

**The Cadillacs of the Canadian Fleet:
Exploring Public Perceptions of the St. Laurent-Class of
Ship in the Early Cold War Period**

by
Sarah Taylor

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Introduction

Considered the “Cadillacs” of the fleet, the St. Laurent-class were the first warships to be designed and built in Canada. Intended for anti-submarine warfare, these destroyer escorts represented a move away from the navy’s previous reliance on the Royal Navy for shipbuilding and design, and provided an opportunity for Canadian innovation to flourish when they were built. The seven ships of the St. Laurent-class were heralded as some of the most efficient anti-submarine warfare ships in the world, and laid the foundation for the Royal Canadian Navy ships that followed including the Restigouche-class. As the service of these ships spanned nearly forty years, there are many different aspects of the St. Laurent-class that can be studied.

This thesis will explore the importance of these seven ships to Canadians in the 1950s by examining the portrayals of these ships in local media accounts. In particular, this examination will focus on how the St. Laurent-class ships were consistently presented in a positive light in newspaper articles and how such positive portrayals could have influenced the opinion of the general public towards this new class of ship. Drawing on newspaper articles published in Canadian newspapers in the mid to late 1950s, this thesis will also demonstrate how the ships were frequently portrayed in a non-critical light to the public, especially in articles written by reporters who had spent time on the ships during pre-commissioning sailings. It will also explore some of the difficulties in examining certain portrayals of the ships of the St. Laurent-class in articles that reproduce passages from government publications, such as commissioning booklets, as these reproductions are not personalized accounts, and thus do not provide any insight into the authors’ opinions on the ships.

In addition to examining the newspaper articles themselves, this thesis will also examine advertisements placed in newspapers around the commissioning of HMCS SKEENA and HMCS FRASER. It will use these advertisements to show how local businesses and municipalities welcomed the arrival of the new destroyer escorts, and exploited the occasion for their own economic gain to attract additional customers, particularly navy personnel and their supporters, by publically associating themselves with the navy's newest ships. Through the examination of these primary sources, this thesis will endeavor to demonstrate how positive, non-critical portrayals of the St. Laurent-class in the newspaper articles and advertisements are linked to the public perceptions of the ships and the navy.

A Brief Overview of the St. Laurent-Class

The ships of the St. Laurent-class were designed to combat the threat of enemy submarines, inspired by the German threat during the Second World War.¹ As Michael A. Hennessy points out in his chapter "Fleet Replacement and the Crisis of Identity," the goal was not to repeat the Battle of Atlantic, but to inhibit Soviet submarines from reaching or firing upon North America.² As early as 1946, the Soviet Union had already been identified as the next "enemy" for Canada.³ With concerns mounting about Russia's naval capabilities, anti-submarine warfare became the focus of the post-war Royal

¹ Michael A. Hennessy, "Fleet Replacement and the Crisis of Identity," in *A Nation's Navy: In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity*, ed. by Michael L. Hadley, Rob Huebert and Fred W. Crickard (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 135.

² *Ibid.*, 135, 138.

³ Mathwin S. Davis, "The St. Laurent Decision: Genesis of a Canadian Fleet," in *The RCN in Transition: 1910-1985*, ed. by W.A.B. Douglas (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 1988), 203.

Canadian Navy.⁴ This does not mean that the Royal Canadian Navy's new ships were not expected to spend time in the North Atlantic, because, as Peter T. Haydon points out in his article "Sailors, Admirals, and Politicians: The Search for Identity after the War", the Royal Canadian Navy's role as assigned by NATO was to focus on "'anti-submarine and convoy escort work' across the North Atlantic," suggesting that the navy was in need, not only of a ship with excellent anti-submarine warfare capabilities, but one that could endure the harsh conditions in the North Atlantic as well.⁵ These Cold War concerns would lead to the largest growth in a peacetime navy that Canada had ever seen, an expansion which included the St. Laurent-class.⁶ In his book *Canada's Navy: The First Century*, Marc Milner praises the very "decision to build the St. Laurents," as "one of the most remarkable industrial and technological commitments Canada has ever made as a nation," which was an endeavour that continued to inspire as Canadian ships were planned and built in Canada.⁷

Nicknamed "the Cadillacs" by the men who served on them, the crew of the St. Laurent-class ships slept in bunks not hammocks.⁸ Luxuries on board included "foam mattresses," to sleep on and an ice cream machine in the galley.⁹ These "Cadillacs" of the fleet were designed differently with "rounded lines" to help "ward...off atomic fall-out,"

⁴ Mathwin S. Davis, "The St. Laurent Decision, 196.

⁵ Peter T. Haydon, "Sailors, Admirals, and Politicians: The Search for Identity after the War," in *A Nation's Navy: In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity*, ed. Michael L. Hadley, Rob Huebert and Fred W. Crickard (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 228.

⁶ David Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific: The Royal Canadian Navy's West Coast Fleet in the Early Cold War*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), 7.

⁷ Marc Milner, *Canada's Navy: The First Century*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 183

⁸ Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific*, 88. ; CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum Archives (hereafter CENMA), HMCS ASSINIBOINE file, commissioning book, "The Commissioning of HMCS ASSINIBOINE at Marine Industries Ltd., Sorel, P.Q. August 16, 1956," 9.

⁹ CENMA, HMCS ASSINIBOINE file, commissioning book, "The Commissioning of HMCS ASSINIBOINE at Marine Industries Ltd., Sorel, P.Q. August 16, 1956," 9.

and prevent ice from building up on the vessel.¹⁰ For attacking hostile submarines, the ships of the St. Laurent-class were equipped with “limbo mortars and homing torpedoes,” although the range of both weapons ultimately hindered the ships’ ability to fulfill their anti-submarine purpose.¹¹ The ships themselves were built using the “[u]nit construction” approach.¹² Described as a “Canadian technique,” the idea with unit construction was not to build the ship from the bottom, or keel, up, but rather to build the pieces separately, in units, and assemble them afterwards.¹³ This technique would allow for faster production of the required ships in a time of crisis.¹⁴ One estimate indicated that “Canadian shipyards could turn out seven St. Laurents every three years.”¹⁵

The first ship of the class, HMCS ST. LAURENT, was built in Montreal and commissioned in October of 1955.¹⁶ Named for the Saint Lawrence river where the ship was going to be built, the name ST. LAURENT was chosen, in part, to help generate support for the navy in Quebec.¹⁷ HMCS ASSINIBOINE was commissioned in August of the following year, followed by HMCS OTTAWA in November 1956 and HMCS SAGUENAY in December.¹⁸ In March of 1957, the first ship of the class to be built on the west coast, HMCS SKEENA was commissioned followed by HMCS FRASER in

¹⁰ CENMA, HMCS ASSINIBOINE file, commissioning book, “The Commissioning of HMCS ASSINIBOINE at Marine Industries Ltd., Sorel, P.Q. August 16, 1956,” 5.

¹¹ Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific*, 157.

¹² CENMA, HMCS ASSINIBOINE file, commissioning book, “The Commissioning of HMCS ASSINIBOINE at Marine Industries Ltd., Sorel, P.Q. August 16, 1956,” 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Haydon, “Sailors, Admirals, and Politicians,” 230.

¹⁶ Ken Macpherson and John Burgess, *The Ships of Canada’s Naval Forces 1910-1981: A complete pictorial history of Canadian warships*, (Toronto: Collins Publishers), 164.

¹⁷ Milner, *Canada’s Navy*, 183.

¹⁸ Macpherson and Burgess, *The Ships of Canada’s Naval Forces*, 163-164.

June.¹⁹ The final ship of the St. Laurent-class to be commissioned was HMCS MARGAREE, which was built in Halifax and commissioned in October of 1957.²⁰ Much praise was given to the ships upon their arrival. For example, a speech made by the Minister of Fisheries, Jim Sinclair, at the commissioning of SKEENA, heralded the “destroyer escorts,” as “the most outstanding of,” the “new warships,” adding that it was a ship that “all Canadians [could] be proud,” of.²¹ The documentary film *An Enduring Tradition*, created for the 50th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Navy in 1960, also praises the arrival of the St. Laurent-class declaring that “[t]hese fast, modern warships of all Canadian design and construction brought the Canadian navy into the nuclear age.”²²

While they were also praised in period newspaper accounts, modern historians are more critical of the merits of the St. Laurent-class of ship. Milner argues that “[t]he St. Laurents, despite the hype surrounding them, proved to be disappointing anti-submarine vessels whose ‘effectiveness against modern submarines proved marginal,’” a problem that he links to the short range of the sonar and weapons onboard.²³ Hennessy also reflects negatively on the newly commissioned ships of the St. Laurent-class, noting that although the destroyer escorts were costly they were not particularly efficient when it came to fighting modern submarines, adding that refits were considered not too long after the ships were commissioned.²⁴ David Zimmerman also discusses the inefficiency of the St. Laurent-class in his book *Maritime Command Pacific: The Royal Canadian Navy's*

¹⁹ Macpherson and Burgess, *The Ships of Canada's Naval Forces*, 163-164.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

²¹ “Skeena: First of Class on West Coast,” *Crowsnest*, April 1957, 5-7.

²² *An Enduring Tradition*, online, directed by Kirk Jones (National Film Board of Canada, 1960), http://www.nfb.ca/film/an_enduring_tradition (accessed September 16, 2015).

²³ Milner, *Canada's Navy*, 222.

²⁴ Hennessy, “Fleet Replacement,” 140.

