

“The Gates” at Our Gates: F.R. (Hamish) Berchem and the Role of the Eastern Based Porte-class Gate Vessels after Canadian Armed Forces Unification

George L. Zimmerman and Duff W. Crerar

Faced with near extinction after the unification of the Canadian Armed Forces in 1968, the Naval Reserve community had to prove its relevance in the era of nuclear missile exchange. A few officers took it upon themselves to demonstrate that the Naval Reserve could make significant contributions to the sea defence of Canada. The main training sea going platforms were the dowdy trawler designed Porte-class gate vessels. Referencing, primarily, the extensive fonds of the officer in charge, a naval reservist, Commander F.R. Berchem, this article chronicles the sea going training and operations of the gate vessels on the East Coast and Great Lakes from 1971 to 1975. The work of like-minded reserve commanders and their crews in the gate vessels was vital in preserving the sea-going capability of the citizen sailors of Canada during this difficult decade.

Confrontée à la quasi-disparition après l'unification des Forces armées canadiennes en 1968, la communauté de la Réserve navale a dû se montrer pertinente à l'ère des échanges de missiles nucléaires. Quelques officiers ont pris l'initiative de prouver que la Réserve navale pouvait contribuer de façon importante à la défense maritime du Canada. Les principales plateformes de formation océaniques étaient les bâtiments de barrière de la classe Porte conçus comme chalutiers peu élégants. S'appuyant principalement sur le vaste fonds du commandant F.R. Berchem, officier responsable et membre de la Réserve navale, cet article relate la formation et les

opérations en haute mer des bâtiments de barrière sur la côte Est de 1971 à 1975. Les travaux des commandants de la Réserve et de leurs équipages à bord des bâtiments de barrière étaient indispensables au maintien de la capacité océanique des citoyens-marins du Canada au cours de cette décennie difficile.

Introduction

During the chaotic period immediately following the politically driven unification of Canada's three armed services in 1968, Commander F.R. Hamish Berchem played a fundamental part in keeping the Naval Reserve alive to serve another day. Over successive reserve summer training periods between 1971 and 1975, Berchem served as the senior officer for three antiquated and poorly maintained Porte-class gate vessels. Through these commands, he demonstrated that the Naval Reserve could accomplish important taskings and that, with the right leadership, these ships could provide a desperately needed platform for junior officer watch-keeping training and qualification. In so doing, Berchem played an important role in the preservation of the basic sea-going capabilities of the Naval Reserve. A generation of reserve naval officers were so influenced by their service on these ships that the gate vessel program, more by circumstances than design, became a significant part of Canadian naval succession.

Frederick Ronald Berchem (1931-2018) was born in Saltcoats, Scotland, before serving in the Denholm Merchant Ship group in the West Pacific. He qualified as a Royal Navy (RN) submariner through HMS *Dolphin*, Gosport in 1957. After transferring to the Royal Canadian Navy, he was posted back to the RN as navigator to the submarine HMS *Excalibur* and participated in testing the propulsion fuel high-test peroxide. Berchem transferred to the RCN Naval Reserve in 1960. Completing his M.A. in History at the University of Toronto, he taught high school at Don Mills and Bathurst Heights Collegiate in North York. At the same time, he progressed through various offices at HMCS *York*, showed his command skills on the gate vessels while they were stationed in Hamilton, became a recognized instructor on the Naval Control of Shipping, and took on a variety of other naval roles. In the early 1970s, Berchem served as commanding officer of HMCS *York* (1970 to 1973) and a commander of gate vessels on the East Coast (1971 to 1974) and Great Lakes (1974 to 1975).

Berchem was an artist, trained historian, professional teacher, and a meticulous chronicler of his work at sea. His papers include memos, signals, and detailed hand-written logs covering these years, and offer many examples of the mariner's pilotage skills. The Berchem fonds, housed in the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador, include charts with tracks and

soundings, coastline sketches, harbour and seaway markings, and approach instructions, excerpts from his unpublished memoirs (1970 to 1978), and the manuscript of his unpublished book, *Scraps from Labrador*, which also contains detailed drawings. Besides being a chronicle of command, litanies of breakdowns, and sometimes wry tales of crew foibles and out port eccentrics, his papers remain a significant resource for anyone wanting to understand the Labrador and North Shore St. Lawrence Coast of the 1970s. They give a revealing, technically accurate, and sometimes humorous chronicle of Berchem’s Atlantic service commanding the Porte-class gate vessels and showcase the determination, ingenuity, and professionalism that overcame the difficulties faced by the Naval Reserve during unification.

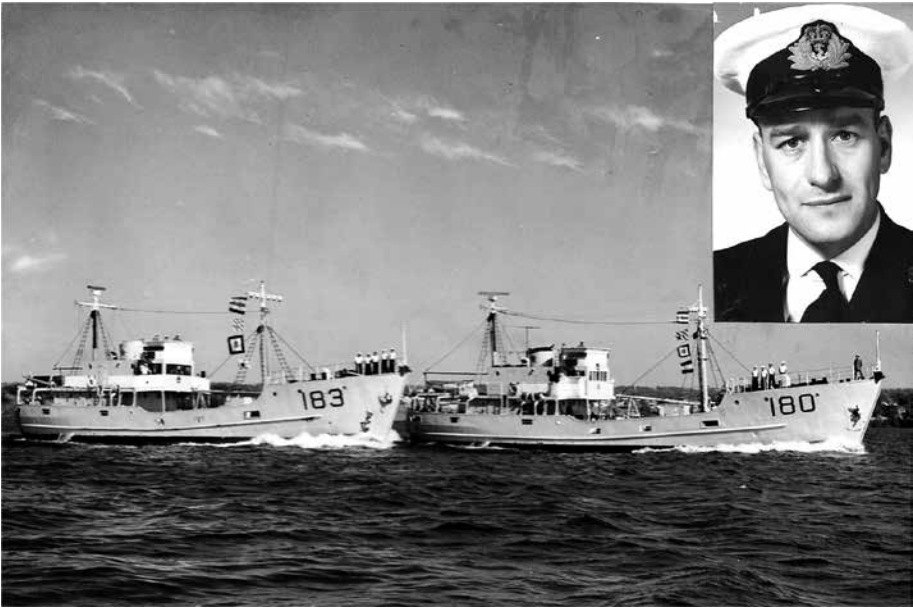
Political Context

To appreciate fully what Berchem achieved, a brief overview of the condition of Canada’s Naval Reserve and its place with the Canadian Forces is necessary. The Canadian military has a long history of contraction and expansion dependent on national economics and international tensions. In the late 1960s, prime ministerial and cabinet reservations about the relevance of conventional forces in a missile-delivered nuclear exchange era led to a change in defence priorities. It was deemed there would be no time to call up the reserves in a nuclear war, hence there was little need for an expansive reserve force. This led to a difficult decade, particularly for the militia and the reserves. The Canadian Naval Reserves faced the prospect of losing basic sea-going experience and practicing the skills essential to all navies for centuries. Researchers, such as Peter C. Newman, a leading journalist and Naval Reserve officer, commented on this decline.¹ Ian Holloway noted that the robust University Naval Training Division, which had steadily yielded basic watch-keeping, naval control and diesel propulsion graduates, died in 1969, succeeded by an anemic Reserve Officer University Training Plan, characterized by a “minimalist program marked by very low recruitment quotas and more limited breadth of training opportunities.”² Michael Hadley observed that some proud and well-known Reserve units fell by the wayside, lost their vessels, or were kept afloat only by dedicated, sometimes civilian enthusiasts.³ Their primary

¹ P.C. Newman, *True North, not strong and free* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983), 45-51.

² Ian Holloway, “The Quest for Relevance,” in *Citizen Sailors: Chronicles of Canada’s Naval Reserve*, eds. Richard Gimblett and Michael Hadley (Toronto: Dundurn, 2010), 81.

³ Michael Hadley, “The Impact of Public Policy on a Naval Reserve Division,” in *RCN in Retrospect, 1910-1968*, ed. J. A. Boutilier (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1982), 308-316.



Porte St. Louis (183) and *Porte St. Jean* (180) in the summer of 1971. Inset is a photo of Commander F.R. Hamish Berchem. (Department of National Defence)

sea training platforms were the unlikely Porte-class gate vessels, built for anti-submarine harbour protection and commissioned in the early 1950s.

