

DR. RALPH L. CHEESMAN – CITATION FOR THE SGS HONOUR ROLL

Ralph Cheesman was born the 19th January 1924, at Southborough, Tunbridge Wells, in the county of Kent in southern England, where he spent his early childhood. His education was completed at Eltham College¹, in Grove Park, south London.

Armed Forces Career

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Ralph served in the Home Guard attached to the Royal West Kent Regiment. In 1942, then aged 18, he joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve as an Ordinary Seaman, and served first on the destroyer H.M.S. Petard in the Mediterranean as the gun crew's communicator. During this time, he was witness to what was later recognized as one of the war's most significant events. On 30th October 1942 in the eastern Mediterranean, H.M.S. Petard forced to surface the German submarine U-559 with the subsequent capture of Enigma code books² an incident that was kept secret for nearly forty years.

In late 1942, Ralph went on to the complete officer training in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, and from 1943 to 1944 was assigned to motor torpedo boats in the Indian Ocean, based in Ceylon. It was when returning from duty to Britain by convoy on board the P & O liner *Stratheard* that he first met Tweelie, who was on *her* way back from India to school in England.

Ralph next trained for duty on submarines at Blythe, north of Newcastle. After the cessation of hostilities on May 6th, 1945 he was sent to receive the surrender of one of the new Type XXI U-boats (U-2513) from the famous Admiral Topp³ at Horten, Oslo Fjord in Norway⁴. This and other surrendered submarines were brought to Lissavally, Lough Foyle, Co. Derry in Northern Ireland, pending distribution amongst the allied navies.

Ralph continued his service with the Naval Reserve in Britain from 1945 to 1955 and later in Canada from 1955 to 1976 and was in turn Commanding Officer of H.M.C.S. Unicorn, Saskatoon and H.M.C.S. Queen, Regina, retiring with the rank of Commander.

Early University Career

Shortly after the end of the war, Ralph enrolled as an undergraduate in the Geology Department at Imperial College, London. After obtaining his B.Sc., he went on to take his Master's (awarded 1952) and then Ph.D., (awarded 1956) working on field areas in Co. Donegal⁵, Ireland under Professor Wallace Pitcher's supervision. At the beginning of his Master's Degree, on 2nd September 1950, Ralph married Tweelie at Eltham School Chapel. During his time at Imperial (1951-1955), he worked as Assistant Lecturer and Watt's Librarian of Geology.

His Master's Thesis area was the Loughros Peninsula and his Ph.D. Thesis area the Main Donegal Granite, between Glenties and Fintown. His work later formed a key part of the Pitcher and Berger's compilation *The Geology of Donegal*⁶, which was the first geology map and memoir to be published on Irish geology in over seventy years.

Emigration and Canadian Career

In October 1955 Ralph and Tweelie emigrated to Canada aboard the Canadian Pacific liner *Empress of Scotland*.

Here he joined the Saskatchewan Department of Mineral Resources (Mines Branch, Precambrian and Industrial Minerals) as a field geologist, working two field seasons in northern Saskatchewan, first mapping the Mari Lake area, and next the Wapus Bay area on east Reindeer Lake. He then became Chief Geologist of the Precambrian and Industrial Minerals Division and was instrumental in operating Prospectors' Schools in northern Saskatchewan and in administering the Prospectors' Assistance Plan.

During this time he actively advocated the use of airborne EM and magnetic surveys and the release of the results to the public and mining industry as a way of promoting the mineral potential of Saskatchewan. In 1969 he co-chaired with Tony Gordon the Saskatchewan Geological Society symposium *Exploring Saskatchewan's Precambrian*.

Dr. Cheesman left the department in 1969 to pursue a career as a consultant to the mineral exploration industry. From 1972 to 1991 he was Manager-Consultant of the Saskatchewan Mining Association, representing the Association on the Cluff Lake Board of Enquiry and serving on many other committees that dealt with land use and access for mineral development, always actively promoting public awareness of the importance of the mineral industry to Saskatchewan and Canada

From 1997 to 2007 he was an Adjunct Professor at the University of Regina, Department of Geology, teaching a variety of courses to undergraduate students that included: Environmental Geology (Geology 102); Internal Processes of the Earth (Geology 201); Mineralogy I and II (Geology 210 and 211); Applied Geochemistry (Geology 471) and Practical and Ethical Responsibilities of the Practicing Geologist (Geol 491)

In 2000, the Prospectors' and Developers' Association of Canada gave Dr. Cheesman the Distinguished Service Award in recognition of his years of outstanding work on behalf of the mining industry in Saskatchewan and Canada.

Other Interests

From an early age Ralph had far-ranging and diverse interests in many things. It was Ralph's boyhood interest in what was then called Natural History that led him into geology. His naval career served to reinforce his love of ships and aircraft, adding them to that other pursuit: railways and trains. He continued his connection with the navy and military, regularly reading the honour roll of lost ships at the Battle of the Atlantic Service every May, attending the D-Day Dinners in June and the Remembrance Day ceremonies at the Cenotaph, and numerous other functions at the Royal United Services Institute.

Whoever happened to be the Royal Visitor would generally catch sight of his impressive row of medals⁶ and come over for a chat⁷.

Chasing *The Canadian Empress* whenever she came through Saskatchewan, was a regular excursion.

He was an avid stamp collector or rather connoisseur, a strong supporter of the Regina Philatelic Club and a regular displayer of stamps at their shows.

Amongst his volunteer positions he was on the Advisory Board of the Regina Symphony Orchestra, served on Senate of the College of Emmanuel and St. Chad, at the University of Saskatchewan and was a member of the Rotary Club of Regina.

Ralph died on June 27th, 2007.

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FOOTNOTES

1. A public school founded in 1842 as the School for the Sons of Missionaries. It is famous as the school attended by Eric Liddell, who won a bronze medal in the 200m and gold in the 400m at the 1924 Paris Olympics and who is the subject of the film *Chariots of Fire*.
2. In this action, Lieutenant Antony Fasson and Able Seaman Colin Grazier lost their lives in the effort to retrieve Enigma code books from the sinking submarine. Both were later posthumously awarded the George Cross.
3. Admiral Erich Topp (2 July 1914 - 26 December 2005) operated mainly against convoys in the North Atlantic, sinking 30 ships and crippling several others on ten patrols. One of his victims during this period was the destroyer USS *Reuben James*, the first US warship to be sunk in WWII, on 31st October 1941. He was the third most successful German U-Boot *Experten* commander of World War II. He sank 35 ships for a total of 197,460 GRT.
4. On 8th May 1945
5. Ralph used to say that his introduction to the geology of Donegal was when during a routine dive, his submarine hit bottom at Lough Swilly.
6. *The Geology of Donegal – A Study of Granite Emplacement and Unroofing* by Wallace S. Pitcher and Anthony R. Berger bears the inscription: “To Ralph Cheesman, In appreciation of your contribution to the geology of Loughros and Fintown, With Very Best Wishes, Wallace Pitcher”
7. Dr. Cheesman’s wartime and subsequent military decorations include: The 1939-45 Star; Atlantic Star; Africa Star (with North Africa 1942-43 Clasp); Burma Star; The Defence Medal; The War Medal 1939-45; The Malta George Cross Fiftieth Anniversary Medal (Malta Convoy Medal), 1992; Queen’s Coronation Medal 1953; The Queen’s Golden Jubilee Medal, 2002.

8. I used to tease him by saying they were just coming to complain about the brilliant glare from the medals shining in their eyes.