

**The War Amps  
Presents**

**Watch and Warn  
(Closed Captioned)**

**Canada's Home Front  
Aircraft Detection Corps**

**A ONE-HOUR DOCUMENTARY**

**Based on the book Watch and Warn  
by Allan Coggon**

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Cliff Chadderton**

May I humbly suggest that you do not touch that dial. We are going to tell a fascinating and interesting tale of the Air Detection Corps. It is a story of World War II, largely unknown to Canadians.

For source material, we have a groundbreaking book called Watch and Warn by former Flight Lieutenant of the Royal Canadian Air Force - Allan F. Coggon.

It is in fact the story of the eyes and ears of those charged with defending our shores. The corps observers adopted the motto "Watch and Warn." The task of these volunteers was to report all potential enemy activity in the air, on land and at sea.

## **Cliff Chadderton**

Unlike most histories, Allan Coggon's book touches upon some wondrous word pictures. Here's a sample. German submarines, German spies landing on our shores via rubber boats. How many Canadians knew that during World War II, the Germans established a radio detection unit which broadcast weather reports to German ships at sea?

And what about those Japanese fire balloons? How many Canadians knew that if that plan had been successful, it would have burned about half of the forests north of Edmonton.

What about friendly aircraft? Yes, the RCAF understood that friendly aircraft could become lost in a hostile environment. The Air Detection Corps did a valuable, valuable job in guiding these planes to safety or if they crashed, in rescuing the operators of the aircraft.

This documentary is what we call ground zero history.

### **Newsreel Voice-over**

These are the days' main events: Germany has invaded Poland. General mobilization has been ordered in Britain and France. Parliament was summoned for 6:00. The following official communiqué has been issued from 10 Downing Street. I am speaking to you from the cabinet room....and consequently this country is at war with Germany.

### **Narrator #1**

At the outbreak of World War II, Canadians faced the possibility that enemy aircraft could enter the country's airspace without being detected. There was no radar alert system at that time.

The country's vast spaces meant the Home War Establishment would need assistance.

The Aircraft Detection Corps was initiated in 1940 by Air Vice-Marshal George Croil.

Unpaid civilians from coast to coast, would be enlisted to report sightings of potential enemy aircraft, submarines – even spies, as they went about their daily tasks.

## **Newsreel Voice-over**

“Although it is organized and administered by the RCAF, the Aircraft Detection Corps also serves the army and the navy. It offers tens of thousands of Canadians a real opportunity to serve their country by volunteering their services as observers. There is no uniform, no pay and no great glamour...but there’s the satisfaction... that from you may come the advance warning that may be the means of saving Canada in the event of an attack.”

## **Cliff Chadderton**

I am sitting here with Allan Coggon, the author of Watch and Warn and we’re taking this opportunity to go over some of the documents to which reference is made in his book and which generally tell us the story of the Air Detection Corps.

## **Allan Coggon**

At the beginning, the big problem the Air Force had was to organize the country. So, they divided all of Canada that they wished to organize into squares.

This is a square, for instance, of southeast Nova Scotia with Mahone Bay on it. And from these squares they would select an area approximately 7 by 8 miles per post, observer posts.

## **Cliff Chadderton**

How the Air Detection Corps went about recruiting the various observers?

## **Allan Coggon**

I think they did it the most sensible way. They'd go into an area and initially contact and persuade the local people who had influence and well known...like school principals, chief of police, politicians of different parties, labour leaders and things of that nature, to get them on their side and promote this.

They would sponsor meetings in which the organizers of the Aircraft Detection Corps would come and sell them on the commercial - why they should join and advantages of it, and how it would do and not to worry and then they were needed and valuable, and so on. It would start off that way.

All the regular people like firemen, policemen, high school people and people already in the service were already automatically – they were enrolled whether they liked it or not. They were given that position. And whoever could be persuaded to participate in this.

Back in those days, women weren't given the importance they should have had. So usually as with my mother, she did all the work on the post but my father was the official observer.

**Cliff Chadderton**

I see.

**Allan Coggon**

But that was the way it was.

**Doug Betts**

Like I say, if we could just go back in time...

**Cliff Chadderton**

Yeah well, we are.

**Narrator #1**

Doug Betts was a teenager living in Wentworth, Nova Scotia. Like many boys of his time, Doug had a fascination with airplanes. Becoming a volunteer observer for the Aircraft Detection Corps was a dream come true.

## **Doug Betts**

The older folks felt it a duty, a responsibility to be part of the Aircraft Detection Corps. When they were asked, there was really not a question of what do I have to do, but when do I start doing whatever you want me to do.