West Coast Fleet in the Early Cold War, pointing out that even before they were commissioned, the Royal Canadian Navy knew there would be problems with the St. Laurent-class.²⁵ In particular he draws attention to the sonar, which was not as capable as variable depth sonar for detecting submarines and the insufficient range of the equipped “limbo mortars and homing torpedoes,” onboard the ships, which “made up [their] antisubmarine armament.”²⁶ Such limitations meant that the ships could be left exposed to counterattacks by the very submarines they were meant to be hunting.²⁷ Milner goes on to suggest that that the Royal Canadian Navy knew by at least 1957 that the St. Laurent-class of ships needed to be modified to better operate as anti-submarine warfare vessels.²⁸

The haste to update the Royal Canadian Navy’s anti-submarine warfare destroyers did not go unnoticed, as one *Vancouver Sun* article demonstrates.²⁹ Bob Porter’s article “Only Eight Years Afloat, Our Warship is Obsolete” notes that ST. LAURENT is going in for a refit, before lamenting that the young ship is a “casualty in the battle of progress,” and that “[t]he navy has decided she is obsolete after only eight years afloat.”³⁰ Despite acknowledging in his article that the ship was undergoing important renovations needed to improve its anti-submarine warfare capabilities, Porter appears sympathetic to the plight of the ST. LAURENT.³¹ His word choice implies a damaged vessel, noting that the ship will “limp into Vancouver harbor” the following weekend, “looking as if she came

²⁵ Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific*, 156.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Milner, *Canada’s Navy*, 223.

²⁹ Bob Porter, “Only Eight Years Afloat, Our Warship is Obsolete,” *Vancouver Sun*, October 29, 1962, 25.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

out second best in a naval battle,” indicating that the once state of the art ship has suffered a fall in stature.³² Several of the planned upgrades Porter mentions in his article including “long-range electronic submarine detection gear,” address some of the problems identified by Milner and Zimmerman, suggesting that even if the limitations of the St. Laurent-class were not discussed publically in newspaper articles, they were still acknowledged by the Royal Canadian Navy itself.³³

Despite their modern design, advancements in submarine production meant that the weapons onboard the St. Laurent-class destroyer escorts also required updating soon after their completion.³⁴ The seven ships were modified to have helicopter carrying capabilities beginning with ASSINIBOINE.³⁵ ASSINIBOINE was recommissioned in 1963 once the conversion was completed.³⁶ The rest of the ships of the class underwent the conversion in the 1960s and were assigned to the East Coast once it was completed.³⁷ The ships of the St. Laurent-class served in the Royal Canadian Navy for a number of years. The first ship of the seven to be decommissioned was also the first to be commissioned, HMCS ST. LAURENT, which was paid off in 1974 and eventually sold for scrap and lost at sea during a storm.³⁸ One of the last ships of the class to be paid off was SKEENA in 1993.³⁹ An article published in *Trident* shortly after SKEENA was paid off laments that as well

³² Bob Porter, “Only Eight Years Afloat, Our Warship is Obsolete,” *Vancouver Sun*, October 29, 1962, 25.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Shawn Cafferky. *Uncharted Waters: A History of the Canadian Helicopter-Carrying Destroyer* (Halifax: The Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, 2005), 168.

³⁵ J.H.W. Knox, “An Engineer’s Outline of RCN History: Part II,” in *RCN in Retrospect, 1910-1968*, ed. James A. Boutillier (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1982), 326.

³⁶ Macpherson and Burgess, *The Ships of Canada’s Naval Forces*, 163.

³⁷ Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific*, 158.

³⁸ Macpherson and Burgess, *The Ships of Canada’s Naval Forces*, 164.

³⁹ Kim Paterson, “The navy says goodbye to an old friend,” *Trident*, November 4, 1993, 3.

as being a part of the famed St. Laurent-class of ship, SKEENA “was the last ship to fire a mortar round in the Canadian navy,” and her departure “marked the end of the era.”⁴⁰

While the St. Laurent-class of ship is notable itself a unique moment in Canadian naval history, it is also remarkable for the number of improved anti-submarine warfare ships in the Royal Canadian Navy that it inspired. The seven ships of the Restigouche class were “slightly modified St. Laurents”.⁴¹ The two types of ships have such a closely interwoven origin that when referring to the classes of ship Milner calls the St. Laurent-class the “original seven” with the second set of seven, the Restigouche-class, in service less than two years after the ships of the St. Laurent-class.⁴² The Restigouche-class of ships “were more powerful,” than the earlier St. Laurent-class ships they had been based on, and with better range for its armament.⁴³ The next group of similar ships “the four repeat Restigouche-class ships,” were later renamed the Mackenzie-class.⁴⁴ The two ships of the Annapolis-class hold the distinction of being “the first Canadian ships designed from the keel up as helicopter-carrying ships,” and HMCS ANNAPOLIS was the last ship to be built as part “of the postwar construction program.”⁴⁵ The development of these ships from what was originally planned demonstrates that the legacy of the St. Laurent-class of ships extends beyond its role as the first Royal Canadian Navy vessel to be designed and built in Canada. Although this is a unique legacy, it is also important to

⁴⁰ Kim Paterson, “The navy says goodbye to an old friend,” *Trident*, November 4, 1993, 3.

⁴¹ Hennessy, “Fleet Replacement,” 135.

⁴² Milner, *Canada's Navy*, 215.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁴⁵ Ron Barrie and Ken Macpherson, *Cadillac of Destroyers: HMCS St. Laurent and Her Successors* (St. Catharines, ON: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 1996), 58-59.

remember the influence the St. Laurent-class had over later, but similarly modelled, anti-submarine warfare vessels.

The Ships of the St. Laurent-Class in Literature

Despite their decades of service and unique role as the first Royal Canadian Naval class of ship to be designed and built in Canada, the ships of the St. Laurent-class do not play a prominent role in literature concerning Royal Canadian Naval history. This is symptomatic of a larger problem in literature related to Royal Canadian Naval history which is neglectful of postwar Canadian history in general.⁴⁶ While some works focus on specific events in the postwar period like the Korean conflict, the unification crisis or the Cuban Missile Crisis, they neglect the bigger history of the postwar Canadian navy.⁴⁷ Before entering into an examination of the primary sources used for this thesis, it is useful to first examine why this area of history is largely ignored.

Perhaps one of the most direct explanations for this lack of scholarship related to the ships of the St. Laurent-class in the early Cold War period can be found in David Zimmerman's book. Zimmerman identifies a key problem with existing scholarship on the Royal Canadian Navy, noting that "no one has specifically examined the role of the Pacific Fleet from 1945 to 1965," making his book the first to conduct an extensive study of the postwar navy in this period that does not focus specifically on polar issues like the Cuban Missile Crisis or the unification crisis.⁴⁸ Zimmerman also criticizes Marc Milner's *Canada's Navy: The First Century*, for largely ignoring the navy on the Pacific coast

⁴⁶ Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific*, 4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

after the Second World War.⁴⁹ SKEENA and FRASER both entered into service on the West Coast.⁵⁰ In 1959, they were joined by the last three ships of the St. Laurent-class remaining on the East Coast, which were transferred to the Pacific Coast as part of “a major reorganization of the fleets.”⁵¹ This meant that all seven ships of the St. Laurent-class would now be based on the Pacific Coast, relegating them to this neglected realm of history. Zimmerman notes that a number of the documents he consulted for his book were declassified for the text, suggesting that other historians like Milner would not have had access to such material, and are therefore missing key sources, which would be needed to create new or more detailed narratives regarding the post World War II navy in Canada.⁵² Zimmerman identifies this period as “the beginning of Pacific Command’s brief golden age,” citing not only the number of ships on the Pacific Coast, but a lack of “massive crew turnovers and shortages,” that had plagued captains in earlier years, as contributing factors to this prosperous era.⁵³ This Golden Age, however, was short lived. The seven ships of the St. Laurent-class left Maritime Forces Pacific for conversion in the early 1960s and did not return to the Pacific fleet, as they were transferred to the East Coast instead.⁵⁴

Another work which addresses the St. Laurent-class’ contribution to Royal Canadian Naval history is Shawn Cafferky’s book *Uncharted Waters: A History of the Helicopter-Carrying Destroyer*. Although Cafferky does credit the building of the ships of the St. Laurent-class as “eventually hav[ing] a significant impact upon Canadian naval

⁴⁹ Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific*, 4.

⁵⁰ Macpherson and Burgess, *The Ships of Canada’s Naval Forces*, 163-164.

⁵¹ Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific*, 95.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 166.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 158.

aviation,” as the title suggests, the book is more focused on the overall history of helicopters on destroyers in the Royal Canadian Navy than on the St. Laurent-class specifically.⁵⁵ This means that the St. Laurent-class of ships is once again a smaller part of a larger history, rather than the main focus.⁵⁶ It was a ship of the St. Laurent-class, the OTTAWA, which participated in early “deck landing trials,” for helicopters in October of 1957.⁵⁷ The destroyers would go on to carry the famed “Canadian Beartrap system,” which according to Cafferky, “transformed operations by frigate-and destroyer-sized vessels in the late twentieth century,” so much so that “by the late 1960s the RCN was recognized as the leader in the field of ship-borne helicopter operations.”⁵⁸

S. Mathwin Davis’ article “The ‘St. Laurent’ Decision: Genesis of a Canadian Fleet,” discusses the anti-submarine warfare in the Cold War period between 1947 to 1953.⁵⁹ As the use of the word ‘genesis’ in the title suggests, Davis’ article concentrates more on the origins and construction of the ships of the St. Laurent-class rather than what happened once the ships were completed and exposed to active duty and the public.⁶⁰ Davis does, however, note that the construction of the St. Laurent-class of ships was an expensive endeavour, but still a beneficial one for the Canadian Shipbuilding Industry.⁶¹

In his article “An Engineer’s Outline of RCN History: Part II,” J.H.W. Knox notes that the construction of the seven ships of the St. Laurent-class was significant, because it

⁵⁵ Cafferky, *Uncharted Waters*, 80.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁵⁹ Davis, “The St. Laurent Decision,” 187.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 187-206.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 201.