The Gate Vessels

There were five trawler-like Porte-class gate vessels: HMC Ships *Porte de la Reine* and *Porte Quebec* on the west coast, and HMC Ships *Porte St. Jean* and *Porte St. Louis* on the east coast. In 1962, the fifth vessel, HMCS *Porte Dauphine*, had been loaned to the Canadian Centre for Inland Waters (CCIW) in collaboration with the University of Toronto, to conduct research on the Great Lakes (sailing out of Burlington, Lake Ontario until re-commissioned in the Navy in 1974). Originally designed to tend harbour anti-submarine nets, the Porte-class (last in class completed in 1952) saw little service in their intended role. The aging ships (known as “pig-boats” due to their ungainly manoeuvrability with fore and aft high sail areas and a single screw) became the primary sea training platform which bore the Naval Reserve throughout the 1970s to the 1990s. Given their tendency to wallow at sea, their reinforced, cement-lined hulls at least reduced the tendency to bob along the surface and their robust build could withstand the abuse anticipated as training vessels. Making about 11 knots at top speed, “the Gates” each had their own distinctive

mechanical quirks.⁴ Through these vessels and the officers that commanded them, there emerged a small newly trained generation of deck and logistic officers, diesel mechanics, sailors, and communications personnel.⁵

Commanding these often mechanically unreliable vessels were a handful of Naval Reserve officers who maintained the reserve’s sea going tradition “throughout the dismal years of the Hellyer’s ungainly, and ultimately, failed experiment.”⁶ Under such difficult conditions, these skippers taught the basic crafts of the mariner as well as the modern skills of naval leadership.

Berchem commanded HMCS *Porte St. Jean* and HMCS *Porte St. Louis* on the east coast during the summers of 1971 to 1974, and HMCS *Porte Dauphine* on the Great Lakes between 1974 and the end of 1975. He earned a strong reputation as a resourceful, no-nonsense, professional, and dedicated officer with enviable skills in navigation, teaching, and leadership.⁷ In a 1973 report, he explained his general approach to training and preparing his reservists: “The pace for summer must be forced, and the task given to the Reserves be a worthwhile challenge if maximum training benefit is to be derived. A long, hot summer, if you will, but the time has come to make it perfectly clear to the ‘summer sailor’ that the days of banyans and ‘jollies’ are limited. Practical performance is what counts.”⁸

Summer 1971: *Porte St. Jean* and *Porte St. Louis*

Planning for the 1971 summer employment of the gate vessels began early in the year. The ships were to be put into service on 25 May, with officers and crew posted in time for work-ups between 14 and 23 June. Although Berchem had not been involved in these planning and preparatory activities, in mid-June, he was surprised by an offer to take command of a two-vessel task unit for summer gate vessel employment out of Halifax.

The reason for his selection is not clear. Berchem speculated, however, that

⁴ Porte-class gate vessels: trawler design, 125.5' x 26.3' x 13', 429 tons at full load, 600 hp single diesel engine, giving maximum speed eleven knots, range 4,000 nautical miles at ten knots. First laid down May 1950 and last of five completed December 1952. Designation changed from YNG to YMG in 1954. See also Raymond Blackman, *Jane's Fighting Ships 1956-57* (London: Sampson Low, 1956), 93.

⁵ Their ranks included Al Horner, Bob Price, Michael Hadley, Bill Webb, F.R. (Hamish) Berchem, Rowland Marshall, and Robin Knapp-Fisher. See H. Létourneau, “Hamish Berchem: Keeping the flame burning,” *Starshell* 83 (Summer 2018), 6.

⁶ Gimblett and Hadley, *Citizen Sailors: Chronicles of Canada's Naval Reserve*, 92

⁷ D. Ravis, email message to George Zimmerman, 16 February 2019.

⁸ *Report Gate Vessels: Summer Employment 1973*, 6 September 1973, The Rooms Provincial Archives Division, Hamish Berchem fonds (Uncatalogued), Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL).

Ports of call in the
1971 Alpha Cruise.
(Wikimedia Commons)



his successful and somewhat daring role as the charge officer of the submarine HMCS *Grilse* in 1969 was a major factor in the selection. His task in *Grilse* (originally USS *Burrfish*, a Balao-class submarine of Second World War vintage acquired by the Canadian Navy for anti-submarine warfare training) was to return the boat back to the USN from which it had been leased in 1961, in full working order.⁹ The only officer on board, he had charge of a Regular Force skeleton crew. Originally the boat was to be towed from Esquimalt to San Diego, however on the first day out, the tug lost propulsion and *Grilse* had to take the tug in tow back to Esquimalt. His crew informed him the boat had full propulsion with all five of its diesel engines functioning. His proposal to take the submarine back under its own power was accepted. He left Esquimalt with the *Grilse* under its own power and successfully delivered it to the USN, although he liked to quip, “we were assigned an escort.”¹⁰

Berchem assumed command of HMCS *Porte St. Louis* on 22 June 1971, in time to oversee the last days of the work-ups. Commander J. Jacques assumed command of HMCS *Porte St. Jean* on 26 June. Like Berchem, he had not been involved in the prior planning activities.

The primary aim of the summer employment of the vessels was “to progress summer training for naval reserve personnel and complementary to that functioning to fulfill certain Maritime Command requirements.”¹¹ These complementary tasks included providing resupply for Canadian Ranger patrols

⁹ Marc Milner, *Canada's Navy: The First Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 228. See also Julie H. Ferguson, *Through a Canadian Periscope: The Story of the Canadian Submarine Service* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2014), 279-281, 308.

¹⁰ F.R. Berchem, *Memoirs* (unpublished manuscript, 2016), 120, Berchem fonds, PANL.

¹¹ Command Operation Order 1/71-Gate Vessels, 4 June 1971, Berchem fonds, PANL.

situated in communities along the coasts of Newfoundland and Quebec, port visits, surveillance, and support for Sea Cadets. The program was conceived to be undertaken with two cruises: “Alpha” and “Bravo,” the first being designed for visits to Newcastle, Campbellton, Magdalen Island, Pictou, Port Hawkesbury, Sydney, and Louisbourg with return to Halifax on 19 July.

The role played by the Gates in supporting the Canadian Rangers was an important task taken on by Maritime Command (MARCOM) in 1971, during a period of revitalization for the Rangers, who the government viewed as important tools to exercise Canada’s sovereignty in the North. Organized into patrols at the community level, the Canadian Rangers – many of whom were (and are) Indigenous – serve as the “eyes and ears” of the military in Canada’s northern and remote regions. In the 1970s, they were supplied with a .303 Lee Enfield Mark 4 rifle, 200 (later 300) rounds of ammunition, and an identifying armband and were encouraged to expend their ammunition for marksmanship and hunting. Given that many Ranger patrols were located in isolated communities on the coast, resupply was most practical by sea and had been provided by passing coastal shipping and the Canadian Coast Guard. In 1971, the Navy acquired an essential resupply and liaison role for the Rangers on the Quebec North Shore, Newfoundland, and Labrador coasts.¹²

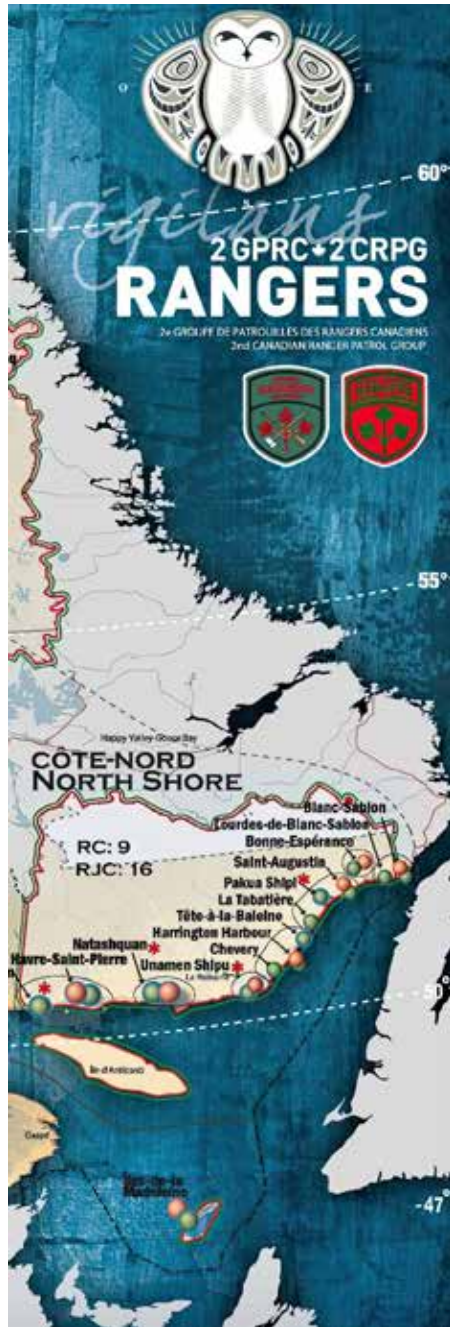
All the officers posted to the Gates were reservists except for an army officer responsible for the ammunition and weapons to be provided to the Rangers. The crew was augmented by a qualified backbone of Regular Force personnel for the engine room, communications, coxswain, boatswain, boatswain’s mate, electrician, hull tech, sick bay “tiffy” (medical assistant), and cook. Crew management that year was a significant issue – in Berchem’s case, these troubles mostly originated from alcohol.