For the young person like me, in the 14, 15-year-old category, most of us were selected because we were interested in airplanes. And to us to be asked to be an official observer was the, the crème de la crème, as they say. I felt and believed that when I was on duty in my hour, that I was as much a part of the air force as the next guy.

## **Allan Coggon**

After they were inducted and went through the procedure of Ottawa of formally enlisting and getting accepted and they would have the book of rules to follow. But this is their Bible that they abided by.

The observers received in a kit, the direction indicator, because most people don't know where north is, or south or east or west. They know the sun comes up in the east. But that's about as far as it goes.

## **Doug Betts**

In the package that the observer corps sent, it was a little cardboard compass rose. But to me, that didn't quite do the job, so I built one.

I had it on a stand and everything else, and I would take this outside and set her up and there I was in business, you know. All right, airplanes, where are you, sort of thing. It worked great actually. You see, I wanted to be deadly accurate. So when I said northwest, I meant northwest. It was right on the money.

### **Allan Coggon**

This is the log that the observers were required to note everything that they saw or heard. It gives the code name of your observation post. It was – the observation was seen or heard, the magnetic direction, the distance of planes from the observation post ...

### **Cliff Chadderton**

Good heavens.

### **Allan Coggon**

- ...in miles and location from the observer post, the number of planes, the height of the plane, low, medium or high. Type – one engine, two-engine, three-engine, four engines, a mono plane or biplane, the time of the observation, and special reporting anything particularly unusual, nearness to a submarine or crash site.

Many of these were party lines. There would be as many as five, ten different phones on the line. But they, the understanding with the

local operators was that that when any of these comes in, it had the top priority of any other use of the telephone line.

**Cliff Chadderton**

There was no such thing as cell phones in those days.

**Allan Coggon**

No indeed. You had to crank the thing and call for Mabel and hope she wasn't asleep...

**Cliff Chadderton**

Let's go ahead, yeah.

**Allan Coggon**

After they became used to the procedure, it was relatively easy and quick and it was just: fill this in and then run with the message to a telephone. Or get young Arnie to pedal on his bike to the nearest phone. The whole family became involved in it. It was a family thing.

And for instance, one group not too far from here, all the people on a certain road were on the same party line. There was six of them, so each, each, each of these families on that road, each one took one day of the week.

**Cliff Chadderton**

Good God.

**Allan Coggon**

It was a communal thing.

**Cliff Chadderton**

Don't tell me that people on the home front weren't busy.

**Allan Coggon**

Oh, they were busy, they were busy.

**Doug Betts**

I had different hours, but they knew, like in school, that my hour was 4 to 5 every day. Like I would remind the teacher that I have to be home at 4 o'clock. She would excuse me and I'd be – truck off home to do my, do my spotting.

**Cliff Chadderton**

These people then took training in aircraft identification, as we did in the army?

### **Allan Coggon**

Yes, not initially, but eventually they did. They would get to the airports closest to them, say whether it be Bagotville or Stanley, Nova Scotia, or Moncton, Greenwood, etc. This was a most happy and important day for these people to be on active station to see these airplanes real and on the ground.

And they could touch them and but they would get go into class and be instructed while they were there with this trip and then toss in a free lunch and so on, which was an occasion for them.

### **Cliff Chadderton**

Yes, I can see that.

### **Doug Betts**

It was great fun. As a young person, like I say, I felt very close to the air force and I can remember going to Debert, see the guys walking around in their blue uniforms. Well, you know, yeah, they're... that's not a big thing. You know, I'm in the Aircraft Detection Corps too. I know about airplanes. I know what a Mosquito is. I know what a Harvard is. I know what an Anson is.

One time I can remember I reported uh, uh, three, four-engine bombers and in the remarks column, uh, B-17's. Geez, wasn't a half

an hour, I get a call. And they said, are you Delta Eight-Six? Are you the chap that just reported these aircraft and called them B-17's? And I said yes. In retrospect, they were probably going to Newfoundland, the direction they were going, eh? They were going northeast.

And he said, well how do you know they were B-17's? And I said, well, first of all, they weren't all that high. And secondly, they had the classic big Boeing tail and they uh, did this, and they were radial engines and blah-blah-blah. And he said okay it sounds like B-17's, and he said thanks very much and hung up.

### **Narrator #1**

Often times, Observers' reports were first transmitted by telephone, telegraph or wireless to an operations room or sub-filter station. These would be manned by RCAF personnel who would pass the reports along to a main filter centre.

Fern Falardeau of Quebec City joined the RCAF at the age of 18. For a short time, he worked in an operations room at the air force base in Chatham, New Brunswick, earning \$2.00 a day.