“established the sea-going identity of the postwar RCN.”⁶² Knox concentrates on the history of the construction of the St. Laurent-class, pointing out the difficulties in trying to have two shipyards work together that eventually led to the creation of the Naval Central Drawing Office.⁶³ Knox does not provide an in depth history of the service of the St. Laurent-class ships, but rather after describing the process needed to build the seven ships, he skips over the early years of service of the ships to describe the trials and refits the ships underwent to become helicopter carrying destroyers.⁶⁴ Although both Davis and Knox wrote articles addressing a dimension of the complex history of the St. Laurent-class of ship, their contributions were smaller pieces of larger books addressing broader topics and themes. These four examples demonstrate that although the St. Laurent-class of ships is sometimes included in modern scholarship on the Royal Canadian Navy, it does not possess a prominent role in literature, much like Canada’s postwar navy in general.

Reporters on the Scene: Personalized Accounts of Journalists

While numerous newspaper articles were written about the ships of the St. Laurent-class in the early years of their service, some of the pieces were printed without an associated author and lacked personal accounts or commentaries regarding the ships. It is the personalized accounts that provide insight into the public perceptions of the class when they were first commissioned. Although the journalists and writers do not speak for the public at large, their articles provide a window into what their audience read about the

⁶² Knox, “An Engineer’s Outline,” 317.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 318-319, 327.

ships, and therefore provide insight on what information the public had access to and how it might influence their own personal opinions of the ships. Of particular interest in the articles is how uncritical many of the writers are in regards to the ships, as they often opt to praise the merits of the ships rather than question the efficiency of their features, their ability to fill the role they were built for, or their large cost to produce.

In March of 1957, the *Vancouver Sun* ran a series of articles written by staff members who had spent the day aboard SKEENA prior to its commissioning. These articles provide personalized accounts and insight into the experiences of three writers aboard SKEENA and their impressions of the new ship. These reflections were then distributed to the public in print form, allowing the *Vancouver Sun* readership to form their own opinion of the new anti-submarine warfare destroyer escort based on the journalists' respective columns.

Les Rimes' article "Destroyer Escort Makes First Run" was the first article of the series to be printed on March 23, 1957.⁶⁵ In his article, Rimes notes that his own interests are more mechanical, but comments on the enthusiasm of SKEENA's crew in introducing him to their ship in detail, a topic of conversation that he likens to "an engineer's graduate thesis," suggesting that the conversation was complicated and possibly difficult to comprehend if the listener was not an engineer.⁶⁶ In his discussion of SKEENA, Rimes highlights the modern design of the destroyer by comparing the ship to a "science fiction city."⁶⁷ He also uses a pop culture reference to introduce readers to the abilities of SKEENA by comparing the smooth movements of the ship to figure skater

⁶⁵ Les Rimes, "Destroyer Escort Makes First Run," *Vancouver Sun*, March 23, 1957, 17.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Barbara Ann Scott.⁶⁸ Later in the article he compares the ship to the stationary Sun Tower.⁶⁹

Rimes seems to make these references to people and concepts that would be familiar to his audience as a way to provide readers with a point of reference when introducing them to potentially unfamiliar aspects of the ship.⁷⁰ Furthermore the comparisons that Rimes uses are all positive in nature and encourage happy images in the minds of readers like a ship cutting through the waves with the grace of a figure skater or a destroyer as sturdy as a building.⁷¹ Even when Rimes references the cost of SKEENA, a sum of \$23,000,000, which he mentions several times in his article, he does not query why the number is so high, but instead simply puts a positive spin on the amount.⁷² Rimes does not question the expenditures, but rather he takes Commander John Dawson's word that the money was largely spent on "the best electrical and electronic equipment Canadian money can buy," using the example of a standard ship fan for \$70 compared with a state of the art tough fan for \$400.⁷³ Rimes' article is supportive of the the money being spent on the ship, praising SKEENA's design and features, and declaring her "[a] credit to the navy," and the local builders.⁷⁴ Although Rimes' article paints an elegant picture of an impressive and modern Canadian warship, it is surprising that the article lacks any trace of criticism by the journalist. Rimes gives the impression of being more concerned with discussing the merits of the ship as they were presented to him rather than digging

⁶⁸ Les Rimes, "Destroyer Escort Makes First Run," *Vancouver Sun*, March 23, 1957, 17.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

deeper, as might be expected of a journalist, particularly one with exclusive access to a story.

The next article to be printed in the *Vancouver Sun*'s series on SKEENA was "No Capt. Bligh On This Ship," by Penny Wise, which appeared two days after Les Rime's article. Penny Wise was actually a pseudonym for female journalist Evelyn Caldwell, whose career in newspapers lasted from 1928 to 1974.⁷⁵ She begins her article by lamenting that she would gladly enlist if women were able "to go to sea" in the Royal Canadian Navy.⁷⁶ Like Rimes, Wise is not critical of the ship or the information she is provided with about it.⁷⁷ Although she does use one paragraph to discuss the complex features of SKEENA including "complicated surface and air radar...[and] highly sensitive electrical and radio communications systems," she devotes most of the article to her experiences with the men on board the ship and describing the amenities that would attract potential recruits and their families.⁷⁸ Wise herself considers volunteering for a position in the boiler room, so she might collide with "the fuzzy-haired chest of the handsome Frenchman on watch," who she identifies a Burrard Drydocks employee.⁷⁹ The author then switches her focus to the knowledgeable navy personnel on board describing the "chubby men with red hair, tall men with chin dimples and handsome men with a couple of gold stripes," who are familiar with the features of the ship.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ "Newswomen gain ground in 1950s: Vancouver Sun book looks back at each decade of its first 100 years," *Vancouver Sun*, September 21, 2012,

<http://www.canada.com/entertainment/books/newswomen+gain+ground+1950s/7280806/story.html>.

⁷⁶ Penny Wise, "No Capt. Bligh on This Ship," *Vancouver Sun*, March 25, 1957, 21.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Although the first half of her article is devoted to the men she sees on board, who she uses to introduce ship features and facts, Wise spends the latter half of her article describing the merits of serving on a ship like SKEENA to her readers.⁸¹ In particular she targets those with male children, declaring that “if any,” readers “have sons interested in serving in the navy, let them.”⁸² She goes on to describe the living conditions in a very positive light, highlighting the “rubber mattresses, and soft pillows,” in the quarters and the cooks that will “cater to,” the men of the SKEENA as well as the “dubious pleasures of TV,” radio, music and ice cream.⁸³ Aside from the fact that she herself is unable to serve, Wise has nothing negative to say about her time onboard SKEENA.⁸⁴ She does not appear to question the information she is provided with and instead repeats it back to her readers, using her article to draw attention to the merits of the ship to the parents of potential sailors.⁸⁵ Wise even goes so far as to praise the colour of the interior paint on the ship and the brightly coloured knobs on radar machinery.⁸⁶ She also suggests that men onboard the SKEENA would be fed from a menu with more selection than what they would receive at home.⁸⁷ Her final remark of “[w]hat more can a lad ask?” is followed by the suggestive notion that “pinups are allowed,” on the ship, indicating that not only can she not find a negative remark to write about the SKEENA, but her article is designed to sway potential enlistees, or their parents, to consider the navy as a career path, especially with all the comforts she claims that the soon to be commissioned

⁸¹ Penny Wise, “No Capt. Bligh on This Ship,” *Vancouver Sun*, March 25, 1957, 21.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

SKEENA offers.⁸⁸ Since she addresses to the parents of potential sailors in the article, Wise is likely not writing for men already serving in the Royal Canadian Navy, but rather those considering it as a career, especially their families who are being reassured that their sons would sail in the lap of luxury.⁸⁹ If this was indeed Wise's intention, then it would not be surprising that she prefers to provide potential recruits with an idealistic version of life aboard SKEENA rather than a more realistic one that could be obtained through more in depth research and questioning.

