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CANADIAN MEDICAL OFFICERS IN THE ROYAL NAVY -- WORLD WAR II by Harry Stafford Morton.

Vivian C. McAlister

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/vivianmcalister/135/
At the beginning of the Second World War, the Royal Canadian Navy offered 90 medical officers on loan to the Royal Navy. The author was among that group, which included leaders in Canadian surgery such as Surgeon Lieutenant McLachlin of London, Ont. The history of these medical officers has not been written because it fell between histories of the Royal Canadian Navy and the Royal Navy. Dr. Morton collected the names of the officers and researched their activities through the Royal Canadian Navy in Halifax and the Royal Navy in London, UK. In addition, he used his contacts to check with survivors directly. The result of his research is this fascinating book.

The second half of the book is devoted to a memoir by Dr. Douglas Bell of his time in the Pacific theatre. This section, with many accounts of life and surgery in the navy, includes the fascinating incident in which Surgeon Lieutenant George Gayman, as the most senior officer present, almost took the surrender of Japan on behalf of Canada. These accounts make fascinating reading for those of us who fortunately have not been required to undertake the risks that this group took.

Probably reflecting the author's modesty, only glimpses are available of his own life. He grew up in Halifax, the son of a gynecologist who worked at the Halifax Infirmary. As was common in those days, he went to England to study medicine. After graduating, he trained as a surgeon, becoming a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. Practising in Canada, he was in the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve before the war. With the other 89 medical officers, he was seconded to the Royal Navy on the outbreak of hostilities. After the war he continued surgery in Montreal.

This is a remarkable text in several respects: in addition to the historical aspect, it is remarkable in that the author retired from McGill University in 1970 and this publication comes 77 years after his first published surgical communication.

By Vivian McAlister

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