### **Fern Falardeau**

We were answering phones from different volunteer observers, civilians around the country. Anytime they saw an airplane or whatever, they phoned it into us.

Chatham, it was a busy place. We had the information about our airplanes that were flying around on their routine exercises so whenever an observer reported an airplane sighting to us, we just took the message and, if we knew it was our airplanes were in that area, we did nothing about. But anything suspicious, then we would pass it onto the big centre in Halifax. They would find out whether it was friend or foe, you know, things like that.

But those volunteers, they were pretty good, as far as I can remember... but it was a live radar. Let's call it that way, a live radar, a real person reporting something.

### **Cliff Chadderton**

So the observer observes what appears to be a crash say 12 miles due south. That information the observer phones through to the filter centre. What happens from that point?

### **Allan Coggon**

Well, the filter centre lady goes to the great map on the floor level and puts that inside the grid of the topographical map exactly where that spot is on the map relative to the other sectors in the area.

Then she's alerting whether it be the navy, the search and rescue, the air force or whatever, the other force for assistance in getting to the site and find out what the, what happened, what's necessary.

**Cliff Chadderton**

Great. Now you mentioned in your book very briefly the Operation Rooms, which were really set up on the same principle as we saw for the Battle of Britain.

**Allan Coggon**

Yes, that's right.

**Cliff Chadderton**

Good heavens.

**Allan Coggon**

That's, that is pretty much what a filter centre looked like – perhaps not as dramatic because the danger and risk of things going on is not, you can't really compare it with the Battle of Britain days with the bombers and the fighters coming over.

**Cliff Chadderton**

Unless you're sitting in a crashed aircraft in the middle of the snow.

## **Allan Coggon**

Here, here.

### **Narrator #1**

The Air Force headquarters issued a monthly newsletter called The Observer. It featured personal stories, tips on how to identify aircraft and vessels and even how to use the telephone.

### **Narrator #2**

You and Your telephone.

All ADC Observers should be instructed in proper telephone practice. Make your report slowly and directly into the mouthpiece—your lips not more than half an inch away.

Do your work quietly, without boasting that you know that a sub was sighted off the coast. Remember, if the eyes of the enemy are open, so are his ears.

If the enemy were to use gas against Canada or Newfoundland, observers are to act as follows:

a) Report the suspected gas immediately to Aircraft Detection Corps.

B) If possible, collect and send a sample of the contaminated earth, clothing or water to the ADC....

Ted Bley, Chief Observer at Malaga Lake Park near Bridgewater, Nova Scotia assists his wife, an official observer, in identifying aircraft that pass over this area.

In a remote part of Northern Ontario, Mr. Paul Ubohy, an official observer, travels up and down the bush lined track as part of his job with the Canadian national railroad, occasionally spotting a plane or two.

On lonely Miscou Island, New Brunswick, Chief Observer Lawrence Vibert, fisherman and Chief Observer Lester Marks, lighthouse keeper, are constantly on alert for any signs of submarine activity.

Mrs. Peggy Willoughby of Vancouver Island has extended her telephone line outside her house in order that as little delay as possible will occur when reports are being made on aircraft.

### **Allan Coggon**

Particularly at the beginning of the war the military didn't know what was out beyond the horizon of the shore. It could have been a big

German battleship out there lobbing at 15 miles, lobbing 200 pound shells into Halifax City.

**Cliff Chadderton**

Yeah.

**Allan Coggon**

The first they would hear about it unless they happened by circumstance to have an airplane fly over would be when the shells started falling.

**Cliff Chadderton**

Good heavens. Yeah.

**Allan Coggon**

That would be kind of scary

**Cliff Chadderton**

Yeah.

**Allan Coggon**

They didn't know what was going to happen on there but this was something that may calm the fears of these people who might face such a thing.

Sometimes an observer may mix up. He's not sure what it is. He thinks it's a submarine but it is a Fairmile.

**Cliff Chadderton**

They look alike.

**Allan Coggon**

Or worse, they thought it was a Fairmile and it was a submarine. That could make a difference in different light conditions and rain and fog and so on.

**Fern Falardeau**

We did at times get some fictitious or supposedly enemy sightings that they passed onto us. We had a squadron of Hudson bombers who were patrolling the Gulf of St. Lawrence they would go out and see about these sightings. One time one report was they saw a submarine. They went out there, what they found, it was a trunk, a

dead tree trunk with a branch sticking up like a periscope. It looks like a submarine, but during the war you didn't take chances.