While food is mentioned briefly Wise's article, it is the focus of Myrtle Gregory's *Vancouver Sun* article "Skeena 'Family' Has Good Food," which was printed on March 28 1957.⁹⁰ Like the earlier articles, Gregory praises the experience she had on the SKEENA and also makes note of the ship's \$23,000,000 price tag, although she does not question it either.⁹¹ Gregory describes the seven cooks in the galley as a comforting sight as they "would be giving their full attention to just what we women do every day—prepar[ing] three meals and a bedtime snack for our families."⁹² It is perhaps not surprising that Gregory, the director for Edith Adams' Cottage, focused her article on food.⁹³ Gregory describes the dishes offered in the galley in detail as well as the appliances used to create them.⁹⁴ Like the authors of the earlier *Vancouver Sun* articles, Gregory has nothing negative to say about her experience onboard SKEENA. She is not even critical of the ship's menu she viewed in the galley, indicating that it "read like a

⁸⁸ Penny Wise, "No Capt. Bligh on This Ship," *Vancouver Sun*, March 25, 1957, 21.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Myrtle Gregory, "Skeena 'Family' Has Good Food," *Vancouver Sun*, March 28 1957, Section 3, 1.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

home economist's dream of good nutrition and a man's idea of living high."⁹⁵ Unlike Wise, whose article seems geared at readers who might enlist themselves or have children that enlist at a later date, Gregory concentrates more on simply describing the meals available onboard SKEENA and the machines at the disposal of the cooks in the galley to create their dishes.⁹⁶

All three of these *Vancouver Sun* writers praise the experience they had on SKEENA. While all of them concentrate on different aspects of life aboard the ship, with Les Rimes focusing the most on the actual operations of the ship itself, they all present positive views of SKEENA, sharing their interpretations of the various merits of the ship with their respective readers, some of whom could be learning about the newest ship of the St. Laurent-class for the first time through the cheerful comments of Rimes, Wise and Gregory.⁹⁷ None of the three authors are critical of the ship, its features, its cost, or the information they are provided with about it. They do, however, all highlight what they consider to be unique features of SKEENA. Rimes notes that SKEENA is unlike earlier ships because she is an "indoor ship," meaning that in the event of an emergency, important functions like combat operations and navigation "can be done from below decks."⁹⁸ Wise praises the living quarters while Gregory draws attention to the ship's modern galley.⁹⁹ Despite what these three writers may have believed, such features were not unique to the ships of the St. Laurent-class. HMCS SIOUX "was converted as nearly as possible, to the new habitability standards," which included bunks and "modern galley

⁹⁵ Myrtle Gregory, "Skeena 'Family' Has Good Food," *Vancouver Sun*, March 28 1957, Section 3, 1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Les Rimes, "Destroyer Escort Makes First Run," *Vancouver Sun*, March 23, 1957, 17.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Penny Wise, "No Capt. Bligh on This Ship," *Vancouver Sun*, March 25, 1957, 21. ;

Myrtle Gregory, "Skeena 'Family' Has Good Food," *Vancouver Sun*, March 28 1957, Section 3, 1.

facilities,” between 1949 and 1950, and it was not the only ship to adopt standards intended for the modern ships being built.¹⁰⁰ HMCS IROQUOIS also carried “the new 3-inch/50-calibre twin automatic gun,” which had been created for the St. Laurent-class and HMCS ALGONQUIN was outfitted with a closed off bridge similar to the one to be used on the SKEENA.¹⁰¹ These would appear to be new arrangements to the *Vancouver Sun* reporters as, if they were unaware of the implementation of such technology on other ships, they would be seeing, and reporting on it for the first time after their visit.

It should also be noted that not one of these three articles was given a place of prominence in the paper. Rimes’ article was the first of the three to appear in the *Vancouver Sun* and was placed on page seventeen.¹⁰² Wise’s article ran three days later and was even further back on page twenty-one.¹⁰³ Gregory’s piece was the last article to be printed and was placed on the first page of the third section of the paper.¹⁰⁴ Despite their descriptions of life aboard this new anti-submarine warfare destroyer escort, which had been built in Vancouver, none of the articles were positioned prominently in the newspapers for readers to see.¹⁰⁵

HMCS SKEENA was commissioned on March 30 1957.¹⁰⁶ The article announcing SKEENA’s commissioning in the *Vancouver Sun* two days later was relegated to the twenty-first page of the paper, and contained no information about the ship’s

¹⁰⁰ Davis, “The St. Laurent Decision,” 202-203.

¹⁰¹ Milner, *Canada’s Navy*, 209.

¹⁰² Les Rimes, “Destroyer Escort Makes First Run,” *Vancouver Sun*, March 23, 1957, 17.

¹⁰³ Penny Wise, “No Capt. Bligh on This Ship,” *Vancouver Sun*, March 25, 1957, 21.

¹⁰⁴ Myrtle Gregory, “Skeena ‘Family’ Has Good Food,” *Vancouver Sun*, March 28 1957, Section 3, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Macpherson and Burgess, *The Ships of Canada’s Naval Forces*, 164.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

capabilities.¹⁰⁷ Instead, the brief article focused on excerpts from politician James Sinclair's speech at the commissioning ceremony that weekend.¹⁰⁸ It also addressed the high cost of the ship building program noting that SKEENA "cost 50 per cent more than the Second Narrows Bridge," with nearly one third of the overall National Budget being spent on defence.¹⁰⁹ These financial figures are followed by a quote from James Sinclair reassuring the population that "[t]he price of freedom is high, but it is an insurance that the free countries of the world are willing to pay," in exchange for their safety.¹¹⁰ As the article itself was relegated to the twenty-first page of the paper, it is unclear exactly how many people would have learned from this article that \$1,750,000,000 was being spent annually on defence.¹¹¹ The front page of the *Vancouver Sun* that day had no mention of SKEENA's commissioning, and instead dedicated space to topics like the arrival of Daylight Savings Time at the end of the month.¹¹² The placement of this article and the earlier examples by Rimes, Wise and Gregory suggest that, although the rise to operational readiness of SKEENA was relevant enough for readers to be reported on, and even though none of the three reporters who wrote about their experience on the ship wrote anything negative about the ship or their personal experiences onboard, their articles were not considered as newsworthy as or as important as the other stories featured more prominently in those three editions of the *Vancouver Sun*.

¹⁰⁷ "Skeena Cost More Than New Bridge," *Vancouver Sun*, April 1, 1957, 21.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² "Daylight Saving Time To Start on April 28," *Vancouver Sun*, April 1, 1957, 1.

The Victoria Daily Times also featured a story from a writer who spent a day at sea aboard SKEENA.¹¹³ Unlike the articles produced by the *Vancouver Sun* journalists, however, a sail on SKEENA was front page news for *The Victoria Daily Times*.¹¹⁴ In an article split between two pages, Monte Roberts highlights many of the modern features of SKEENA including her machinery, electrical system, and maneuverability.¹¹⁵ Roberts also makes use of several phrases that can be found word for word in SKEENA's commissioning booklet including a brief description of the sleeping arrangements.¹¹⁶ The article also uses language taken from the commissioning booklet to compare between the production of the generators on SKEENA and HMCS MAGNIFICENT.¹¹⁷

In addition to using the words provided by official publications, Roberts also inserts his own opinions into the text, which give the article a more personal feel for readers. At one point, Roberts notes that he has "radio-telephoned" in his article, which means that not only is he learning about the equipment onboard, but he is able to use it for his own benefit as well.¹¹⁸ The only negative comment Roberts makes in his article is his allusion to the idea that the SKEENA's hull "isn't too pleasing to the eye of the traditional sailorman," but counters that the new design is "a joy to those who will serve in her,"

¹¹³ Monte Roberts, "New Punch, New Look Given to RCN in B.C. Built Submarine Killer Skeena," *Victoria Daily Times*, March 22, 1957, 1.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1, 17.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.;

CENMA HMCS SKEENA file, commissioning book, "The Commissioning of HMCS SKEENA at Burrard Dry Dock Co., Ltd. North Vancouver B.C. March 30 1957," 6.

¹¹⁷ Monte Roberts, "New Punch, New Look Given to RCN in B.C. Built Submarine Killer Skeena," *Victoria Daily Times*, March 22, 1957, 1.;

CENMA, HMCS ASSINIBOINE file, commissioning book, "The Commissioning of HMCS ASSINIBOINE at Marine Industries Ltd., Sorel, P.Q. August 16, 1956." 7.

¹¹⁸ Monte Roberts, "New Punch, New Look Given to RCN in B.C. Built Submarine Killer Skeena," *Victoria Daily Times*, March 22, 1957, 1.

anyway as it serves as a counter measure to ice formation.¹¹⁹ Roberts mentions in his article that many sailors at Esquimalt are “anxious to join,” the ship, and that “you can’t buy a seat aboard.”¹²⁰ This indicates that the arrival of SKEENA was highly anticipated, at least among military personnel. Roberts uses a combination of factual information that can be found in the commissioning booklets and his own personal observations and experiences while on board to introduce his readers to the soon to be commissioned SKEENA. Like the *Vancouver Sun* writers, Roberts offers little in the way of critical analysis of the ship itself.

Nearly a month later, *The Daily Colonist* published their own article about a press experience onboard a ship of the St. Laurent-class, only this time the ship was FRASER.¹²¹ The article “Giant, Floating Electronic Brain” appeared on the second page of the paper and described FRASER as a “mighty hunter of submarines, planes and seagulls,” the latter being a reference to a story told by an officer onboard of how the ships’ guns, on occasion, automatically target seagulls rather than the intended airplane.¹²² Whether or not the officer’s anecdote is true is another matter entirely, but it would not be the only time a member of one of the destroyer escort’s crews told tales to the public. In his book Zimmerman describes an incident where a member of SKEENA’s crew was heard telling a friend that the ship was both “submersible and nuclear powered,” and she was, of course, neither.¹²³ Zimmerman also notes that the ship was

¹¹⁹ Monte Roberts, “New Punch, New Look Given to RCN in B.C. Built Submarine Killer Skeena,” *Victoria Daily Times*, March 22, 1957, 17.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ “Giant, Floating Electronic Brain,” *Daily Colonist*, June 18, 1957, 2.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific*, 88-89.

“closely examined by both the [United States Navy] and the general public.”¹²⁴ This suggests that it was not just the Canadian public that were interested in the attributes of this new class of ship.

