members, stating that Andre Desrochers had donated a large Dive/Surf Board(it is in fact an RCN Paddle Board, vintage 1950's) to FDU(A) a couple of years ago, and it had been mounted on the wall up by the Training Tank. Mark believes it was used back in the 1950/1960's era for surface swimmer type attacks. He would like to get a talley plate made for it, describing what, who, when, where & why it was used, or any other pertinent info you guys can give me – thanks.

Chuck Rolfe forwarded Mark Simonsen's email request to all the Ottawa Members, and to Haydn iuchi-sutton in Switzerland for their information, and replied to Mark that when Chuck was the Editor of the DIPPERS DIGEST back in the 1990's, the late CPO Dave Pilot told him the story of Lawlors Island back in the early 1950's, when most of the DV(Divers) were sent there for training on an assault course and Paddle Boards. Ordnance Officer/Diving Officer the late LCdr Don Loney was one of the Officers conducting this training, and he informed me(see his story in DIPPERS DIGEST #7, 15 September 1991) that in 1952, some person in higher authority decided that Divers had to be in good shape, therefore a decision was forthcoming that a training and conditioning Unit was to be established on Lawlors Island, which is on the Eastern Passage NS side of Halifax Harbour. Part of the scheme was to build an obstacle course, which in due course was finished and then put into heavy use. This, together with lots of exercise on the Paddle Boards(they had been borrowed from the USN "Frogmen"), consisted of the majority of their physical training. C1DV4 John Brown i/c as Chief Instructor, P1DV3 Keith Powers for Hell Week Instructor, LSDV2 Bruce Robinson and LSDV2 Dave Pilot were some of the RCN Divers involved with this course on Lawlors Island. Chuck Rolfe also stated that the photos taken on this course can be found on our website navydiver.ca in the Scrapbook file, go to **CNDA ALBUM 1** to find photo # 9 of 72, then go to **VINTAGE PHOTO ALBUM by Chuck Rolfe** to find 9 photos:- 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67 and 71 & 72 of 72 pictures for reproduction to go on the exhibit. Additionally, at a later date, there was an actual Divers attack on York Redoubt from both the land, and from the sea(with Paddle Boards), in which one of the Commissionaires standing Watch believed it was the start of World War Three, and had a heart attack – story to be told later. Mark, you are to be commended for wanting to get the full story behind this Paddle Board and Lawlors Island training! If we don't get it down in writing from this generation of RCN Divers, it will eventually be lost in antiquity.

Jack Lewis contacted us to let us know that he believes Jim Balmforth out on the West Coast would be a good contact about Paddle Boards, since he may have been a part of the story. Jim would have much information from the early 1950's, and has a lot to tell of what occurred then.

RED LARSEN contacted us that there were two of these Paddle Boards at the West Coast Unit when he and Jim Balmforth arrived there in 1954. He doesn't really remember any activity using them, but maybe Jim does. It also seems to me that Jim mentioned that he actually had one in his possession at one time – perhaps he could let you know about this.

Jim Balmforth contacted us to let us know that it is interesting to hear about the Paddle Boards used on the East Coast back in the early 50's. Perhaps around 1954/55, the West Coast Unit's Commanding Officer, LCdr Phil Henry had a visit by his good friend, the late LCdr Don Loney, and I was tasked to try an attack at night in Nanoose Bay on a ship anchored at the end of the Bay. The three of us arrived around midnight as I recall, and I was launched on a Paddle Board from the end of the breakwater. I paddled for a couple of hours but, because of the strong tidal current, I was not successful, and returned to the

breakwater. As far I know, they were never used again for this task. As a point of interest, while on the East Coast in the late 1950's, the Diving Unit was scrapping the Paddle Boards, so I got one, painted it light blue, put a Woody Woodpecker decal on the front end and it was used by my young children at the lake for some time.