We had heard of a report of this funny looking new German bomber which supposedly coming across the Atlantic to America. So some observer spotted this one airplane. It looked like this particular bomber because this particular bomber, I would say, the description of it had been passed around so that people would know what to look for.

But it ended up through investigation that it was one of these flying boats that when it flies at a certain angle, you will see only one engine. And when you look at that airplane, it did look a little bit like

that German bomber. So it was reported but finally it ended up to be a friendly airplane, our own.

### **Cliff Chadderton**

Look at this. Canadians today would scarcely believe that the enemy was that close to us but all the shoreline, Nova Scotia for example, went on a dim-out because if they didn't then the submarine could silhouette a fishing vessel coming into Halifax Harbour and put a torpedo in it.

## **Allan Coggon**

So the purpose was to keep the people informed and have some sorts of morale that they are not alone and, most of the remarkable things they did was to save the lives of aircrew.

## **Narrator #2**

Mrs. D. M Aiken, an observer on watch, focused her binoculars on an Anson aircraft flying at low altitude. To her horror, the aircraft banked, then crashed.

She was able to give an instantaneous report to ADC headquarters. She is to be complimented for the cool manner in which she reported this catastrophe.

When an RCAF aircraft crashed in the centre of town at Port Alice recently, ADC observers risked their lives attempting to save occupants of the aircraft from being burned to death in the wreckage.

## MARITIMES

### **Narrator #1**

As the war progressed, the enemy threat came not from the air but from the sea. The most effective observers beyond our shores were fishermen. They were considered already trained observers and were of valuable assistance to the Aircraft Detection Corps.

### **Allan Coggon**

Without proper naval aircraft, to see what's beyond the shore, the only people we had out there consistently was the fisherman, who sometimes will go out many miles offshore and sometimes stay overnight or more depending on the success of their catches. Cause many different things can seem what can seem in the ocean that are not what they seem to be. It might be a whale or it might be some sort of a proper naval vessel. These fishermen would recognize the sound of vessels and the shape of them through the fog or through rain squalls and so on like that.

### **Narrator #1**

Fishing boat captains were instructed to report their sightings by telephone upon returning to shore. While at sea, they developed signals.

### **Allan Coggon**

The fisherman would expose hatches on their vessels and for night, they would have a light shining out of this particular open hatch but just shine upward, not outward, so then, the aircraft would fly over on their patrols and if they spotted a fishing boat with a hold exposing a light, that was good information for them and they would pursue that.

### **Cliff Chadderton**

I am standing on the east coast of Nova Scotia province. If there were an incursion by foreign agents, for example, this is a very likely area for them to penetrate. If the German spies had come ashore here, they could have gotten up into the St. Lawrence area where they could have spied on ships, or even gotten as far as Quebec City and Montreal. The observers of the Air Detection Corps were our first line of defence.

### **Narrator #2**

In early spring of '45, members of Hitler's navy came ashore on Nova Scotia's Sable Island, a lonely, windswept place in the North Atlantic.

The young lighthouse keeper in charge that night watched in disbelief as an officer of the German submarine came in from the darkness in

full uniform, followed by three armed submariners. Not a word was spoken.

The officer examined his logbook while the others searched the lighthouse, not waking the two light-keepers asleep upstairs. Then they left.

### **Allan Coggon**

When his replacement come down this fella was still sitting at the desk shaking. I mean, after all he was only 18 years old. He told his friends about it, and they just pooh, pooh, pooh, pooh. So he went to bed and he couldn't sleep and the next morning when he got up he told 'em again and they still didn't believe it and he said "Well God damn it," he said, "Come outside and we'll go down to the shore." And they took it downstairs and the shore and they could see where the rubber dingy had dragged. They had dragged it up on the sand.

### **Cliff Chadderton**

What about weather station Kurt? I think this is really going to fan the imagination of Canadians.

## **Allan Coggon**

Well, the Germans were desperate for information that's going to affect the weather for the bombers. And so they went to some great scientific exercise in developing weather stations that could be operated remotely, while on station. And operate for months afterwards without any attention at all, denoting certain aspects of meteorology and transmitting them to Hamburg or wherever it was.

So they had one in Iceland and they put one up in, at the very tip of Quebec on the Atlantic side. And it finally came to the Canadian authorities' attention and indeed now the remains of it sit in the war museum in Ottawa.

## **Cliff Chadderton**

This is the entrance to Halifax Harbour. You can imagine the security that was required because a saboteur could get in and with very little demolition with him, bombs or whatever, he could disrupt shipping for weeks on end if he got here.

