

## Richard Rohmer. *Raleigh on the Rocks: The Canada Shipwreck of HMS Raleigh*.

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to include a glossary of terms, particularly those related to the French fishery, as well as an index of names and places. That said, the variety, liveliness, and occasional humour of the selections, and their relative shortness make it well worth the effort.

This anthology is a wonderful opportunity for present and future generations who are interested in Newfoundland history — provided they have the requisite linguistic ability or just desire to brush up on their rusty French — to immerse themselves into the French past of this area. It provides a valuable selection of samples from abundant, though largely untapped, historical sources. This is a major contribution, a veritable journey of recovery of a Newfoundland that, while still fairly close to us in time, has remained nearly entirely hidden for so long. Rompkey has connected many of the pieces that serve as an enlightening guide book of French Newfoundland in the nineteenth century.

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Richard Rohmer. *Raleigh on the Rocks: The Canada Shipwreck of HMS Raleigh*. St. John's: Creative Publishing, 2003, ISBN 1-89429-446-7

ON 8 AUGUST 1922 the new Cavendish class light cruiser HMS *Raleigh* drove aground on the rocks below the Amour Point lighthouse on the Labrador coast. She was en route to Forteau Bay, making 12 knots in fog and rain squalls, with a strong wind from the south west. By the time breaking surf was spotted from the bridge it was too late, and *Raleigh* plowed her way onto the reef. No amount of reversing of engines and winching on cables and anchors would free her. Meanwhile the sea worked the hull against the bottom, grinding her ever tighter into the rock. Soon *Raleigh* was a total loss. And almost as quickly her cutlery, crockery, china, and furnishings graced homes from Blanc Sablon to Nain, as *Raleigh* herself entered into the folklore of the Labrador.

The story of the cruiser's loss is the subject of Major General Richard Rohmer's slightly mistitled *Raleigh on the Rocks: The Canada Shipwreck of HMS Raleigh*, a good account of the stranding and the subsequent events. Rohmer starts with an informative description of *Raleigh*'s North American cruise in 1922, but quite quickly gets to the events of 8 August as Captain Arthur Bottomley made his way towards Forteau Bay on the Labrador — not the Canadian — coast for some salmon fishing. What follows in Rohmer's book is a bare bones story, told largely without embellishment, context, or analysis. Rohmer focuses instead on the technical aspects of the grounding, the weather, course steered, impact, the courts of enquiry and courts martial, salvage attempts, and later destruction of the wreck and its ammunition. Once it became clear that *Raleigh* was never going to get free, the

wreck was stripped of its valuables, including weapons and equipment, much of which apparently found its way in the form of salvage into the hands of locals — including some of the cruiser's 7.5" shells. Meanwhile, the Navigating Officer, Cdr L.C. Bott and Captain Bottomley were both court martialled and found negligent in the performance of their duty, reprimanded and discharged from the service. In September 1926 what remained of *Raleigh* was blown up by the Royal Navy, although the last of her ammunition was not cleared from the site until 2003 by the Canadian navy.

Rohmer presents much of his story — and at times it seems all of his evidence — in the form of facsimile reprints of contemporary documents which he unearthed in the Public Record Office (PRO) in England. This makes the book less of a story than a compilation of primary documents which, especially after page 67, have to be read if the thin supporting narrative is to be understood: most will need their glasses to do so. The transcripts of the two courts martial are here, as is the correspondence related to disposal of the wreck, clearance of the ammunition in 2003 and much else besides — including a facsimile copy of Rohmer's letter to the Chief of the Naval Staff in London in 2002 on his own ostentatious letterhead, replete with titles and honorifics, asking if the Brits were going to pay for the clearance of the cruiser's ammunition from the bottom by Canadian divers (!). The focus of the book is clearly on what the surviving written naval record in the PRO says about the incident. Indeed, one could argue that *Raleigh on the Rocks* is not a proper book at all, but rather an assembly of documents loosely tied together with a very spare narrative: the facts, just the facts — Bottomley was charged as follows (see document), the court was composed the following (see document), it heard evidence as follows (see document), and reached the following verdict (see document). Not much context, not much analysis.

Nor is there much human interest here either, no evidence of attempts to find out who Bottomley and Bott were, what the local community did when the vessel grounded, what the navigational hazards of that stretch of the Labrador coast might be in late summer, no first-person accounts of the escape of the crew (just the matter of fact and very brief short report filed afterwards), how the navigation of the day worked and therefore why Bottomley and Bott were found to be negligent, and a myriad of other issues that would have added colour and interest to the story. In short, there is much more to the *Raleigh* story than Rohmer presents. It is also unfortunate that the book is lumbered by Rohmer's autobiographical, name-dropping discussion of his own naval lineage in the introduction. The grounding and loss of the *Raleigh* does not need an association with Major General Richard Rohmer to make it a worthwhile study. That said, he has produced a good and informative read, and a useful addition to local history.

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