In addition to providing the seagull story, *The Daily Colonist* writer places emphasis on the electrical systems of the ship noting that they were “more extensive and complex than those carried in Second World War ships twice her size,” a phrase found in both SKEENA’s commissioning booklet and Roberts’ earlier article.¹²⁵ The unknown author also provides statistical information about SKEENA’s design and capabilities, and describes his or her own experiences on the six-hour sail including the observation of a brief “mock war game.”¹²⁶ The author concludes the article with a description of ST. LAURENT’s recent success in an exercise with United States Navy Ships wherein the Canadian destroyer was the only ship “to score a theoretical kill,” on “the U.S. atomic sub[marine]...Nautilus.”¹²⁷ Although the author’s article primarily described the experience on FRASER, the inclusion of the ST. LAURENT story showed readers that the newest ship on the west coast was part of an effective and proven successful class of anti-submarine warfare destroyers.¹²⁸ Although this article concentrated on a positive outcome during a joint exercise, Zimmerman points out that while such exercises might have identified the ships of the St. Laurent-class as

¹²⁴ Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific*, 88-89.

¹²⁵ “Giant, Floating Electronic Brain,” *Daily Colonist*, June 18, 1957, 2.;

CENMA HMCS SKEENA file, commissioning book, “The Commissioning of HMCS SKEENA at Burrard Dry Dock Co., Ltd. North Vancouver B.C. March 30 1957,” 5.;

Monte Roberts, “New Punch, New Look Given to RCN in B.C. Built Submarine Killer Skeena,” *Victoria Daily Times*, March 22, 1957, 1.

¹²⁶ “Giant, Floating Electronic Brain,” *Daily Colonist*, June 18, 1957, 2.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

“the best [anti-submarine warfare] vessels in the Pacific, they lacked passive variable depth sonar and long-range antisubmarine weapons systems to defeat the most modern conventional-powered submarines, let alone the much more potent threat posed by nuclear-powered vessels.”¹²⁹

This suggests that no matter what the initial successes of the St. Laurent-class were, they were ill equipped to continue on in their anti-submarine warfare role without improvements.

The *Victoria Daily Times* also published several articles about press experiences onboard FRASER the same day as *The Daily Colonist*, although the first of such articles “In Which We Serve” was published on page four with no author identified.¹³⁰ The writer wrote that those onboard FRASER “received a very vivid impression of what a modern warship is like,” noting that the St. Laurent-class was much further advanced than its predecessors were over their predecessors.¹³¹ The author provides little insight into his or her personal experience on the ship and instead concentrates on describing the abilities of the destroyer including her ability to find enemy submarines, her maneuverability and her future role in the Royal Canadian Navy.¹³² The author also offers praise to the builders of FRASER as well as the Federal Government and Navy itself for the production of such a ship.¹³³ The author suggests a higher price tag of \$25,000,000 for FRASER, but concludes that although the ship “is a heavy investment in defence,” FRASER “could return this investment with interest by saving one important convoy in wartime.”¹³⁴ In this passage the author demonstrates that he or she is aware of the hefty financial cost of

¹²⁹ Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific*, 162.

¹³⁰ “In Which We Serve,” *Victoria Daily Times*, June 19, 1957, 4.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

such a modern destroyer, but justifies the expenditure to readers with the hypothetical gains such a ship would provide during times of conflict.¹³⁵ This indicates that this *Daily Times* reporter, along with the earlier authors writing about SKEENA, had little in terms of negative comments to make about the newest ships of the St. Laurent-class and instead used the article to inform readers of their merits. It is not apparent if these newspapers also eventually published articles denouncing aspects of SKEENA and FRASER, but the sampling of articles available shows that the readers of these three west coast newspapers were exposed to predominantly positive information about the newest ships of the St. Laurent-class, which could influence their own personal opinions of the ships depending on how much confidence the readers had in the author of the article they read.

Although not outright negative, articles about the St. Laurent-class appearing in *The Globe and Mail* are more critical of the ships than those found in Vancouver, Victoria and even Montreal based newspapers. One possible explanation for this is the location of the paper itself. While ships of the St. Laurent-class were built in Montreal, Vancouver and Victoria, with Esquimalt being home to the Royal Canadian Navy's Pacific Fleet, *The Globe and Mail* was published in Toronto, which is further removed from the navy and the shipbuilding industry than papers in the other three cities.¹³⁶ In a city like Victoria, where a fair portion of the population is employed by or affiliated with the Royal Canadian Navy in some form, these circumstances make it unlikely for a reporter to criticize a main source of income for the area, especially in regards to what was being presented as a land mark achievement – The St. Laurent-class of ships. The Toronto-

¹³⁵ "In Which We Serve," *Victoria Daily Times*, June 19, 1957, 4.

¹³⁶ Milner, *Canada's Navy*, 182.

based *Globe and Mail*, on the other hand, lacks such a strong connection economically with the Royal Canadian Navy, which would allow them to be more critical without fear of strong repercussions from an angry readership.

This more critical approach can be seen in articles like George Bain's 1955 piece "Sleek Sub-Chaser is Last Word" published in the *Globe and Mail* where Bain describes his experience onboard ST. LAURENT, a ship whose appearance he likens to a whale.¹³⁷ He calls his time onboard a "leisurely..cruise," implying a casual pace, and notes that the ship's "most striking external features," include "a generally clean appearance."¹³⁸ Bain writes that the ships are "basically...all-Canadian," which is a reference to the American and British innovations that can be found on board, and a subtle way of questioning the notion of the ship being designed and built entirely in Canada when it contains non-Canadian elements.¹³⁹

While the west coast newspapers tend to defend the cost of building a ship of the St. Laurent-class, like Rimes' explanation that the \$23,000,000 it cost to build SKEENA largely funded the state of the art electronics equipment onboard, Bain approaches the financial aspect of ST. LAURENT differently.¹⁴⁰ Rather than discussing the final total for the vessel, George Bain points out that the estimated cost of the ship had actually gone up over the course of construction nearly doubling from \$8,000,000 to \$15,000,000.¹⁴¹ Milner also discusses this difference in cost in his book, noting that while original

¹³⁷ George Bain, "Sleek Sub-Chaser is Last Word," *Globe and Mail*, October 18, 1955, 8, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1291423121?accountid=14846>.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Les Rimes, "Destroyer Escort Makes First Run," *Vancouver Sun*, March 23, 1957, 17.

¹⁴¹ George Bain, "Sleek Sub-Chaser is Last Word," *Globe and Mail*, October 18, 1955, 8, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1291423121?accountid=14846>.

estimates put the cost per ship at \$8,000,000, in the end they cost close to \$22,000,000 per ship.¹⁴² He credits this financial discrepancy to the “cost-plus contract arrangement,” established with ship yards that would be using unit construction, as no one really knew what the total cost of the ships would be.¹⁴³ Bain and Milner both make note of the \$8,000,000 tentative price tag, a figure that would become a contested issue several years after Bain’s article was published.

In a *Globe and Mail* article published in July of 1958, writer Walter Gray outlines a change in Department of Defense Production policy, specifically in regards to contracts that are on “a cost-plus basis,” which Deputy Minister Golden suggests could save millions of dollars in the future.¹⁴⁴ Golden goes on to challenge another politician’s claim that a ship of the St. Laurent-class was originally projected to cost \$8,000,000, a figure that increased by the end of production.¹⁴⁵ The Deputy Minister’s response was simply that he “didn’t know where that \$8,000,000 estimate comes from.”¹⁴⁶ It is curious that the validity of the figure was disputed in 1958 when three years earlier it had been published in the *Globe and Mail* article.¹⁴⁷ This estimate of \$8,000,000 is presented as a contentious political point, which is portrayed in this *Globe and Mail* article, while other articles from

¹⁴² Milner, *Canada’s Navy*, 214.

¹⁴³ Milner, *Canada’s Navy*, 182.

¹⁴⁴ Walter Gray, “Saving of Millions Sought: Order New Contract Basis for Navy Ships,” *Globe and Mail*, July 15, 1958, 15,

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1288582147?accountid=14846>

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ George Bain, “Sleek Sub-Chaser is Last Word,” *Globe and Mail*, October 18, 1955, 8,

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1291423121?accountid=14846>.

the time merely present the final sum of \$23,000,000 unquestioningly or justify it with the cost associated with the ship's modern features.¹⁴⁸

Removed from the navy bases and shipbuilding industry, the Toronto based *Globe and Mail* could be more critical of the ships than other newspapers as their economic livelihood was not necessarily tied to the navy, and as a result the paper could publish more controversial reports like the disputed \$8,000,000 initial estimate for building ST. LAURENT.¹⁴⁹ Despite being more critical than, for example, west coast papers, the *Globe and Mail* was still not overtly critical of the new ships, but was instead more subtle in their questioning.

When describing the newly launched ST. LAURENT, Bain notes when information was provided without specific details or a method of verifying the facts like the "extremely high (but unspecified) rate of fire," or the "anti-submarine mortar Mark 10'," which "the navy had little to say about."¹⁵⁰ Even speed is kept under wraps with Bain noting that "the navy will say only that the ST. LAURENT in trials has exceeded the design speed...and that it has an acceptable turn of speed," a statement which indicates, like the others, that the reporter was unable to verify any of the claims, so readers have to decide for themselves how they feel about the navy's claims.¹⁵¹

Other *Globe and Mail* articles mention the ships of the St. Laurent-class but focus on a specific aspect rather than the ship as a whole. For example, while the title of the article

¹⁴⁸ Les Rimes, "Destroyer Escort Makes First Run," *Vancouver Sun*, March 23, 1957, 17.

¹⁴⁹ Walter Gray, "'Saving of Millions Sought: Order Hew Contract Basis for Navy Ships," *Globe and Mail*, July 15, 1958, 15,

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1288582147?accountid=1484>.