We're heading up The Narrows. They separate Dartmouth on our starboard side and Halifax on our port side. There was one incident where a German submarine did fire upon, and sunk, an Allied vessel. That was a mere 15 miles from Halifax Harbour. For those who think that Canada was not in danger in World War II, just consider that again.

## **Gulf of St. Lawrence**

### **Cliff Chadderton**

We're going to talk in this section about the war as it was brought close to the shores of Canada in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We have a chart here which shows the number of actual ships were sunk by U-boats. Many Canadians today will just not believe that the Germans were within let's say, a stones throw of the Gaspé coast.

### **Fern Falardeau**

On one of the walls we had a blackboard with all the information about convoys that were leaving Canada for Europe, the positions, the speed, how many boats and everything else, the information was there, part of our Operations room. That was a crucial period. There were I don't know how many German U boats in the Atlantic and we lost a lot of ships going across there.

### **Allan Coggon**

The convoys from Quebec they would also go up through the Straits of Belle Isle between Newfoundland and Labrador. That was a shorter way to go out, get up and get south of Greenland and south of Iceland and perhaps on their way up to Russia or wherever they were going.

The Germans picked onto that pretty quickly once they had the, the submarines with the proper range that they could go hunting. And that's where most of the ships were, were being sunk.

## **Narrator #2**

Beginning in the summer and fall of 1942, the German navy's U-boats waged a war of terror that endangered ships transporting troops and cargo for the war effort in Europe.

A total of 23 ships were sunk in the Gulf, resulting in the loss of more than 300 sailors from the navy and merchant navy, as well as civilians. The closest attack came within 13 kilometres off the Gaspé peninsula.

The Royal Canadian Navy, Merchant Navy and Air Force fought valiantly against odds that favoured Hitler's U-boat fleet.

After Canada was forced to close the Gulf to merchant traffic, the U-boat fleet moved to other waters. They returned in 1944 when the Gulf re-opened to trans-Atlantic vessels.

## **Fern Falardeau**

Knowing those submarines were in the Atlantic and in the St. Lawrence, that scared you. They found some torpedoes in Gaspé, they found torpedoes around Mont -Joli on the beach. They were everywhere, they were daring.

## **Narrator #1**

Despite the submarine attacks on the River and in the Gulf, maintaining lighthouse operations was still required for the safety of ships. Former light keeper Remi Ferguson tells how the Department of National Defence proceeded.

## **Voice of Remi Ferguson**

We were sent radio messages. They gave us codes. They said: "A notice to lighthouse keepers: Executive instructions A for Alphonse." That meant to keep the lighthouse operating. If they said, "B for Bonbon," that would have meant that there was danger offshore – submarine or something. That's when we turned off the lighthouse until further notice. This message was repeated three or four times a day.

**Narrator #1**

Strict measures were imposed on the entire Gaspé Peninsula to prevent the enemy from detecting light sources which would allow German submarines to guide themselves in Canadian waters.

Madame Alexandrine Beaudoin tells how it was prohibited to have lights on in the house without first drawing the shades.

**Voice of Alexandrine Beaudoin**

“One has to walk around in buildings with lit lanterns that must not be visible from the sea. We also confirm that the authorities have imposed turning off street lamps, and covering windows and lights at the train station. The upper part of car headlights must be blacked out with a painted black half-circle.”

**Narrator #1**

The ADC had hundreds of miles of new telephone lines built in Quebec's Gaspé region, new telephones were installed and more and more volunteer observers were recruited. These urgent developments and increased security measures were in response to the reality that the war in Europe was dangerously close to home.

## **Fern Falardeau**

We were outside Quebec City. I see this big round ball, so I yelled inside. Mother comes outside, she says that's a Zeppelin. Sure enough, that Hindenburg was coming down the St. Lawrence, and we saw the whole thing, right there, and the swastikas on the tail and so on.

What we thought about this was who says that those, that German zeppelin was going around taking pictures of all this, flying around all over North America and down to the States, you know. Again, you can't take chances. I'm talking about a wartime thing.

## **Narrator #2**

On the night of November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1942, Nazi spy Werner Janowski was delivered by submarine to the south coast of the Gaspé.

## **Allan Coggon**

They put him ashore in a rubber boat and he had kept his radio stuff with him. And he was trudging along in the morning and there was a man returning from a job and he offered him a ride and he wanted to go to the hotel at New Carlisle.

## **Narrator #2**

Some of the family members who owned the hotel were volunteer observers. They were immediately suspicious of the stranger. He stayed a few days then bought a train ticket to Montreal.

## **Allan Coggon**

The father of the family who had been a seaman with diesel engines, he mentioned there's something funny about that fellow. He said he's got the smell of diesel engines on him, which of course was common with submariners. They had what they call a dank odour from if they're stuck in the submarine for a couple of weeks coming across.