Cruise Alpha got underway, as planned, on 28 June 1971. The age and the maintenance neglect of the Gates plagued all the sailing programs. This year, it began with the breakdown of the gyro compass and the echo-sounder on *Porte St. Louis*. Given the never-too-reliable state of the equipment in these vessels, the operational order made allowances for local repairs as required. Repairs meant changes to schedule and yet, despite some minor sailing changes, Cruise Alpha was considered a success, setting the Gates up for the more extensive Cruise Bravo.

¹² After 1979, MARCOM relinquished its responsibility for Quebec, north of 60 degrees, simplifying its work with the Rangers on the Lower North Shore, Newfoundland, and Labrador. For information on the Rangers in Quebec, see P. Whitney Lackenbauer (with Stéphane Roussel and Magalli Villierme), *A History of the Canadian Rangers of Quebec: 2nd Canadian Ranger Patrol Group* (North American and Arctic Defense and Security Network, 2022). For an overview of the Canadian Rangers, see P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers: A Living History* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013).

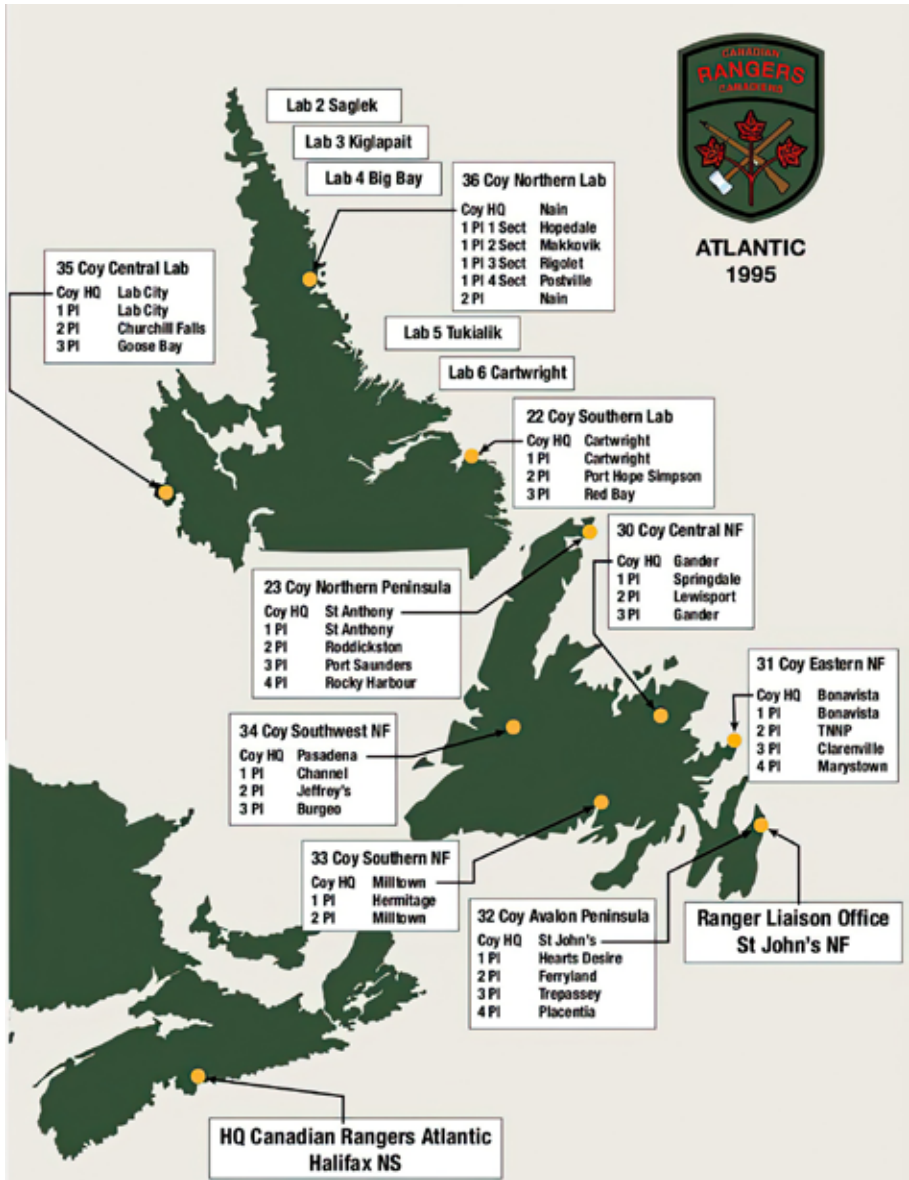
There was, however, some dockside turbulence. At the end of Cruise Alpha, the alarmed commanding officer of *Porte St. Jean* submitted a strongly worded request that the Newfoundland – the Ranger support – portion of Cruise Bravo be scrapped.¹³ To him, dangerous ice and fog conditions, critically unreliable equipment like radar and other machinery, the limited fresh water capacity (fifteen tons would normally last only three days), lack of experienced personnel, unsafe, poorly charted harbours, exposed anchorages, and reduced training opportunities all made the entire program unrealistic, even dangerous. Realizing that these objections, if supported, would restrict training to brief unproductive cruises around Bedford Basin, Berchem, point-by-point countered each issue in writing and strongly recommended that the program be executed as planned.¹⁴

Berchem argued that the sailing schedule was flexible enough in the trickier Belle Island Strait to allow sailing only during daylight hours with at least 10-mile visibility, thus reducing the need for the unreliable radar. He pointed out that potable water supplies were available every three days, which would be sufficient with judicious rationing. He requested that an additional Officer Watchkeeper be assigned



¹³ Gate Vessels Program of Sailing-Cruise Bravo 71, 21 July 1971, Berchem fonds, PANL.

¹⁴ Gate Vessels - Summer Employment 1971, 22 July 1971, Berchem fonds, PANL.



These maps show the locations of Canadian Ranger patrols on Quebec's Côte-Nord and on the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador. Many of these patrols were resupplied by Berchem and the Gates. (Department of National Defence)

to *St. Jean* for Cruise Bravo. He also argued that, "The shortcomings of the ships' essential machinery are a fact which must be lived with, and in effect, if they cannot be operated in the areas (as planned), then there is little support for any argument they be operated outside of Halifax harbor."¹⁵ In the end, as Commander of the Task Unit, Berchem was given the final authority on Cruise Bravo. The ships sailed as scheduled 26 July 1971.

Berchem learned at the end of the season that he had salvaged the gate vessel summer programs for the foreseeable future. He was advised that had he "supported *Porte St. Jean*'s submission it would have spelled the end for any such future programs for the Reserves."¹⁶ His professional weighing of the risks and benefits of Cruise Bravo was a major factor in Maritime Command's final decision to issue the sailing orders. The chance for a meaningful tasking for the Naval Reserve and the opportunity for open-sea training in the hands of an experienced commander were too good to miss.

The Gates were primarily tasked to resupply the Rangers with weapons and ammunition, in the outports of Newfoundland (Corner Brook, Forteau Bay, Red Bay, St. Anthony) and then along the North Shore of the St. Lawrence (Blanc Sablon, Harrington Harbour, Natashquan, Havre, and Bai Sept-Iles). The homeward leg included a Port Visit at Baie-Comeau, Quebec and Chatham, New Brunswick, with return to Halifax 25 August. Despite engineering problems and constant low visibility due to fog, Cruise Bravo was executed on time with its mission completed.