Haydn iuchi-sutton contacted Mark Simonsen to say that it is great to learn that one of the Paddle Boards has survived, and is on display. As Chuck Rolfe mentioned, I am an amateur historian who has been doing a bit of research on the broader topic, so maybe I can shed a tiny bit of light on the subject for anyone who was unaware of the Paddle Board history. The article in DIPPERS DIGEST that Chuck mentioned is a great read and quite humorous; highly recommended! (Divers attack on York Redoubt). The Military application of Paddle Boards is very much a Canadian thing. It started in the early days of World War Two with a junior Officer in the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve, the late LCdr Bruce Wright (read his book, THE FROGMEN OF BURMA). He was temporarily tasked with skipping one of the clapped-out boats being used for the St. John's NFLD harbour entrance net defenses, which gave him ample time to ponder how best an enemy might sneak into his harbour. It so happened that he was an accomplished competitive swimmer, who had read an article about how fishermen in California USA dived for abalone wearing goggles and swimfins. They used Paddle Boards, which are similar to surfboards, but longer and more tapered at the rear, and propelled by the arms – often with small paddles attached to the hands. He put two and two together, and an idea was born; Wright reasoned that a swimmer on one of these boards could tow an explosive charge into the harbour undetected, evading the hydrophone and magnetic detection loops, and negotiating the nets as he went. Wright developed his idea and submitted it for consideration. It took a while, but he was eventually called to London to explain his idea to none other than Lord Louis Mountbatten. This was at a time when the desperate situation led to the creation of several "Special Forces" units, and he was authorized to form a unit from the Royal Marines. Most were poor swimmers, however he persevered, making them into a world class unit. He was a contemporary and associate of some notables, including Major 'Jumbo' Courtney (father of wartime {Army} S.B.S.), and LCdr Nigel Willmott (father of Combined Operations Pilotage Parties-COPP). The greatest influence, and very much two-way, was probably Major 'Blondie' Hasler, who led the "Cockleshell Heroes" raid on Bordeaux, France. Wright introduced Hasler to Paddle Boards, and Hasler introduced Wright to underwater breathing apparatus. Wright's new unit was called the Sea Reconnaissance Unit (SRU) and was tasked both with beach reconnaissance and attacks on shipping. There was always a warm-water training emphasis, with much of it being conducted in California and in Bermuda, where the SRU almost certainly had a direct influence (but hard to prove) on the American swimmer units of that time, specifically the OSS maritime unit and the UDT; in post-war terms, that meant the CIA and SEALs. The SRU was held in reserve during the Normandy invasion, but the honour of beach reconnaissance went to the COPP's. Realizing that there wasn't much for his swimmers unit in Europe after D-Day, Wright took the SRU to Ceylon, where it joined with Hasler and other SBS, COPP, OSS (Office of Strategic Services), SOE (Special Operations Executive) and Royal Marine Detachment 385. This is where the SRU came into its own, swimming reconnaissance across the Irrawaddy River to allow their men to cross in 1945 against the enemy. The Paddle Boards, goggles and breathing apparatus were soon discarded for this mission, but the successful task was only possible due to the exceptional training under Wright's command. Amazingly, the unit did not lose a single man! Like almost all Special Units, it was disbanded at war's end, with Wright returning home to Canada. And like the COPP's & RN Det-385, the story of the SRU was virtually unknown for many years, and they have never enjoyed the limelight of units who actually attacked ships. As we all know, recognition often does not match the deed! What's been said so far, can be found in Bruce Wright's book "THE FROGMEN OF BURMA, the Story of the Sea Reconnaissance Unit", Published by William Kimber (1970). It's a great read. The post war history of Paddle Boards is even less documented, or acknowledged. There are two lineages, both of which can be

said to come directly from Wright. The first was what we call the British Small Boats Service(SBS)today. The post-war SBS was part of the Royal Marines, and very much based on Blondie Hasler's ideas. They trained with Paddle Boards into the 1950's, specifically for ship attack. I am told by the former SBS swimmer/canoists, that they stopped training with them when they decided that radars had become too much of a problem. One must keep in mind that all those I have recently discussed this with are from the more modern era than back in the 1940/1950's. A slight clarification is required here; the Royal Navy Clearance Diver Branch never trained with Paddle Boards as far as I know – they got their ideas from the Wartime Chariot, X-Craft and P-Party company lineage. Then there is the other lineage, the occasional resurgence of interest within the Canadian Navy Diving Branch, which explains the Paddle Board here. I'll have to dig out my notes from trawling your Newsletter, DIPPERS DIGEST's(thanks to Chuck again!), but there seems to have been times at least when, for a brief period, there were attempts to reintroduce this skill as the Canadian way of doing things, once in the mid 1950's, and again at the end of the 1960's. Neither attempt lasted long, although the reasons were partly financial, I think. Plus a lack of imagination among bureaucrats, I expect too.

The late **Stan Stephenson**, when writing the story of YMT 7 in DIPPERS DIGEST #19 on 15 September 1994(7 Boat was talking as itself in the first person), that the amalgamation of Standard Dress Divers with the Swimmer Divers had gone pretty smoothly. All the Clearance Divers were now capable of surface air supplied diving, self-contained mixed gas diving, salvage diving, using underwater cutting and welding gear, surface and underwater explosives, ID and disposal of underwater ordnance. The first requirement was then to get all the boys into shape to do these tasks, in the Summer of 1954. A Gate Vessel was moved to the jetty at Lawlors Island, after which an assault course was set up, which went around the derelict World War Two hospital(Lawlors was a Quarantine island for VD and other exotic, hard to treat diseases for a number of years in the 1940's), and this was how we spent our Summer.

Chuck Wilson wrote that I seem to remember that sometime in the early 1970's Roger "Butch" Boucher and Wayne MacDonald used a surfboard(Paddle Board?)to conduct a couple of night attacks while on the Attack Team. They weren't too successful, due to the ship's boats crews patrolling the area.

Gary Reddy wrote on 16 September 2014 that Mark Simonsen attempted an attack during a SABEX in the early 1980's, using an early version of a sea kayak. Outcome was similar, but it added a great diversion to the evenings activities!

Mark Simonsen replied to thank Gary Reddy for bringing up the tale of my sea kayak adventure. Kevin McNamara was my wingman, and we had great fun! Surprisingly, we got within 100 yards before we were seen, and then everything went crazy aboard the ship, with people running around screaming like crazy – it looked like a Chinese Fire Drill, only more amusing. We ducked under the jetty cambers, leading them on a merry hide and go seek for about an hour or so, before turning ourselves in, to our by then pissed off and embarrassed captors. When I was on my Basic Clearance Diver course out West, we found a washed up sea kayak, which I immediately took possession, putting it on our Dive Boat to take back to the Unit. At the end of the course I had it shipped back East. I painted the small kayak in a camouflage pattern and used it extensively for duck and goose hunting around Chezzetcook, Conrads Beach in Lawrencetown, and the Cole Harbour dikes. I had quite a few bird meals due to that little stealth craft. I ended up giving it to Kevin Muise when my hunting days started to interfere with my sons early morning hockey practices. Terry Havlik took a mould of it, selling quite a few copies to other duck hunters on the East Coast.