But right after he left to go to the train, the son hot footed it upstairs to the room where the fellow had entered and he found box ... paper ... small matches that were made in Belgium and an empty cigarette package for cripes sake which also was from the other side. And so right away he called the police.

## **Narrator #2**

When the police arrested Janowski, they found a radio transmitter, a gun and other suspicious items in his valise. Janowski confessed and became a double agent.

## **HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY TRADING POSTS**

### **Cliff Chadderton**

What about the factors of the Hudson Bay Company? Who knew that they were involved in very valuable information gathering and broadcast of same during World War II?

### **Narrator #1**

Canada expected that enemy bombers would arrive from the north bordering Labrador, Hudson Bay and Hudson Straits.

The work of the Aircraft Detection Corps in the north fell to the Fur Trading Posts of the Hudson's Bay Company. It had the only organized radio communication system in these remote areas that could flash news of enemy planes or vessels to the government.

Fur traders, Inuit hunters, Hudson's Bay Company personnel and government radio operators were all active Observers.

## **Cliff Chadderton**

The Hudson Bay Trading Post operators were performing a very useful function governing a vast amount of territory in Canada.....

## **Allan Coggon**

Oh definitely, and they needed to get material up there to build some buildings at a couple of key locations for staffing. And of course the far Arctic at that time only got one shipload a year on the Nascopie. And that boat had to leave Montreal I think no later than July to be able to get up to the farthest north port, unload and escape before the ice were frozen in for the winter.

## **Narrator #1**

In 1942, when Germany's air power was at its peak, the central part of northern Canada was considered vital as an alert area to protect the United States' iron ore traffic through the Sault Ste. Marie canal.

## **SAULT STE. MARIE**

### **Cliff Chadderton**

Tell us about Sault Ste. Marie. Now that's a great surprise to most people. They don't know that the Air Detection Corps was very active in the Sault Ste. Marie area.

### **Allan Coggon**

The Americans were extremely excited about the potential of having the great canals of Sault Ste. Marie blocked because all the iron ore from the Masabi range in Michigan came down to the south end of Lake Superior through the Sault locks, down to the steelmakers of Pittsburgh and New York. If that source of supply was cut off, it's pretty much game over for American munitions production going overseas. Especially after Pearl Harbour, all hackles came out .

So the National Guard of two or three southern states were sent up to man the aircraft defenses.

### **Sally Gibson**

I'm Sally Gibson, with Parks Canada here at the Sault Ste Marie Canal National Historic Site of Canada. During World War II when the Americans entered the war in 1941 they had a regiment stationed

here in Sault Ste Marie and right here on the south side of the locks were barracks where a number of the men stayed.

There were also other barracks throughout the city up on some of the hills.

### **Betty MacLeod**

I'm Betty McLeod now. I was Betty Fleming. I was 12 when the war started. I do remember when the American troops came. It must have been in the wintertime because I still remember how cold they were, they appeared to be. They had their collars up to ... over their ears and their hats pulled down. And just shivering in the back of those trucks. And that's mostly what I remember, just so many army trucks moving around town with loads of soldiers.

### **Sally Gibson**

There was a fear of sabotage here at the Sault Ste Marie Canal. Huge barrage balloons were placed at the ends of the lock walls. Also, the buildings here were surrounded by sand bags and the whole area was secured and closed off to the public.

### **Betty MacLeod**

We knew that the locks were so important because it was the busiest shipping area in the world, more concentrated than anywhere in the

world. And highest percentage of tonnage going through the Sault locks, especially at that time.

### **Betty Bridge**

My name is Betty Bridge and at the time of the Second World War, I was Betty Ferguson and I was about 16 years old. Every piece of lawn that was big enough or a playing field or just an empty lot was either ... had a barrage balloon connected on it, or an anti-aircraft gun along with the searchlight.

### **Betty MacLeod**

Well, when they were on the ground they were gigantic. When they were way up in the air they were just like a toy balloon. We just took them for granted because they were in almost every neighbourhood in the Soo, especially along the river.

### **Betty Bridge**

The barrage balloons had one tether that would ... it was a steel tether but every now and again one would break.

### **Betty MacLeod**

We saw a few of them get away and it was very interesting and rather amusing to see them sail away in the wind.

## **Betty Bridge**

We had blackouts, blackout practices and blackouts all the time. The Sault was divided into areas and my grandfather was a warden in charge of the area in which we lived. And my father was one of his ... his air raid wardens underneath it.