¹⁵⁰ George Bain, "Sleek Sub-Chaser is Last Word," *Globe and Mail*, October 18, 1955, 8,

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1291423121?accountid=14846>.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

“Latest Equipment Used in Destroyer Escorts,” might suggest an evaluation of the anti-submarine warfare equipment on board the Destroyer Escorts, the article actually concentrates primarily on the refrigeration system and air conditioning onboard the ships of the St. Laurent-class noting that the refrigeration systems were designed in Canada.¹⁵² The author also praises the “Canadian shipyards,” which produced “14 warships exactly suited to the needs of Canada and the Royal Canadian Navy.”¹⁵³ The praising of Canadian shipyards can also be found in an earlier *Globe and Mail* article from 1951, which heralds “Canadian Vickers Ltd.,” as “the world’s only completely enclosed shipyard.”¹⁵⁴ Vickers is mentioned, because ST. LAURENT, which the author refers to as “an atom-shielded greyhound of the seas,” left it to enter the St. Lawrence River.¹⁵⁵ According to the author, the ship’s designer claims that the destroyer escort “will be capable...of overtaking the fastest submarine now in surface,” a claim that conflicts with arguments from modern historians like Milner who wrote in his book that the speed of a “conventional submarine...pushed the St Laurent’s capability to the limit,” while a nuclear submarine outclassed it all together.¹⁵⁶ Although the information provided in these articles was what was available to readers of newspapers like *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Globe and Mail*, comparing such accounts with modern historical works demonstrates that the information provided in the period articles was not always

¹⁵² “Latest Equipment Used in Destroyer Escorts,” *Globe and Mail*, April 24, 1956, 18,
<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1291405030?accountid=14846>

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ James Hornick, “Sleek New Sub-Killer, Shielded from A-Attack, Joins Canadian Navy.” *Globe and Mail*, December 1, 1951, 17,

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1287389187?accountid=14846>

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*;

Milner, *Canada’s Navy*, 223.

indicative of the actual capabilities of the St. Laurent-class of ship. While many of these articles are not critical of the information they are provided with and do not raise questions about the high financial expenditures or the actual capabilities of the ships when faced with enemy submarines, it is also unclear even if such questions were ever asked, especially those pertaining to armament, and whether they would be answered at all in a period of Cold War tensions.

While these journalists from the *Vancouver Sun*, *Daily Colonist* and *Globe and Mail* were seemingly writing for the public, and a largely civilian public at that, they weren't the only type of publications to praise the merits of the St. Laurent-class of ships. The Royal Canadian Navy's Magazine *Crowsnest*, which targets a specific demographic, that of military personnel, and has the potential for nationwide readership, also ran an article about the new ships of the St. Laurent-class.¹⁵⁷ While the *Vancouver Sun* used three of its journalists to write articles about SKEENA, the *Crowsnest* article was based on a presentation by a single navy officer, Commander R.W. Timbrell.¹⁵⁸ Timbrell had extensive experience on a ship of the St. Laurent-class as he had been the commanding officer of the new ST. LAURENT several years earlier.¹⁵⁹ A *La Patrie* article from 1955 quotes Commander Timbrell as being happy that he got to "commander un navire qui est le plus modern du genre au monde entier."¹⁶⁰ Timbrell sounded delighted to be at the helm of Canada's newest anti-submarine warfare destroyer escort. He was also featured

¹⁵⁷ "A New Look at the St. Laurent," *Crowsnest*, 9 no. 10 (August 10, 1957), 10.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ "Le temps n'est pas encore venu de faire disparaître le fardeau de l'armement," *La Patrie*, October 31, 1955, 12, <http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/1251452>.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

in an earlier *Crowsnest* article entitled “A Proud Young Lady Puts to Sea,”¹⁶¹ with nearly an entire page of the article published to celebrate the commissioning of ST. LAURENT devoted to him.¹⁶² Timbrell’s positive experiences as the commanding officer of ST. LAURENT are reflected in his article for the *Crowsnest* article years later as, like the authors of the west coast articles, Timbrell has nothing negative to say about the St. Laurent-class of ships.¹⁶³

Unlike the *Vancouver Sun* writers, Timbrell begins his article with a brief overview of the history of what led to the need for and creation of modern anti-submarine warfare destroyers.¹⁶⁴ The naval officer describes in detail the many modern features of the ST. LAURENT, drawing his readers’ attention to the heating and air conditioning capabilities of the “enclosed bridge,” a description that he interweaves with his anecdote of visiting the bridge in the middle of the night in his slippers and pajamas due to the well adjusted temperature.¹⁶⁵ He also praises the construction strategies used for the ST. LAURENT, which allow it to be massed produced if necessary, as well as the design, which accounted for the comfort of extra crewmen that might be assigned to the ship in times of conflict.¹⁶⁶ Despite his personal experience on the ship, Timbrell provides few personal anecdotes of his time aboard and instead concentrates on explaining the need for ships of the St. Laurent-class and the modern features and measures that have been taken to ensure its ongoing success, concluding with the notion that “Canada now leads the world

¹⁶¹ “A Proud Young Lady Puts to Sea: HMCS St. Laurent Tailored to needs of Modern War,” *Crowsnest* (November 1955), 5-6

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ “A New Look at the St. Laurent,” *Crowsnest*, 9 no. 10 (August 10, 1957), 10-12.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

in design and operation of an anti-submarine warship,” and one that “we in the service are extremely proud of and confident to sail...as part of Canada’s contribution to the freedom of the seas.”¹⁶⁷ The use of the first person plural “we” implies that Timbrell is speaking not only for, but to, military personnel, a different audience than the writers of the *Vancouver Sun* would have as the majority of its readership.¹⁶⁸ It is possible that Timbrell was speaking to former navy personnel as well, as an insert in the text notes that his article was originally a speech given to the Montreal Naval Officers’ Association.¹⁶⁹ Timbrell writes from a unique stand point as a former commanding officer of ST. LAURENT.¹⁷⁰ It is perhaps not surprising that Timbrell does not speak negatively or even critically of his old command, and it would be remarkable to see a captain published in an official Royal Canadian Navy magazine while speaking ill of his former ship. Despite their differing target audiences, all of these articles are useful sources for observing what material the public and military members were provided with that could have influenced their opinions on the ships of the newly launched St. Laurent-class of ship.

Similarities Between Newspaper Articles and Government Publications

While newspaper articles from the early days of the St. Laurent-class can provide valuable insight into the thoughts of reporters on the new ships and what information was being conveyed to the public, understanding the opinions of some article writers and

¹⁶⁷ “A New Look at the St. Laurent,” *Crowsnest*, 9 no. 10 (August 10, 1957), 12.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁷⁰ “Le temps n'est pas encore venu de faire disparaître le fardeau de l'armement,” *La Patrie*, October 31, 1955, 12, <http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/1251452>.

therefore the message they are trying to convey can prove difficult when the words they use are not solely their own. The commissioning booklets like the one from the August 1956 commissioning of ASSINIBOINE or the 1957 commissioning of SKEENA are a wealth of information when it comes to detailed descriptions of the construction, armament, machinery, electrical equipment and living spaces onboard the ships.¹⁷¹ It is perhaps not surprising then to find such information repeated on documentation for different ships produced by the government or its agencies. For example, the commissioning booklet of ASSINIBOINE from 1956 contains categories like “electronics” and “propulsion machinery”.¹⁷² The commissioning booklet of SKEENA the following year contained identical categories that detail the features of the ship using either identical or very similar phrasing.¹⁷³ While it is perhaps not unusual for government productions to be identical in wording as they address the same class of ship with the same features, and the publications serve the same purpose, these documents are not the only place such repetition occurs. For example, the commissioning booklet for ASSINIBOINE describes a ship of the ST. LAURENT-class as being

“the smallest ship capable of maintaining fighting efficiency against the most modern submarine, or its successor of the foreseeable future, under the extreme weather conditions of the North Atlantic.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ CENMA, HMCS ASSINIBOINE file, commissioning book, “The Commissioning of HMCS ASSINIBOINE at Marine Industries Ltd., Sorel, P.Q. August 16, 1956,” 4-9.;

CENMA HMCS SKEENA file, commissioning book, “The Commissioning of HMCS SKEENA at Burrard Dry Dock Co., Ltd. North Vancouver B.C. March 30 1957,” 4-9.

¹⁷² CENMA, HMCS ASSINIBOINE file, commissioning book, “The Commissioning of HMCS ASSINIBOINE at Marine Industries Ltd., Sorel, P.Q. August 16, 1956,” 6.

¹⁷³ CENMA HMCS SKEENA file, commissioning book, “The Commissioning of HMCS SKEENA at Burrard Dry Dock Co., Ltd. North Vancouver B.C. March 30 1957,” 5-6.

¹⁷⁴ CENMA, HMCS ASSINIBOINE file, commissioning book, “The Commissioning of HMCS ASSINIBOINE at Marine Industries Ltd., Sorel, P.Q. August 16, 1956,” 4.