Berchem's memoirs reveal much of the daily mechanical and crew drama that service on the Gates provided. As the daily litany of notations attest, Berchem and his crew coped with repeated mechanical breakdowns (both ships had engine troubles; *Porte St. Louis* dealt with an oil leak in the clutch, while *Porte St. Jean* had issues with its oil pump), unreliable navigational equipment (especially the radars), unreliable charting, and difficult passages. Challenging harbours, encounters with ice, and near constant fog conditions forced officer trainees to learn quickly, yielding improved confidence and competence as the voyage progressed. The crew were treated to some wild weather combined with, of course, engine trouble. Berchem noted that while the Gates were very seaworthy, they were unsurpassed for discomfort in wild seas: the passage was like "riding a wild animal in an "aquatic rodeo." In naval parlance: "Poseidon was pissed off."¹⁷

Nevertheless, Cruise Bravo was considered an unqualified success. The Rangers had been re-supplied at lower costs than previous years and

¹⁵ Letter *Porte St. Louis*: 3250-1, 22 July 1971, Berchem fonds, PANL.

¹⁶ Berchem, *Memoirs*, 129, Berchem fonds, PANL.

¹⁷ Berchem, *Memoirs*, 138, Berchem fonds, PANL.

Berchem had gathered invaluable current port information for many locations, including approaches, berthing, anchorages, and navigational diagrams. One of Berchem’s key recommendation’s was that the inexperienced reserves be posted to the ships “for as long as possible ... they would be better qualified at the end.”¹⁸ Initial plans were also made for the 1972 program. During the Cold War, Labrador was a region of strategic value, as it had been during the Second World War. Updating every piece of information on that coast was an important task. The stage was set for a more ambitious program to travel further north “down” the coast of Labrador.

Summer 1972: *Porte St. Jean* and *Porte St. Louis*

The 1972 summer sea training season for the Naval Reserve began once again with Berchem as commander. He assumed command of *Porte St. Jean* on 4 July 1972. As before, the task unit’s mission was to “progress summer’s training for naval reserve personnel and complementary to that function fulfill certain Maritime Command requirements.”¹⁹ These complementary tasks again comprised port visits, support for Canadian Ranger patrols, coastal surveillance, and Sea Cadet support. Since *Porte St. Jean* had not undertaken its obligatory work-ups, Cruise Alpha was undertaken by *Porte St. Louis* alone, under the command of Captain (Sea Reserve) (i.e. a two ring Lieutenant) I. Verryn-Stuart. *Porte St. Louis* left Halifax on 4 July 1972, making port visits to Pictou, Summerside, Lunenburg, Souris, Georgetown, and Charlottetown. As in the previous years the navigational equipment (gyro, radar and echo sounder) proved undependable and as usual repeated post-trip requests for equipment replacement were not actioned. Significantly, Verryn-Stuart, sensitive to Canadian francophones, recommended in his after-cruise report that future ship’s company should continue the practice of carrying at least one bilingual senior hand to ensure good training for the French-speaking members of the crew. Forestalling an old navy prejudice, he was quick to add that the French speaking members were a success: apt, hard-working students. Cruise Alpha ended when *Porte Saint Louis* returned to Halifax on 28 July 1972.²⁰

Berchem’s Cruise Bravo that year was projected to be the most ambitious to date, serving Ranger outposts as far north as Cartwright, Labrador. The outbound track began in Newfoundland from Port aux Basque to Battle Harbour, though the voyage was interrupted by a hasty return to Corner Brook for additional repairs to the radar of *Porte St. Jean*. After repairs, they proceeded

¹⁸ *Report Gate Vessels: Summer Employment 1971*, 2 September 1971, Berchem fonds, PANL.

¹⁹ CANCOMFLOTLANT OPORD 5/72 GATE VESSELS, 7 June 1972, Berchem fonds, PANL.

²⁰ *Report Gate Vessels: Summer Employment 1972*, 5 September 1972, Berchem fonds, PANL.



1972 Gate Vessel Summer Cruise (Keith McDougall via forposterityssake.ca)

to Harrington Harbour, Red Bay, St. Anthony, and on to Cartwright, arriving at anchor on 17 August. The southbound track took them to Frenchman Island, Spotted Island, Snug Harbour, Fox Harbour, Mary's Harbour, Battle Harbour, Blanc Sablon, Natashquan, and Mingan. Mingan ended the Ranger portion of the cruise and the Gates headed to Port aux Basques and St. Pierre, before finally arriving at Halifax on 31 August 1972.

Armed with a sheaf of notes, soundings, diagrams, and chart corrections, Berchem rated the 1972 Cruise Bravo Gate Vessel Summer Employment as "good." What prevented him from rating it "Very good" were the discipline cases and equipment failures. The discipline cases comprised a chief engine room artificer who failed to report to his emergency station during an actual fire, choosing, rather, to stay in his mess to enjoy Molson's finest ale. Another case involved an electrician whose drinking habits left him "restricted to ship" – which he ignored – and another engine room artificer who fractured his skull on a "run ashore," and a cook who jumped ship leaving the note: "I hereby quit the RCN."²¹

Equipment failures also had disrupted the schedule. *Porte St. Jean's* gyro compass failed at the outset. The radars on both the ships failed – due to constant fog and the dangers of ice, they were considered essential. Other delays were caused by a main engine cooling water connection failure, clogged fuel filters,

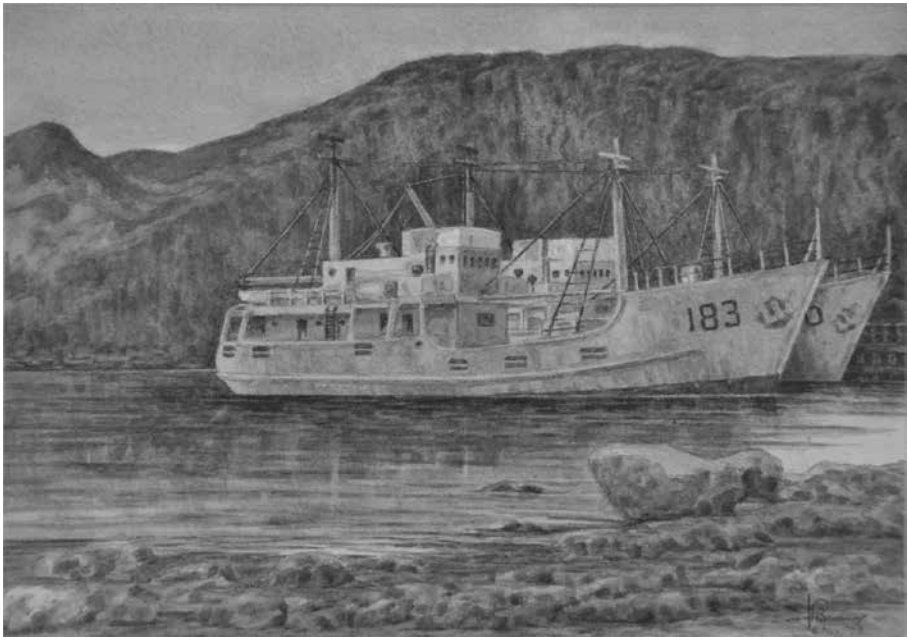
²¹ Report Gate Vessels: Summer Employment 1972.

and a main engine fuel injector problem. Berchem was particularly concerned about the two generators on the Gates. Although they gave no trouble this time, he recommended a thorough over-haul and that a cache of spare parts be embarked for longer deployments.²²

The navigational challenges were formidable, exacerbated by poor charting. The Gates resorted to hand swinging the lead for depth sounding or sounding with the anchor, due to dilapidated navigational aids. Berchem, as was typically taught in classic naval officer training, sketched accurately tiny islands almost indistinguishable one from another, which required all his skills. Maritime Command and the Naval Reserve Headquarters were thrilled with the achievements. The training opportunities in real time were optimal, successfully seeing two junior officers that year (E.J. Cahill and D.J. Green) obtain their Watch-keeping Certificates. The stage was set for a third, even more ambitious Ranger support program and training regimen in 1973.