There was air raid sirens on all the different posts and as soon as it would go you had to make sure every curtain was closed in your place so that there wasn't a spark of light anywhere.

We didn't go out much at night at all, just maybe to a neighbour's and that was it. We were always under very strict guard.

## **BRITISH COLUMBIA**

### **Narrator #1**

Following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour (December 7, 1941), the people of the West Coast were fearful of an invasion by the Japanese. This anxiety intensified after they invaded the Aleutian Islands, near Alaska.

On June 20, 1942, a Japanese sub surfaced two miles off the coast of Vancouver Island and shelled the lighthouse and wireless station at Estevan Point near Tofino. One of these shell fragments is on display at the Maritime Museum of British Columbia.

### **Cliff Chadderton Voice-Over**

I was en route to the Officers' Training Centre at Gordon Head on Vancouver Island when we heard the news of the shelling of Estevan Point. I held the rank of infantry sergeant at the time. While still on the ship, we were ordered to unpack our shovels and be prepared to dig trenches when we arrived at Gordon Head.

## **Allan Coggon**

I think they lobbed 10, 20 shells at it and they didn't hit it. Just a bit south of there however they had a submarine that could carry an aircraft in sections. And they used that down the coast a bit and attack an oil refinery or something, a couple of times. I think they had probably 2 or 3 or such submarines. But I don't think they really did too much harm.

## **Narrator #1**

Although no damage had been done, the fact remained that Canada had been subjected to hostile enemy action. Members of the Aircraft Detection Corps in BC were on alert.

Neil Macdougall was 15 at the time. Building model airplanes was his favourite pastime. It was his passion for planes that qualified him to become a Chief Observer in his hometown of Abbotsford.

## **Neil Macdougall**

I became a chief observer right from the beginning probably because they couldn't find anyone else. And possibly because I was teaching aircraft recognition to the army cadets. And I had been interested in aviation for many years and was thrilled at the chance to do something interesting and useful.

The first job as chief observer is to find people to observe. So I had to go around and recruit people. I didn't know very many people who would be suitable so I relied upon my parents contacts and I would go out and ask them if they would volunteer. And most of them did.

### **Narrator #1**

Neil Macdougall's first recruit was his mother, and their family home became the headquarters for the area. He rode his bicycle from house to house, signing up volunteers. Using diagrams on a poster, he taught them to identify Japanese and Allied aircraft. He also assigned each observer a time slot of when to be on duty. After that, the observers were left on their own.

### **Neil Macdougall**

In B.C., the observers were mainly along the coast and that was the first priority to set up a line of observers right from the Alaska border down to Washington. But because the Fraser Valley is a main air route to the east and also because it's a back way door of attacking American cities in Seattle and Portland, it was an important place for an observer post.

Our main job was to look for airplanes. But on the coast the observers were also looking for suspicious ships, obviously spies who might be landing.

We held classes for the Observers, usually in their houses, and we had silhouettes like this and they became very proficient at identifying the most common airplanes and some of them could actually identify one or two by sound.

And because the aircraft were going two to four miles a minute, it was really important to drop everything you were doing and dash in and phone directly to the filter centre.

Most of the observers were 20 or 30 years older than I was and some of them were 40 years older. No one seemed concerned about my age and they didn't need much supervision. They knew what to do, they did it! We had a retired army captain from World War I. We had five or six housewives who reported from their houses, a provincial policeman, a service station owner. But the housewives were by far the most effective and dedicated.

## **Narrator #1**

There were not enough air force fighters to maintain continuous patrols along BC's vast coastline. Air defence relied heavily on volunteer observers for early warning and tracking. Assisting them were the newly formed Pacific Coast Militia Rangers.

## **Allan Coggon**

They were a terrific group. They were basically guerillas, but they were guerillas well my Jesus they had a lot of hump and a bang with them you know. They were well organized on a military basis, although they were not military themselves. They were wood cutters and miners and people that work out in the woods and the mountains. But they were all gung ho, really great physical men. And they took to this thing like a duck to water. The 30-30 rifle was a great little gun for hunting. I used it a lot when I was a boy. And that was their weapon of choice.

One of the other things they did, they had every logging trail and bridge and everything uh already loaded with bombs to blow it up in case the Japanese should come over. They were just fantastic.

## **Neil Macdougall**

There were very few army bases or army people in BC at that time. And so the rangers were designed just like the British Home Guard to supplement the army and particularly in remote areas. And unlike the Home Guard they were mainly woodsmen, hunters, very talented and down to earth outdoorsmen. So they were comfortable with rifles they were comfortable with living outside.

They worked with the Aircraft Detection Corps and they directed sightings to us or reported sightings to the filter center.