This exact phrase is used in a *Montreal Star* article from August 1956 about ASSINIBOINE's commissioning with only changes to the punctuation apparent.¹⁷⁵ As the article is written about ASSINIBOINE's commissioning after the fact, and the booklet with the same quote was produced for ASSINIBOINE's commissioning ceremony, it is perhaps not surprising to see the booklet quoted in the article, even if the article does not indicate that it is doing so.¹⁷⁶ The use of material verbatim from publications produced for the ships themselves adds a degree of complexity to using newspaper articles to examine the public perceptions of the St. Laurent-class, as the words being used in parts of the article are not the product of the reporter writing the article, but are part of the official material produced for the ships' commissioning ceremonies. The same quotation appears in a *Victoria Daily Times* article published in 1957 about SKEENA with only a minor change in the latter part of the sentence, replacing "North Atlantic" with "sea lanes".¹⁷⁷ Roberts' article also quotes other portions of the commissioning booklet throughout, which he mixes with his own personal experiences and observations on board.¹⁷⁸ This combination means that Roberts is able to provide readers with factual information about the systems and design of the ship while also including first hand experience with the new ship. While Roberts succeeds in intertwining his own opinions with facts about the ship, the use of large amounts of material verbatim from government publications in articles can become complicated as

¹⁷⁵ Norman Pascoe, "Ultra Modern Fleet on Way: Second New Sub Hunter Commissioned At Sorel," *Montreal Star*, August 17, 1956.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Monte Roberts, "New Punch, New Look Given to RCN in B.C. Built Submarine Killer Skeena," *Victoria Daily Times*, March 22, 1957, 17.

¹⁷⁸ Monte Roberts, "New Punch, New Look Given to RCN in B.C. Built Submarine Killer Skeena," *Victoria Daily Times*, March 22, 1957, 1, 17.

the use of government material does not provide any insight into the author's opinion of the ship. It is particularly difficult if the reader is not familiar with the source of the original material, or has not read enough articles to recognize the repeated phrases and content, which then makes it difficult to determine what information was conveyed strictly by the writer and was potentially influential to the impressions of his or her local community, and what information was merely provided for factual purposes.

Public Attendance at Commissioning Ceremonies

Some articles mention attendance at the commissioning ceremonies, which help to show the interest Canadians had in the arrival of this new class of modern destroyer. An article from the September 1956 edition of *The Crow'snest* notes that "[h]undreds of guests and townspeople watched the impressive ceremonies," that welcomed ASSINIBOINE into service in Sorel, Quebec.¹⁷⁹ The mention of townspeople is significant as it indicates that part of the local population attended the ceremonies rather than simply the builders, navy personnel and invited guests who were directly associated with the ship; however, without knowing the capacity of such a ceremony or how many townspeople were allowed to attend, it is difficult to determine exactly how many did attend and how interested the local population as a whole was in the ship. An article from the Quebec-based, French language newspaper *La Patrie* suggests that over 1500 attendees and invited guests witnessed the ceremony.¹⁸⁰ Included among the guests at the commissioning ceremony were military representatives and naval attachés from several

¹⁷⁹ "A New Assiniboine Sails the Seas: Second Ultra Modern D E Bears Honoured Name," *Crow'snest*, (September 1956), 9.

¹⁸⁰ "Le HMCS Assiniboine est baptisé à Sorel par Mme L. Chevrier," *La Patrie*, August 17, 1956, 2, <http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/1251779>.

countries including Russia, the United Kingdom Italy, the United States and Poland.¹⁸¹ Pascoe does note that the Russian attaché would not provide his opinion of the new ship, but did mention that he was happy to have been invited to the ceremony.¹⁸² In contrast, *La Patrie* writes that the Russian ambassador “a déclaré que la nouvelle acquisition de la Marine royale canadienne l'impressionne considérablement.”¹⁸³ It is unclear what caused the discrepancy between the two accounts, but one possible explanation is a problem with translation or transcription. Pascoe's article for the *Montreal Star* identifies the man as Captain Gregori Balinov while *La Patrie* writes his name as Gregory Balimov.¹⁸⁴ As well, Pascoe identifies Balinov as an assistant military attache while *La Patrie* describes him as the Russian ambassador.¹⁸⁵ Regardless of whether the Russian military attaché had little or much praise to offer the newly commissioned ASSINIBOINE, his presence at the ceremony along with military representatives from several other countries indicates that the commissioning of ASSINIBOINE was an occasion for the Royal Canadian Navy to show off its newest ship, not only to the Canadian public, but to foreign military forces, both friendly and otherwise.

La Patrie's article also identifies another high profile attendee, a Madame Chevrier, who was “l'épouse du president de l'Administration de la voie maritime du St-Laurent,”

¹⁸¹ Norman Pascoe, “Ultra Modern Fleet on Way: Second New Sub Hunter Commissioned At Sorel,” *Montreal Star*, August 17, 1956.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ “Le HMCS Assiniboine est baptisé à Sorel par Mme L. Chevrier,” *La Patrie*, August 17, 1956, 2, <http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/1251779>.

¹⁸⁴ Norman Pascoe, “Ultra Modern Fleet on Way: Second New Sub Hunter Commissioned At Sorel,” *Montreal Star*, August 17, 1956.;

“Le HMCS Assiniboine est baptisé à Sorel par Mme L. Chevrier,” *La Patrie*, August 17, 1956, 2, <http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/1251779>.

¹⁸⁵ Norman Pascoe, “Ultra Modern Fleet on Way: Second New Sub Hunter Commissioned At Sorel,” *Montreal Star*, August 17, 1956.;

“Le HMCS Assiniboine est baptisé à Sorel par Mme L. Chevrier,” *La Patrie*, August 17, 1956, 2, <http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/1251779>.

who christened ASSINIBOINE.¹⁸⁶ The choice of christener is intriguing as Milner notes in his book that the first ship of the class, whose name was subsequently given to the class itself, ST. LAURENT, was named for the St. Lawrence River, and Madame Chevrier is the wife of a notable man who works on that seaway.¹⁸⁷ The name St. Laurent was significant, not only because the ship was to be built on its namesake river, but because of “the navy’s desire to raise its profile in Quebec and build support there for naval expansion.”¹⁸⁸ Since the navy was particularly interested in pleasing Quebec, this makes the content of newspaper articles published in the province, both in English and French, of particular importance for understanding how the navy was portrayed to the public.

Much like their west coast counterparts, the east coast newspaper writers rarely provided critical commentary about the ships, with the *Montreal Star*’s Norman Pascoe noting that “Canada’s navy took another step towards possessing one of the finest anti-submarine fleets in the world...with the commissioning of ASSINIBOINE,” a statement which indicates that the new ship made a positive impression on the reporter.¹⁸⁹ The unidentified author of *La Patrie*’s article also praises the ship, heralding ASSINIBOINE as a “navire de guerre de l’âge atomique,” and highlighting the ship’s association with its builders Marine Industries Ltd.¹⁹⁰ Neither author questioned the hefty price tag attached

¹⁸⁶ “Le HMCS Assiniboine est baptisé à Sorel par Mme L. Chevrier,” *La Patrie*, August 17, 1956, 2, <http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/1251779>.

¹⁸⁷ Milner, *Canada’s Navy*, 182-183.;

“Le HMCS Assiniboine est baptisé à Sorel par Mme L. Chevrier,” *La Patrie*, August 17, 1956, 2, <http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/1251779>.

¹⁸⁸ Milner, *Canada’s Navy*, 183.

¹⁸⁹ Norman Pascoe, “Ultra Modern Fleet on Way: Second New Sub Hunter Commissioned At Sorel,” *Montreal Star*, August 17, 1956.

¹⁹⁰ “Le HMCS Assiniboine est baptisé à Sorel par Mme L. Chevrier,” *La Patrie*, August 17, 1956, 2,

to ASSINIBOINE or the accuracy of statements made by navy personnel like Commander Earnshaw's claim that Canada soon "would have 'probably the finest anti-submarine fleet in the world'."¹⁹¹ The lack of criticism and subsequent praise heaped upon ASSINIBOINE suggest that readers in Quebec received positive impressions in the media of the ships of the St. Laurent-class.

Advertisements: For the Navy or Personal Promotion?

Another kind of source that provides insight into the reaction of the community to the arrival of anti-submarine warfare destroyer escorts on the west coast are the advertisements placed by businesses and municipalities in local papers around the commissioning of FRASER and SKEENA. In addition to the normal newspaper, the June 28 1957 edition of the *Victoria Colonist* contained a multi-page special edition insert about FRASER, which featured a large photo of the ship on the front page with the headline "Canada Builds a New Navy."¹⁹² In addition to printing information about the newly commissioned FRASER, the insert featured numerous advertisements from local businesses praising the arrival of the new ship.¹⁹³ These advertisements are varied and provide valuable insight into how local businesses and municipalities reacted to the arrival of the new anti-submarine warfare destroyer escort, and how they used the occasion to generate business and support for themselves from navy personnel, civilian

<http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/1251779>.

¹⁹¹ Norman Pascoe, "Ultra Modern Fleet on Way: Second New Sub Hunter Commissioned At Sorel," *Montreal Star*, August 17, 1956.

¹⁹² HMCS FRASER insert, *Victoria Colonist*, June 28 1957, 1.

¹⁹³ HMCS FRASER insert, *Victoria Colonist*, June 28 1957, 3.

supporters or both. Some businesses that were not directly involved in the construction of the locally built FRASER, like the Astoria Café, still placed ads in the special insert.¹⁹⁴

The Astoria Café welcomed the newest ship in the Royal Canadian Navy by announcing that “the Men Who Man Her Will Find a Welcome at the Astoria Café,” which indicates that they are appealing to the crew of the FRASER for their business.¹⁹⁵ Liberty Café also praised the arrival of FRASER, and used their advertisement to highlight their earlier association with navy personnel declaring that they “are proud of the fine food [they] have served to so many men of the Navy,” evoking a history of business interactions with navy personnel.¹⁹⁶ Other advertisers took the opportunity to appeal directly to the family members of navy personnel, like McLennan, McFeely & Prior Ltd., which used the opportunity to promote their “Sailor’s Bride Special,” which was a discounted bedroom set.¹⁹⁷ These advertisements from various local businesses in Victoria demonstrate that the arrival of ships of the St. Laurent-class of ships on the west coast represented not only a notable occasion for the navy, but an opportunity for economic exploitation for local businesses.