Summer 1973: *Porte St. Jean* and *Porte St. Louis*

Having demonstrated competency and professionalism on his previous cruises, Berchem was given essentially a free hand in the development of

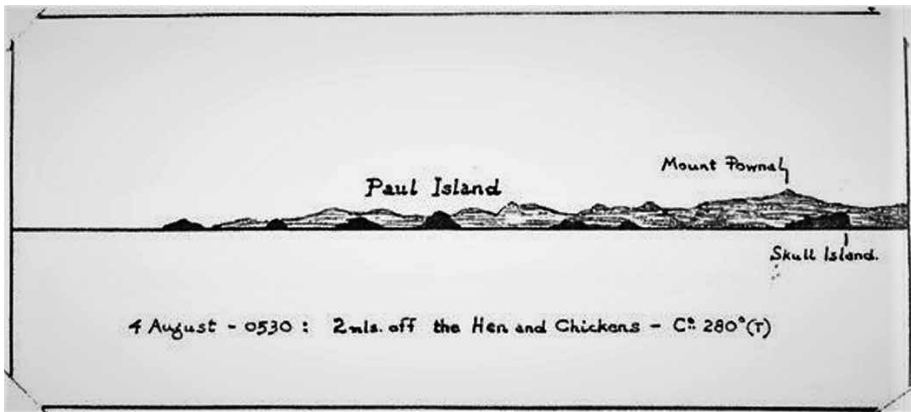


A photographic reproduction of a watercolour by F.R. Berchem, *Gates Vessels Alongside Nain*. (Author's collection)

²² *Report Gate Vessels: Summer Employment 1972.*

the operational phase of the summer employment program. The Operations Order for 1973, written by Berchem, with Maritime Command Operation Center input, was published on 30 May 1973. Preliminary training would comprise, as in the past two years, shore training, trials, work-ups, and capped off by Cruise Alpha. Cruise Bravo was designated as primarily operational, involving Ranger liaison to northern Labrador outports, coastal surveillance, and oceanographic survey (bathythermograph drops, surface oil pollution sampling, and iceberg reconnaissance). The water supply being the limiting factor of the Gates (with only three days supplies, maybe five with serious rationing), Cdr Berchem worked out a schedule that included finding sources of potable water in the outports.²³

Work-ups were completed on 22 June. Interestingly, the readiness work-



Sketch by F.R. Berchem, "Hen and Chickens" on approach to Nain. (Berchem fonds)

ups report was issued 9 August 1973, two weeks after the task unit had departed on Cruise Bravo. It was signed by Captain (N) J. Allan, who atypically did not assign a pass or fail, but stated that ships of other classes would not have passed. The list of shortcomings from the work-ups comprised power generator failures, navigational equipment unreliability, and the inoperable winch in *Porte St. Louis*. Equipment deficiencies included hard hats, life saving equipment, lifelines, and anti-flash gear in the chemical oxidation (Chemox) sets.²⁴ Obviously, there were factors other than sea readiness which influenced the decision to continue the program, but no explanation has been found to date.

Porte St. Louis did not participate in Cruise Alpha due to repairs required

²³ Berchem, *Memoirs*, 160.

²⁴ WUPS 5/73 RESERVE TRAINING FLEET, 9 August 1973, Berchem fonds, PANL.

on the Fairbanks-Morse 30 KW generator. *Porte St. Jean* left Halifax on 26 June 1973. Over the course of two weeks, the mission took in Gabarus Bay, Louisbourg, Arichat, Baddeck (via the very narrow lock of St. Peter’s Channel), Sydney, Port Hawkesbury, and Grindstone via Canso lock, returning to Halifax 12 July.²⁵ Dense fog and an untimely radar breakdown posed a safety threat, though, luckily, a Kelvin Hughes radar mechanic was visiting the Coast Guard College in Sydney and was able to complete the required repairs. Between cruises, the litany of mechanical problems in *Porte St. Jean* comprised failure of the heating “bogey” boiler and cylinder #3 of the main engine (which entailed a call for new parts), emulsified lubrication oil in the main engine (which has to be flushed), breakdowns of the main sanitation pump, and a health branch-required sanitation of the freshwater tank.²⁶

Cruise Bravo commenced on 18 July 1973 in dense fog with both Gates steaming from Halifax. Operations began from Corner Brook with surface pollution tows, bathythermograph measurements, and iceberg reconnaissance. Travelling through Canso Strait, the Gates made their way to Corner Brook, Harrington Harbour, and Blanc Sablon. After taking on supplies in St. Anthony on 27 July, the next leg took them “down” the Labrador coast to Nain via Rigolet and Goose Bay. The first ice was spotted off Cape St. Lewis on 27 July. The reported temperature averaged 52 degrees F, usually with cold rain and fog limiting visibility. They achieved the furthest north of any gate vessel when they went alongside Nain on 4 August 1973, at 1815 local time. Preparation to approach Nain was a delicate task. Waiting until dawn, Berchem surveyed the approach to Nain from the “outer track” by patrolling to and fro so that he could “make sense of the gibberish of islands picked up by the radar.”²⁷ Berchem further noted that: “The passage into Nain Labrador took place on a miserable day, overcast cold and surrounded with the chills of nearby icebergs. The sea was a lumpy northerly swell which were not comfortable. The place is nowhere described in flattering terms.”²⁸

Armed with newly acquired local knowledge, Berchem decided to take “the inside track” south from Nain to Davis Inlet. Travelling south, the Gates then supplied Hopedale, Postville, and Makkovik on 11 August. The navigational

²⁵ At Fortress Louisbourg, Cdr Berchem, always seeking the story behind the skeleton of names, dates, and places, asked about a larger building among the houses. He writes: “the guide blushed slightly and told me that it was used to house the women who were brought over from France to provide favours for the garrison’s troops.” Berchem, *Memoirs*, 161.

²⁶ Berchem, *Memoirs*, 161-173.

²⁷ Berchem, *Memoirs*, 173-174. Berchem explored the history of Nain in his account. He painted a brilliant word picture of this picturesque tiny out port which was the home of the influential Moravian Missionary Headquarters for Labrador until 1957.

²⁸ Berchem, *Scraps from Labrador* (unpublished manuscript 1979), 54, Berchem fonds, PANL.

challenges were significant. In transiting Shoal Tickle, Berchem noted, “1555 hrs: dicey-rocks visible on the bottom in the shallows at the western end. – Speeds slow ahead and stop until through.”²⁹ Engine and helm orders given in the lead vessel were passed to *Porte St. Louis* so that her commanding officer could follow the track exactly.³⁰ To prepare for the transit, the Gates anchored at the western entrance to sound the passage by Boston whaler. Although the paper used in the Boston whaler disintegrated in the rain, the soundings were preserved by the boat’s coxswain who engraved the soundings on a wooden paddle.³¹ Commander Berchem deemed the carving adequate and moved to the fo’c’sle with his navigator, while the officer of the watch (OOW) remained on the pilotage bridge. The ship’s company watched their Captain “con” *Porte St. Jean* while lying flat on the fo’c’sle and leaning over the starboard bow to observe the anchor cable. Berchem had lowered the anchor to fifteen feet at the waterline. While the navigator and OOW kept the ship on track by lead mark, Berchem ordered “stop” and then “slow ahead” to transit Shoal Tickle. This allowed the stern of the vessel to rise a few inches to clear the evident boulders whenever the captain saw the anchor flukes being displaced by the bottom.³² Perhaps this was the manoeuvre that earned Berchem the fondly remembered moniker of the “Crazy Captain.”³³

The Gates continued to Cartwright where *Porte St. Louis* was detached for St. Anthony due to severe water shortage. *Porte St. Jean* continued to resupply the Ranger patrols at Batteau Harbour, Frenchman Island, Seal Island, Snug Harbour, Square Island, Fox Harbour, Mary’s Harbour, Battle Harbour, St. Charles Harbour, before arriving at St. Anthony on 17 August. With strict water rationing, *Porte St. Jean* steamed from 11 to 17 August without additional fresh water, no small feat for ships limited normally to three days’ capacity. On a cool, grey, and blustery morning, the Gates slipped St. Anthony for Great Harbour Deep, situated on the east coast of Newfoundland’s Great Northern Peninsula. Both generators failed or remained unreliable in *Porte St. Louis* and the vessel required tug assistance to go alongside St. John’s, where its auxiliary generator was given a temporary fix, but the main generator was deemed non-repairable. Given the generator issues on board *Porte St. Louis*, both Gates cancelled a planned visit to St. Pierre and departed together directly for Halifax on 26 August. They arrived three days later, with *Porte St. Louis*

²⁹ HMCS *Porte St. Jean* 1973/1974 (unpublished Captain’s log), Log entry 7 August 1973, Berchem fonds, PANL.

