Lieutenant Graham McNaughton Baker, O-3820

Graham Baker. Photo: Canadian Virtual War Memorial

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**

- **Born: Toronto ON, 2 April 1916**

- **Enlisted: HMCS *York,* 18 March 1940**

- **Civilian Occupation: Salesman, AS & E Robinson & Company**

- **Death: Died during Operation *Chariot,* at St Nazaire, France on 28 March 1942**

- **Mention in Dispatches**

- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 8 and Baker Hill, Nunavut, named in his memory**

Graham McNaughton Baker was the first of four children born to Gina McNaughton Baker and Edwin George Baker on 2 April 1916 in Toronto, Ontario. Three sisters followed – Kathleen Margaret in 1918, Nancy Isobel in 1920 and Gina Elise in 1928. After their marriage in Scotland in 1912, their parents emigrated to Toronto, Canada, where they quickly prospered.

In 1920, Edwin Baker joined Moore Corporation, the Toronto-based business form company with North America-wide affiliates. Through hard work, he became its president in 1935, where he simplified the corporation's structure. As a result, the corporation's capabilities were increased. The United States government turned to the Moore Corporation in 1936 when it needed a huge business-form order of 40 million Social Security application forms and cards. This government connection proved important as World War II approached and the war brought demands for ration books, payroll envelopes, and various other forms that industry and governments had not previously needed. More than 150 Canadian and U.S. government departments used forms developed by Moore.

Graham graduated from Upper Canada College in Toronto in 1934. He earned a Bachelor's degree from Trinity College, University of Toronto, in 1938 and was studying at Clare College in Cambridge UK when the Second World War broke out. He immediately returned to Canada, commenced the enrollment process, and found temporary employment as a salesman with AS & E Robinson & Company, a paper, printing, and packaging company in Toronto. He enlisted as an Acting Sub-Lieutenant in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve at the Toronto Division RCNVR on 18 March 1940. He was 23 years old and single. At enlistment Graham was 5'11 ",

weighed 167 pounds, and he had brown hair and blue eyes. He was an avid sailor and hockey player.

Acting Sub Lieutenant Baker was part of the first group of six recruits to be selected and loaned to the Royal Navy. By 20 March 1940, he was on his way to the U.K. On completion of his basic training in July 1940, he was posted to HMS *Eclipse*, an E-class destroyer commissioned in 1934. During his time onboard, the ship was busy taking part in major operations off the west coast of Africa, in British home waters, the Norwegian Sea, and in the Arctic Ocean. He earned his Bridge Watchkeeping Certificate and eventually became her Navigating Officer. On 19 January 1942, he left *Eclipse* and was posted to HMS *St. Christopher*, the Coastal Forces training base located in Fort William, Scotland. There he underwent training in the operation of Motor Torpedo Boats (MTB) and Motor Gun Boats (MGB) in preparation for Operation *Chariot.*

Operation *Chariot* was an assault on the docks at Saint-Nazaire on the west coast of France. In 1942 the German battleship *Tirpitz*, anchored in a Norwegian fiord, was considered by the Admiralty to present a grave threat to Atlantic shipping. Should *Tirpitz* enter the Atlantic, the huge drydock at Saint-Nazaire would be vital for *Tirpitz*'s operation because it was the only German-held drydock on the European Atlantic coast large enough to service the battleship. The Admiralty reasoned that by pre-emptively putting the drydock out of action, any offensive sortie by *Tirpitz* into the Atlantic would be riskier and much more difficult.

The plan called for HMS *Campbeltown,* an obsolete former US Navy destroyer, obtained in the Destroyer for Bases Agreement, to be extensively modified to reduce her draft and change her appearance, mimicking that of a German warship. She was also packed with 4.5 tons of explosives in a concealed compartment. With these modifications she could navigate up the Loire estuary and ram the drydock gates. The explosives were set to detonate at a specific time. Accompanying *Campbeltown* would be 16 Fairmile B motor launches (MLs), one MTB and one MGB. A total of 612 seamen and commandos comprised the task force. As the gates were rammed the commandos would land, destroy the dockyard infrastructure and then re-embark in the MLs to withdraw out to sea. Two destroyers would escort the task force from Falmouth to the Loire estuary and then stand out to sea. A submarine would be stationed at the mouth of the estuary to operate a beacon from periscope depth.

The task force departed from Falmouth at 1400 on March 26, 1942. *Campbeltown* rammed the dry dock gates 0134, just 4 minutes later than planned, on 28 March. The task force met heavy resistance transiting the estuary and attempting to land and recover the demolition parties. While the operation achieved its aim, the cost was enormous. One hundred and five seamen and 64 commandos were killed, 106 seamen and 109 commandos were captured, 223 returned to the UK by sea and 5

HMS Campbelltown on 28 Mar 1942
Successfully damaged the dry dock at St Nazaire
Photo: Bundesarchiv, Bild 101II-MW-3722-03 / Kramer / CC-BY-SA 3.0

evaded capture and returned to the UK via Gibraltar. Only three Fairmile B motor launches returned to the UK, one was captured, one had turned back, and the rest were either destroyed by enemy fire or scuttled. Neither the MTB nor the MGB survived.

There is some confusion regarding the role Lieutenant Baker played in the assault. There was a Toronto Star report that Graham was in charge of an MTB leading the attack. That is incorrect, Lieutenant Baker was embarked in ML 447 as the Third Officer. Six MLs, including ML 447 were tasked with landing a total of 79 commandos on a finger jetty known as "The Mole". Specifically, ML 447 carried the only assault party capable of clearing and securing "the Mole" for additional landings and later embarkation. Consequently, ML 447 attempted to land her party first. The 15-man assault team had already suffered casualties from shore batteries by the time they reached "the Mole". The assault team and ML 447 crew were met with grenades and heavy close-range fire as they attempted to come alongside "the Mole". ML 447, set ablaze by the enemy fire, eventually backed away from "the Mole", whereupon ML 160 came alongside and took off survivors. Sub Lieutenant Graham Baker was not among those rescued. His remains were never recovered.

Lieutenant Graham McNaughton Baker actions are best described in the Mention in Dispatches citation: "For great bravery and unshaken devotion to duty in control of a gun in his motor launch, and afterward in trying to take a rope onto a jetty heavily enfiladed by intense enemy fire (during an attack on St. Nazaire)."

For his service, Lieutenant Graham McNaughton Baker was awarded: the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the War Medal, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and a Mention in Dispatches. His mother, Gina Baker, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

Sub Lieutenant Graham McNaughton Baker is remembered on panel 8 of the Halifax Memorial in Point Pleasant Park, Halifax. NS. Additionally, Baker Hill, in Nunavut, is named in his honour.

Prepared By:

John Dalzell, Capt(N) (retired), Commanding Officer HMCS UNICORN 1983-88 & Citizen Sailor Virtual Cenotaph Research Team

Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission – record for Lieutenant Graham McNaughton Baker

- Library and Archives Canada Service Record for Lieutenant Graham McNaughton Baker

- Canadian Virtual War Memorial – Profile page for Lieutenant Graham McNaughton Baker

- Reference for Business Encyclopedia (2021). History of MOORE CORPORATION LIMITED. Retrieved 12 September, 2021 from

https://www.referenceforbusiness.com/history2/34/MOORE-CORPORATION-LIMITED.html

- The St. Nazaire Society. Operation Chariot. Retrieved August 31, 2021, from www.Operation-Chariot.org

- Wikipedia page for HMS Eclipse (H08). Retrieved 12 September 2021 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Eclipse_(H08)