While advertisers like Astoria Café and McLennan, McFeely & Prior Ltd. used the special edition of the paper to increase their business from navy personnel, other companies took the opportunity to advertise their own involvement in the actual construction of the new ship. Victoria Machinery Depot took out a full page advertisement to describe their history of shipbuilding with the Royal Canadian Navy.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ HMCS FRASER insert, *Victoria Colonist*, June 28 1957, 6.

The company responsible for the construction of FRASER, Yarrows, also placed a full page advertisement for the occasion noting that “[t]he commissioning of H.M.C.S. FRASER is a proud occasion for Yarrows Limited,” and took the opportunity to praise its workers and their capabilities.¹⁹⁹ Even municipalities took out advertisements in the paper with the District of Saanich drawing attention to the involvement of its residents in the ship building process.²⁰⁰ The Municipality of Esquimalt highlighted its “close association with the ‘men of the navy’,” while the City of Victoria opted for a combination of the two, noting that both the men who built FRASER and the men who would serve on her reside in Victoria, concluding with the idea that “HMCS FRASER,” could “serve as a reminder to us of the great privilege which is ours in having these people living in our midst.”²⁰¹

Although the advertisements varied in composition and origin, they share a common thread of using the commissioning of FRASER to further their own individual agendas, be it to draw attention to the good work of their residents or employees in the case of the Municipality of Saanich or Yarrows, or to increase business from navy personnel or their supporters like Astoria Café or Liberty Café. This demonstrates that although the advertisements do not provide an indication of public opinion regarding the commissioning of FRASER, many local businesses in Victoria and the surrounding area felt the event was significant enough and would be prominent enough in the public eye that they could draw attention to their own enterprises and increase their own revenues by associating themselves with the commissioning of FRASER.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

Following the commissioning of SKEENA, the *Vancouver Herald* also featured advertisements from local businesses praising the ship in the March 30 1957 edition of the paper; however, unlike the multi-paged special insert featured in the *Victoria Colonist*, the advertisements in the Vancouver paper were confined to a couple of pages.²⁰² The businesses that placed the advertisements were often directly linked to the construction of the ship itself like Burrard Dry Dock, which built SKEENA, and an industrial feeding contractor, who mentioned in their advertisement that they played a role in the sea trials of SKEENA.²⁰³ While the lack of advertisements congratulating SKEENA's commissioning could indicate a perceived lack of interest on the part of the paper and its target audience, it should be noted that while the SKEENA was built in Vancouver, it was not destined to remain there, unlike FRASER which would stay in Victoria where there was a large navy presence. As Esquimalt was the home of the Royal Canadian Navy's Pacific Fleet, the association between the city and the navy would be an ongoing relationship as the navy had a permanent base there whereas in Vancouver the focus was more on shipbuilding than the ongoing naval presence. This lack of coverage regarding SKEENA, however, is not only apparent in the advertisements section.

The *Vancouver Herald* also features an article prior to the advertisements entitled "Burrard Dry Dock Builds Fine Vessel," which announces the "completion and commissioning," of SKEENA.²⁰⁴ The article provides little information about the ship itself, and this omission is telling.²⁰⁵ SKEENA is only mentioned twice in the article by

²⁰² Legislative Library of British Columbia, Mfilm: The Vancouver News Herald, Reel No. 113, Year: 1957, Month: January to March, Advertisements, March 30, 1957, 9.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ "Burrard Dry Dock Builds Fine Vessel," *Vancouver News Herald*, March 30, 1957, 8.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

name, but not in the title.²⁰⁶ Instead, the article concentrates on the Burrard Dry Dock Company, while providing few details about the ship that had been produced.²⁰⁷ This demonstrates that, for the *Vancouver Herald* at least, the important aspect of the story in the commissioning of a new modern destroyer escort was the involvement of a local shipbuilding company rather than the merits of the ship itself.

Conclusion

Nicknamed the Cadillacs of the fleet, the seven ships of the St. Laurent-class ST. LAURENT, ASSINIBOINE, OTTAWA, SAGUENAY, SKEENA, FRASER and MARGAREE were a historic first for the Royal Canadian Navy as they were designed and built in Canada. They served in the Royal Canadian Navy for nearly forty years, first as anti-submarine warfare destroyer escorts, and later as ships with helicopter carrying capabilities following their conversions and recommissionings. Although no St. Laurent-class ships remain in service today, there is still much to be studied about their role in Royal Canadian Naval history.

Through the use of predominantly Canadian newspapers from the mid to late 1950s this thesis has explored how newspapers can be used to study the public perceptions of the ships of the St. Laurent-class. Personal accounts of visits to anti-submarine warfare destroyer escorts like SKEENA and FRASER published in the *Vancouver Sun*, *Victoria Daily Times* and the *Daily Colonist* demonstrate how the reporters themselves felt about the new ships. With few exceptions, the newspaper articles written about the St. Laurent-

²⁰⁶ "Burrard Dry Dock Builds Fine Vessel," *Vancouver News Herald*, March 30, 1957, 8.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

class during the early Cold War Period lacked any kind of critical analysis of the ships. Instead, authors produced articles with overwhelmingly positive reviews of their experiences on the ship, because the authors did not question the information they were provided or attempt to study it critically in their articles. The overwhelming number of positive articles for the public to read about the ships of the St. Laurent-class is a strong argument in favour of positive public perceptions of the ships as some people could only rely on the newspapers for information about the navy's newest ships as they had never visited one for themselves.

Interpreting the sentiments of the authors of newspaper articles, and therefore their potential impact on their readership, becomes complicated when the articles quote government publications, like the commissioning booklets, word for word. Although some authors like Monte Roberts of the *Victoria Daily Times* are able to create a balance between personal accounts and repeated facts, in other situations it can be different to notice a pattern of repetition until the reader has examined numerous articles that use the same phrasing.

Geographic location is also an important factor related to the production of navy related publications. A city like Victoria, which is the home of Canada's Pacific Fleet, or a city like Montreal, where ships of the St. Laurent-class were manufactured would be hesitant to be overtly critical of the Royal Canadian Navy, when their economies are so intertwined with the navy. In addition, the articles written for newspapers like the the trio of articles regarding reporters' experiences on SKEENA for the *Vancouver Sun* were also written in a positive tone, but they concentrated more on the domestic side of life onboard the ships like the galley equipment and luxurios living space. The articles

themselves were also relegated to less than prominent locations in the newspapers they were published in. Curiously, despite their attempts to present the ships of the St. Laurent-class in a positive light, the articles generally do not incorporate the nickname of “Cadillacs” for the class, a nickname bestowed upon the ships by their crews.²⁰⁸ This indicates a certain disconnect between the reporters creating articles for the public, and the navy personnel who actually served on the ship.

Newspapers are also valuable sources for examining the public’s interest in events and the ships they’re built around. Both *The Crow’snest* and *La Patrie* published articles indicating that townspeople as well as honoured guests had attended the commissioning ceremony of ASSINIBOINE. This attendance indicates a healthy interest on the part of the general public in the soon to be commissioned destroyer escorts. Advertisements placed in Victoria and Vancouver newspapers around the commissionings of FRASER and SKEENA provide additional insight into the reception of the ships in the community as numerous local businesses placed congratulatory advertisements celebrating the commissioning of FRASER to attract additional customers and revenue by associating themselves with the ship, demonstrating that the ship, or even the Royal Canadian Navy as a whole was well received in the community and could be used to attract additional business. While the information in period newspaper accounts can conflict with modern day scholarly accounts, like in regards to the effectiveness of the sonar and armament on early St. Laurent-class ships, there is still a lot that can be learned from these primary sources.

²⁰⁸ Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific*, 88.

The St. Laurent class of ships, despite being the first class of ship in the Royal Canadian Navy to be designed and built in Canada is a neglected area of historical study. It is not alone in this regard as, with the exception of several singular events and crisis like the Korean War, Cuban Missile Crisis and unification crisis, the postwar navy in Canada is itself a neglected area of historical study. To better understand and be able to pursue topics in these undervalued areas of history, access to primary sources is crucial. Newspaper articles from the early Cold War period provide a wealth of information from which to learn about this era including personalized accounts of encounters between reporters and the St. Laurent-class of ship, which had the potential to influence public perceptions. The lack of critical analysis in most of the articles pertaining to the ships of the St. Laurent-class along with advertisements linked to the commissioning of ships of the St. Laurent-class provide valuable insight to the relationship between the Royal Canadian Navy and certain Canadian communities. Certain communities like Esquimalt, home of Canada's Pacific Fleet and Montreal, with its shipbuilding industry, had businesses and enterprises that could increase their economic gain by being positively associated with the navy.

As Canada is a Maritime Nation, the Royal Canadian Navy plays a crucial role in the country's past, present and future. As the first ships in the Royal Canadian Navy to be designed and built in Canada, the ships of the St. Laurent-class had a large influence on the changing state of the navy in Canada, serving as the model for anti-submarine warfare ships that followed including the Restigouche, Mackenzie, and Annapolis classes of ships. Although the St. Laurent-class is a neglected area of history, it should not remain one. The newspaper articles examined in this paper offer a wealth of information about

public perceptions and media portrayals of this unique class of Canadian ship, and they provide insight into a topic that must not be ignored if a deeper understanding of the postwar Canadian navy is to be achieved.

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