



Quinte West to honour navy veterans Saturday

Military News

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Gordon Gibbons figures his boots are still where he left them in 1945.

Minutes after the HMCS Trentonian had been hit by a torpedo, Gibbons took off his boots, put them under an ammunition locker and jumped in to the bone-chilling English Channel.

The 86-year-old Royal Canadian Navy veteran, who lives in Lindsay, is one of the surviving crew members of the Revised Flower Class Corvette named after the city of Trenton.

The city will welcome Shields and several crew members during a special presentation Saturday afternoon at city hall in Trenton.

As part of the 100th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Navy, officials with the Canadian Royal Reserve will present the city with a framed pictorial history of the warships HMCS Quinte I and II, plus the Trentonian, to mark the milestone anniversary.

Lt.-Cmdr. John Leighton, executive officer of HMCS Cataraqui, will make the presentations to Quinte West Mayor John Williams.

On Feb. 22, 1945, the Trentonian was escorting a convoy along with a British torpedo boat. The convoy consisted of 10 ships. The Trentonian was performing an antisubmarine sweep ahead of the convoy when the second ship in the column, SS Alexander Kennedy, exploded and began to sink.

The Trentonian made a hard turn to port and began searching for the submarine. Crew gained a sonar contact but, seconds later, the Trentonian's hull shuddered as a huge explosion ripped a hole on the ship's starboard quarter.

It took about 14 minutes for the ship to sink. Five men went down with the ship. Ninety-six men were rescued.

Gibbons was on the depth charge thrower on the port quarter when the torpedo hit. The impact of the torpedo knocked him out. He was thrown against the ship's superstructure.

Gibbons was one of the last survivors to be rescued.

When Bill Shields enlisted in the RCN in late November, 1943 he was only 16.

"I lied about my age," said Shields, 83, who lives in Oakville.

About two years, later Shields found himself treading water in the Channel.

"We were going at top speed. When the torpedo hit it was like someone had slammed on the breaks. I just followed orders, abandoned ship and got in the water," said Shields.

Shields figures if the torpedo had hit after dark, far more men would have died.

"It was February, the water was awfully cold. Thank God we were only in it for about one hour," he said.

Gibbins enlisted Jan. 27, 1941. He spent the four years shuttling between destroyers and corvettes before ending up on the Trentonian in 1944.

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