³⁰ Berchem, *Memoirs*, 183, Berchem fonds, PANL.

³¹ The paddle was cleaned up and presented to Cdr Berchem engraved “To Commander Berchem from the Officers of the *Porte St. Jean*.” That paddle hung in his home until he died.

³² J. Cahill, email message to George Zimmerman, 29 March 2019.

³³ Berchem, *Memoirs*, 218, Berchem fonds.

limping alongside the Synchronlift jetty #11.³⁴

Once again, Berchem made accurate sketches of the many ports visited and provided detailed port reports for the Navy. He also provided detailed descriptions of the approaches to these near impenetrable ports and researched their histories. On the way north, the Gates passed through the notoriously dangerous waters off Cape Harrigan on 3 August, passing the submerged Clinker Rock, which was charted as “position approximate.” On this night, Berchem wrote of the Hudson Bay Company ship *Bayrupert*, in which his father had served. In 1927, *Bayrupert* likely foundered on this then uncharted rock and was lost off Farmacyard (Nanuktok) Island.³⁵

The lengthy and demanding voyage offered several disciplinary and health issues. One crew member presented with depression and, prior to sailing, was landed to a chaplain in Halifax. While on mission, a member developed heart problems, another suffered a badly cut foot, and three alcohol related incidents took place. One crew member ashore was “rolled” for his money after drinking with locals (almost culminating in the settling of scores between crew and said locals), another was fined for drunkenness on duty, and a third treated at sea for delirium tremors. Out of Makkovik, on the south bound leg, somebody tried to sabotage the mission in a failed attempt “to jam open the crew’s water taps with the obvious intent that the *Porte St. Jean*, too, like the *Porte St. Louis*, would be forced to divert for St. Anthony.”³⁶

Notwithstanding crew and equipment challenges, Berchem assessed the 1973 program as highly successful, with all operational requirements fulfilled. His report on the summer’s activities was thorough, studied by the Navy to guide future operations and circulated to other government departments for their use. As it was the fiftieth anniversary of the Naval Reserve, Berchem was pleased to note that the Gates, primarily crewed by reservists, were the only naval presence to penetrate as far as they did in those confined northern waters. His superior officers concurred. Commander Berchem relinquished his command of HMCS *Porte St. Jean* in mid-September 1973. About a month later he received an evaluation of his contributions that summer – a fitting final note to an historic journey:

Cdr Berchem was employed this year as Commanding Officer HMCS *Porte St. Jean* and as Senior Officer Gate Vessels which included HMCS *Porte St. Louis*. He has throughout the summer

³⁴ HMCS *Porte St. Jean* 1973/1974 (unpublished Captain’s log), Log entry 17 August 1973, Berchem fonds, PANL.

³⁵ Berchem, *Scraps from Labrador*. Berchem’s account covers 23 outports and passages such as Makkovik, Postville, Shoal Tickle, Davis Inlet and Nain, including an assortment of local historical and ethnographic notes.

³⁶ Berchem, *Memoirs*, 188, Berchem fonds, PANL.



Photo of icebergs
off *Porte St. Jean*.
(Berchem fonds)

rendered excellent service. His experience, personality and devotion to duty were significant factors in the successful achievement of a most demanding operation, a cruise in difficult pilotage waters to communities in Labrador. The ships of Cdr Berchem's command penetrated the farthest (sic) north of any RCNR manned ships since the war. They achieved their destination of NAIN, Labrador with the aim of supporting the Canadian Rangers in the most obscure Outposts of the Labrador Coast.

It was due primarily to the leadership of this officer, his steadiness in the face of unexpected difficulties, that inspired the confidence of junior and senior alike. His Report of Proceedings of his summer's operations is a thorough document which will be studied for future operations and passed to other government departments for its use. Cdr Berchem proved himself an excellent leader, organizer, and seaman and capable of high command.³⁷

Summer 1974: *Porte St. Jean* and *Porte St. Louis*

The 1974 summer program began slowly. When Berchem arrived at the end of May, both the Gates were under-going refits, *Porte St. Jean* at Port Hawkesbury and *Porte St. Louis* at Liverpool. Visiting *Porte St. Jean* in early June, he discovered the refit work behind schedule, including "the 'Doghouse' being built to accommodate the additional Sub Lieutenants...." As in past years, a task unit was formed with the two Gates under Berchem's command. Work-ups were planned for 2 to 12 July. The *Porte St. Jean* commissioned and sailed for Halifax on 21 June. Due to failures of the freshwater system pump and the bogey boiler the ship's company had to move ashore until

³⁷ *Course Report, CF 377, Summer 1973, 15 October 1973, Berchem fonds, PANL.*

habitability was restored. Under the command of Lieutenant Commander William Webb, *Porte St. Louis* was commissioned and arrived at Halifax on 6 July. The sailing program was delayed to the end of July due to requirements for continued repairs, parts acquisitions, and sub-lieutenant classroom training with examinations. Port visits commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of Newfoundland’s entry into Confederation and sub-lieutenant sea training were the primary missions of 1974, along with a less ambitious Ranger resupply program.³⁸

The Gates left Halifax on 27 July 1974 in dense fog after completing less than stellar workups. Equipment failures continued to frustrate efforts. The ships anchored at Forau Bay for training purposes and next day proceeded to Red Bay. At Red Bay, Labrador, the 50 KW generator of *Porte St. Louis* was deemed no longer serviceable. This was a serious issue, threatening the serviceability of the whole ship – without the generator the starting air bottles for the main engine could not be charged. The 50 KW generator on *Porte St Jean* could not supply enough power to support both Gates. Adding to their troubles, *Porte St Jean*’s bogey boiler and essential “Pye” (ship to ship) radio failed.

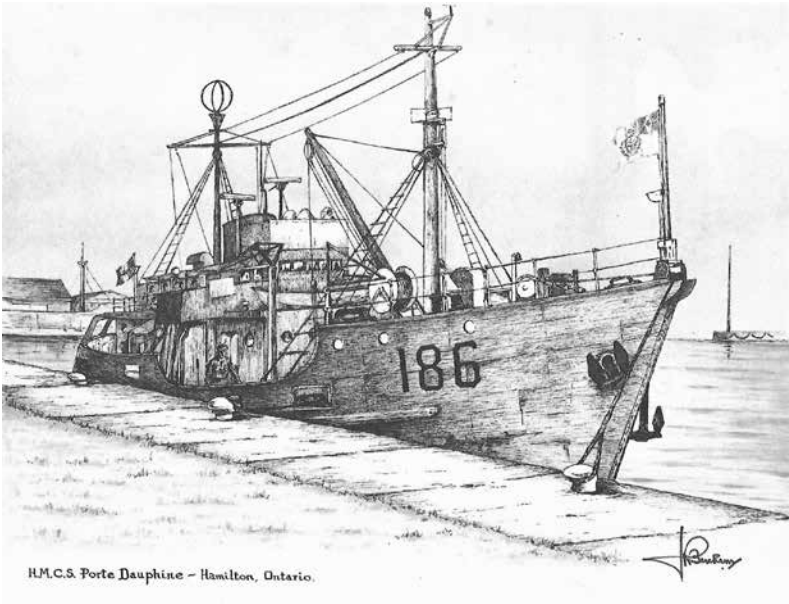
The equipment failures forced Berchem to proceed to St. Anthony, a day’s run, against explicit orders to stay out of the community to avoid conflicting with a port visit by an RCN destroyer. The St. Anthony decision apparently caused the Commander of Maritime Command, Admiral Douglas Seaman Boyle “great distress,” which was quietly communicated, in service tradition, to Berchem.³⁹ On the plus side, the passage to St. Anthony around the north end of Newfoundland was filled with ice (facilitating the traditional “tourist” photo in “iceberg alley”) and fishing fleets, providing great training experience for the watch keeping candidates.⁴⁰

With sufficient repairs made, the Gates continued around Newfoundland for Roddickton (Ranger patrol resupply), Bai Verte, Lewisporte (Ranger patrol resupply), Twillingate, Seal Harbour, Fogo Island (Ranger patrol resupply), Clarenville, St. John’s, St. Pierre, Louisbourg, and back alongside Halifax on 23 August. Being a training trip, the eleven sub-lieutenant watch-keeping candidates were exposed frequently to the usual array of exercises: fire fighting, steering gear breakdown, launching the Boston whaler, blind (radar) pilotage, OOW manoeuvres, dan-buoy recovery, towing, light jackstay, station-keeping, passage planning, anchorage planning, and a mock

³⁸ Berchem, *Memoirs*, 205.