When I was asked to talk to them and tell them what to do and what we did I felt intimidated by all these guys who were in their 50's and 60's and had been living outdoors and knew all about things I never heard of.

## **Narrator #1**

Japanese military planners did not have long-range bombers capable of reaching North America. In 1944, they devised an unusual alternative.

## **Cliff Chadderton**

Tell us about the Japanese paper balloons.

## **Allan Coggon**

That was a fantastic thing. That was science fiction stuff really! The Japanese discovered something most, most valuable that we didn't know. We suspected something of this was going on when some of our bombers in Europe going in would end up beyond the German east boundary and they couldn't get back home when they turned around to come home.

The jet stream! The Japanese knew about these rivers of high speed wind way up in the stratosphere. But we didn't but, they did! And it was on this basis that they were able to construct a remarkable thing - a remotely controlled hot air balloon that would maintain its altitude between 28 and 32,000 (feet?) for a definite number of hours whereupon the past experiences they had with the speed of the wind, would drop its bombs and set fire to forests and interfere with the war effort.

### **Cliff Chadderton**

And if it had worked, it could have destroyed thousands of acres of valuable...

### **Allan Coggon**

Yes fortunately God was with us then because they didn't realize that the North American forests on the west coast are full of snow in the wintertime.

### **Neil Macdougall**

The balloons had to rely upon the wind and so they just went where the wind went. They weren't controlled anywhere and a lot of them came down in the interior of BC and in the northwest states in the US. And they dropped in force and a few of them set minor fires but basically they didn't do any damage. It was an economical weapon but not an effective one.

## **Narrator #1**

The sightings that were reported dutifully by Observers during the war years were especially useful in helping to locate lost aircraft. Their efforts saved the lives of many airmen.

Enemy incursions were rare, however, and ADC volunteers had few opportunities to distinguish themselves publicly.

## **Neil Macdougall**

It was a little bit like being a guard and you don't always see anything that's significant but you have to be alert all the time.

The Aircraft Detection Corps was disbanded toward the end of the war when the action in the Pacific moved closer to Japan and also when the radar along the coast was so effective they didn't think human observers were as necessary.

## SO I'M A SUCKER, AM I?

### Cliff Chadderton

I've been intrigued ever since I read the book about the fellow who wrote the letter Was I a Sucker?

### Voice-over of unidentified Observer

I'm a volunteer Observer of the Aircraft Detection Corps. A "sucker" to some of the folks on the outside looking in. Well, as long as I'm a sucker, this country can be mighty thankful, for the moment I stop being an active part of the armed forces, war will come to Canada on enemy wings!

The minute I take over the watch, I become -- for a few short hours -- just that important. I'm no longer a clerk, a mechanic, or a gardener. I like to feel that I'm an important cog in the vast machinery of Canada's defences.

### Allan Coggon

Well that fellow embodies the spirit that I found rather common talking to in talking with these different people in the aircraft corps – aircraft detection corps. Their devotion to their job. And so this sort of embodied itself in this letter about – about being a sucker.

None of them took it casually that I could detect. It was a mother and a father saying our son is over there, he's now flying a spitfire or a bomber and something. He's laying his life on the line. We have to do everything we can to support him that he gets home safe.

### **Neil Macdougall**

All of the Observers, myself included, felt there was a job to do, we did it, people in the community said nothing about it, they didn't chide us for it, they didn't congratulate us for it nor did we expect it.

The job was just a tiny, tiny cog in the war machine but it was a necessary thing at the time and I was glad to do it.

### **Cliff Chadderton**

Is there some reason why Canadians don't know very much about the Air Detection Corps?

### **Allan Coggon**

It wasn't kept secret by any means. It didn't make the headlines. And once Europe was set free, it was all hurrah and back home, celebration and wow, the war's over.

**Doug Betts**

I can remember when it was downsized, the Aircraft Detection Corps, there was no fanfare. It wasn't a sad day in the sense that, but it was a day of accomplishment, don't need us any more, we've done our job.

**Fern Falardeau**

I think a little bit of war effort contributed somewhat, I hope. Because then again, there was never too much discussed about this particular job that we did. So I'm glad that this is happening now, at last.

**Cliff Chadderton**

You didn't have a badge of any kind?

**Doug Betts**

They did towards the late, late forty-three, early forty-four, they sent us a badge. And that badge was sent with some fanfare and worn with great pride by everybody.

## **Cliff Chadderton**

And so that is the fascinating story of the Air Detection Corps. In it we have given the highlights. We hope you enjoyed the story. Thank you. This is Cliff Chadderton of The War Amps.