³⁹ Berchem, in conversation with George Zimmerman, n.d. See also Berchem, *Memoirs*, 208.

⁴⁰ HMCS *Porte St. Jean* 1973/1974 (unpublished Captain’s log), Log entry 31 July 1974, Berchem fonds, PANL.



Sketch by F.R. Berchem of HMCS *Porte Dauphine*, Hamilton Harbour, 1975.
(Berchem fonds)

Watch-keeping Board. These citizen sailors left their summer training with unparalleled practical exposure and real time experience. All but one continued with significant careers in either the Reserve or Regular Forces.

Porte St. Jean had one last tasking that summer. On a usual foggy, miserable morning Berchem steamed out of Halifax for a day exercise involving air personnel training for sea survival. The exercise was thwarted by fog and the personnel adrift in rafts could not be evacuated by helicopter as planned. The faithful *Porte St. Jean* ended up recovering the men.

In contrast to previous years, and in a silent tribute to leadership, there were essentially no personnel or discipline issues in 1974. The breakdown rate, however, was the most severe in four years. *Porte St. Louis* limped along without the 50 KW generator and a fully functioning 30 KW generator and struggled with radar failure. *Porte St. Jean's* engine room telegraph indicator became "ambiguous," the echo sounder failed, the "Pye" radio was unreliable, the bridge gyro compass repeatedly failed, and there was a failure of the main engine reduction gearing oil line.⁴¹ While sufficient repairs during the cruise were enacted and the mission completed, Berchem expressed doubt that the Ranger resupply operations could continue with these ships, due to the precarious essential equipment situation. His own career was about to take him

⁴¹ HMCS *Porte St. Jean* 1973/1974 (unpublished Captain's log), Berchem fonds, PANL.

to inland waters.

1974 to 1975: *Porte Dauphine*

The Navy, experiencing a paucity of sea going training platforms, claimed the CCGS *Porte Dauphine* back from the Canadian Centre for Inland Waters (CCIW) for the purpose of providing another Naval Reserve sea-going training platform. Berchem, having earned the confidence of his superiors, was assigned to the re-commissioning project and given command of the vessel. He took command on 8 November 1974 and with a Naval Reserve crew steamed the vessel from Burlington, Ontario to the stone frigate HMCS *Star*, a land-based naval training establishment located in Hamilton, Ontario. By 17 November, the ship had been repainted navy grey and re-commissioned HMCS *Porte Dauphine*.



With crew training in emergency procedures still under way, *Porte Dauphine* supported Coast Guard Inland Waters hydro-meteorological research. From 25 to 29 November, the scientists took samples around Lake Ontario, travelling the north shore to Kingston and returning along the southern shore. By 5 December, however, Berchem has his first “defaulter” (discipline case) and the never ceasing engineering problems began. While equipment failures continued during the cruise, which continued until 24 December, once the initial crew screening had been completed there were few personnel problems. Other challenges emerged, stemming from shared control of the vessel by two federal agencies, which resulted in several awkward meetings

with Coast Guard officials.⁴²

Administration, crew selection, discussions about ship employment in 1975, crew readiness, and restoring safety and navigational equipment (all the lifejackets, Chemox sets, mooring lines, timber for emergency shoring, and most of the fire-fighting equipment) to reliable navy standards filled the next four months.⁴³ By 18 March 1975, the Navy had ended the joint program, finding that it was impossible to meet the research expectations of its partners and carry out its training agenda at the same time. Admiral Boyle's strong support of Berchem's insistence on Navy standards for *Porte Dauphine* was instrumental in ending the joint program.⁴⁴

Official work-ups began on 25 March 1975 and *Porte Dauphine* was cleared for operations on the Great Lakes. From 10 April to 2 June, the ship began a continuous series of training cruises over successive weekends to Kingston, Montreal, back to Kingston for the land-based naval training establishment or "stone frigate," HMCS *Carleton* (Ottawa). Two June training cruises were then conducted out of Toronto for the stone frigate HMCS *York*. In total, members of five reserve units were taken to sea for training, thus completing the first extended "reserve navy only" set of operations (with not even a pilot embarked) since the re-commissioning. The ship was tasked for two official port visits in June: Rochester, New York and Wallaceburg, Ontario. The Rochester Port Visit was successful, involving an inspection of the Naval and Marine Corps Reserve Centre.

The port visit to Wallaceburg, however, proved to be a challenge worthy of the outports of Labrador. Wallaceburg lies on the Sydenham River through the Chenal Ecarté or Snye River. Not only was the river too shallow for *Porte Dauphine*, but it was very narrow, had strong currents, unpredictable silting, and little-used swing bridges. Questioning the wisdom of the tasking, Berchem was made privy to the correspondence involved. It turned out that mayoral candidate Lou Stonehouse and the Commander of Maritime Command, Douglas S. Boyle, had been close friends since they were boys in cadets. Berchem explained:

At Wallaceburg the incumbent Mayor was leaving office, around the time of the [town's Centennial] Celebrations, and the race was on for a successor; one of the hopefuls was – guess who? – Lou Stonehouse! Hence the correspondence that I received, an exchange between 'Dear Doug' and 'Dear Lou.' The upshot of it all was that in order to give 'Dear Lou' a strong boost for his campaign, 'Dear Doug' would

⁴² HMCS *Porte Dauphine* 1974/1975 (unpublished Captain's log), Berchem fonds, PANL.

⁴³ HMCS *Porte Dauphine* 1974/1975.

⁴⁴ Berchem, *Memoirs*, 225.

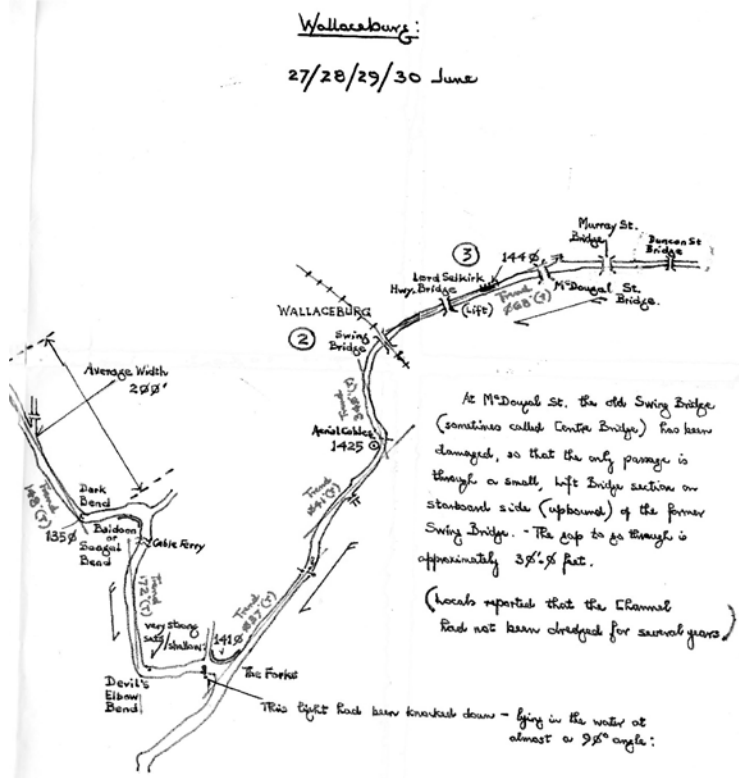


Chart by F.R. Berchem tracing approach to Wallaceburg, Ontario. (Berchem fonds)

promise that a ship could be sent to Wallaceburg for its Celebrations!
 – guess what ship! – *PORTE DAUPHINE* would be the sacrificial offering, - and that was that!⁴⁵

Preparations for potential grounding were made by ensuring a kedge anchor was ready to let go off the stern, lightening the ship, preparing the crew for lead line soundings ahead in the Boston whaler, and preparing the engine room staff for full engine movements. *Porte Dauphine* entered the Chenal Ecarté on 27 June for the two-and-a-half-hour passage to Wallaceburg. At the Devil’s Elbow Bend (the Forks), about ten nautical miles below Wallaceburg, the “engine full ahead” was needed to come to port, countering shallow water, the muddy bottom, and a strong cross current.⁴⁶ A makeshift jetty had been completed on top of near-submerged pilings on the north side of the river, about 100 feet from the low fixed McDougal St. Bridge. On approach, the ship

⁴⁵ Berchem, *Memoirs*, 232.

⁴⁶ Port Information report Wallaceburg, Ontario, HMCS *Porte Dauphine*, June 1975, Berchem fonds, PANL.

slipped softly over the bottom mud. Using full engine astern, Berchem coaxed the ship alongside at the foot of Creek Street at 1440 hrs on 27 June.

This unprecedented naval visit was not without its excitement: the next day the 30 KW generator suffered a catastrophic failure, pushing a piston through the casing, which might have seriously injured the watch-keeper, who fortunately had moved from his usual station because he heard a suspicious engine noise. The port visit included successful mutual visits and the ship was opened to visitors. *Porte Dauphine* sailed for Windsor on 1 July, slipping from the jetty with the Boston whaler pulling her around by the head. The transit to Hamilton through Windsor was uneventful, with the vessel coming alongside on 4 July.

Table 1. List of junior officers who served under Commander Berchem, organized by year. Names marked with a star are the twenty officers that pursued longer careers in the reserve or regular forces.

| <u>1971</u> | <u>1972</u> | <u>1973</u> | <u>1974</u> | <u>1975</u> |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Hugues Létourneau* | Jim Cahill* | Ken McCaw* | Wm Perks* | John Chow* |
| Hugues Villeneuve | Paul Roquet* | Rick Ruston* | Giles Joly | Matt Dillon |
| M? Markewitz | Doug Green* | | Jean Léveillé* | Johannes Sauerteig* |
| Michel Vallée | | | Don Koehler* | King Wan* |
| | | | Brian McCullough* | Doug Hone |
| | | | Kerry Dowdell* | George Zimmerman* |
| | | | Steven Perron* | |
| | | | Dennis Schultz* | |
| | | | Gary Reddy* | |
| | | | Geary MacMillan* | |
| | | | Randy Mifflin* | |

While Berchem took two weeks of well-earned leave to mid-July, Commander M. Reid oversaw day-sailing out of Hamilton for training the sub-lieutenant watch-keeping candidates who had joined the ship in early July. With a rebuilt 30 KW generator installed by 31 July, *Porte Dauphine*, again under Berchem's command, continued watch-keeping training, sailing to Kingston and return. Back in Hamilton, the vessel joined a task unit with HMCS *Nipigon* to undertake a Great Lakes good will trip. The ships transited together to Windsor, training skills such as anchorages, replenishment approaches, station keeping, and zig-zag pattern exercises across Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. Leaving HMCS *Nipigon* in Windsor on 18 August, *Porte Dauphine* continued north for navigational training in Georgian Bay, visiting Collingwood and

Penetanguishene.⁴⁷

The training cruise continued north to Sault Ste Marie and Thunder Bay at the head of Lake Superior. Day runs out of Thunder Bay trained members of the land-based naval establishment, HMCS *Griffin*. Thirty knot winds on Lake Huron and Lake Superior, both during the north and south legs, kicked up eight-to-ten-foot swells making for an uncomfortable passage. The return trip to Hamilton from 31 August to 12 September essentially marked the end of summer training in 1975. The fall of 1975 saw day sail training out of Hamilton for the stone frigates HMCS *Hunter*, HMCS *Cataragui*, and HMCS *York*, and then sea support for the Naval Reserve regatta in Toronto on 10 October. Leaving Hamilton on the 10 December, Berchem delivered HMCS *Porte Dauphine* to Thunder Bay on 16 December for refit through cold, freezing rain, snow, low visibility, light ice, and moderate winds. Since April 1975, the vessel had steamed 5,510.4 nautical miles in seventy-nine sea days.⁴⁸

On board *Porte Dauphine*, once the initial crew problems had been addressed, there were only two serious personnel issues: a defaulter problem in December 1974 and a “missed sailing” charge. Dealing with constant engineering and navigational equipment difficulties, however, was a significant challenge for the captain and ship’s company. There were problems with generators and the main engine lubrication oil pump, the freshwater header tank, cooling water circulation pumps, the heating auxiliary boiler, gearbox lubrication, radar, and echo sounder. Berchem and crew left *Porte Dauphine* in the hands of the Port Arthur Shipbuilding Yard on 18 December, marking the end of the 1975 program.⁴⁹

Conclusion

In 1976, F.R. Hamish Berchem took service with the Canadian Coast Guard until his retirement in 1993. In total, he served in the Canadian Naval Reserves for 16 years, with active sea commands from 1969 to 1975. An artist and author, over his lifetime, Berchem also completed some 550 watercolours and published four non-fiction books. He was selected a member of the Canadian Society of Marine Artists in 2010. On a holiday junket to Mexico’s west coast, Hamish died on 8 March 2018 at the age 87.

Berchem had a profound impact on the Naval Reserve and the Navy, more generally. Throughout his career, he consistently demonstrated great resourcefulness and the Canadian “can do” naval attitude, which would serve

⁴⁷ F.R. Berchem, Personal notebook 1972-1975, Berchem fonds, PANL.

⁴⁸ F.R. Berchem, Personal notebook 1972-1975, Berchem fonds, PANL.

⁴⁹ F.R. Berchem, Personal notebook 1972-1975, Berchem fonds, PANL.

future officers well. Berchem, the Porte-class gate vessels, and their summer cruises in the 1970s were critical for the development of the Naval Reserve after the unification of the Canadian Armed Forces. A review of the post deployment summer reports from 1971 to 1974 highlights five significant outcomes. First, Berchem was an able teacher, imparting the required skills and inspiring junior officers. A survey of twenty-six junior officers who served under the commander shows that twenty pursued longer careers in the reserve or regular forces, several contributing as commanding officers (see Table 1). Second, operations became increasingly complex demonstrating increased confidence in the sea-going capabilities of Naval Reserve personnel. Third, there were fewer discipline problems showing a better selection process and leadership capability. Fourth, the demand for sea training platforms with operational capability reached the point where the Navy secured the return of a fifth gate vessel for the Naval Reserve. Finally, Berchem's meticulous recording of harbour, shoreline, landmark, and navigational information, his sounding charts, and his documentation of port facilities, weather, accommodations, water availability, and resupply capacity were a great asset to the Navy as it planned future operations in the region.

Eventually the West Coast Training Squadron was re-established when HMCS *Venture* stood up in 1976. By the time the Gates were retired in 1995, Naval Reservists formed the primary crews for the twelve Kingston-class Maritime Coastal Defence Vessels. Before these vessels there were the Gates, keeping the Naval Reserve ready and able at Canada's nautical gates. The story of the gate vessels, their unique character, and their impact on the Naval Reserve for nearly forty-five years has not been well-told. This snapshot of only one commander and his exploits should prompt further inquiry into the contributions of the commanders and crews of all five of these small ships.

George L. Zimmerman, CD, MA (Captain, RCN, ret'd) served the Canadian Armed Forces for 38 years – 8 years as Naval Reserve Officer and the remainder as a Chaplain, Regular and Reserve Forces. A life-long friend to Cdr Hamish Berchem, they met when George joined HMCS Porte Dauphine in 1975. Upon release from the CAF, he was called as the minister to St. David and St. Martin Presbyterian Church, Ottawa, a position he held until his retirement in 2022. (Contact: zimmy1@sympatico.ca)

*Duff Crerar graduated from Queen's University in 1990, specialising in Canadian religious, military, and naval history. He has published extensively about Canadian military chaplains and religious history, including *Padres in No Man's Land: Canadian Chaplains and the Great War*, with McGill-Queen's University Press. For over a decade he was historical consultant to the Royal Canadian Chaplain Service. (Contact: crerar1@telusplanet.net)*