

Lt Commander Alfred Edward Zeally
The Royal Canadian Navy Reserve
The Father of Canadian Navy Bands

Jack Kopstein



Alfred Zeally is seen inset(right) with the Machine Gun Brigade band during WW1

Alfred Zealley was no doubt one of Canada's finest military musicians of the last century. But his greatest contribution was his ability to both organize and attract good musicians for the Royal Canadian Navy during the period of 1939 to 1945. In fact he offered to organize a band at his own expense for the navy, since at the outbreak of hostilities Canada had no Naval bands in service on a regular basis. Thus his offer was accepted and he was awarded a commission in the navy in the special branch to accomplish his mission.

Zealley was born in Bristol England on June 10th, 1878 and served in the British Army during the period 1893 to 1909, first as a band boy in the Boer war and later as a regular musician. He was trained on French Horn at Kneller Hall, the Royal Military School of Music in 1898 and on leaving, was with the Royal East Kent Regiment, the "Buffs", for 12 years.

He migrated to Boston. in 1908 and in 1910, his reputation as a musician had reached such extent that he was appointed as bandmaster at Harvard University, and held that position for four years. He joined the Canadian Army at Toronto in 1915, and was appointed bandmaster to the 75th Battalion Band of General Victor Odium's Canadian Expeditionary Force. In France and Belgium, he served as Brigade Bandmaster, having some 300 bandsmen under his supervision.

Working out of Boston after the war, he enhanced his reputation as a band conductor, the highlight being an extensive tour through the U.S., Cuba and Mexico with the Belleville “Kiltie” band. His reputation with this band was known throughout the commonwealth.

In 1924, Captain Charles O’Neill recommended him for the post of director of Music of the Royal Canadian Regiment band the venerable director of the Royal 22nd band of Quebec City. However he was not selected and chose to continue directing bands in Toronto and writing invaluable articles for various magazines and periodicals in Canada. In 1926 he co-authored a book titled “Famous Bands of the British Empire” which was accepted by King George V for the Royal Library. The book remains as a historic masterpiece and is found in several libraries in Canada and Britain. The book also found a place in the Congressional library in Washington.

In November 1939, Zealley wrote to Naval Headquarters in Ottawa with the concept of a naval band. The Army and Air Force currently had their own bands and he suggested that at least from an esprit de corps point of view, the Navy should have one. He offered to organize and equip a band for the Canadian Navy at no expense to the government. His offer was accepted, and he was given the rank of Lieutenant (RCNVR) (Special Branch). Formed at HMCS York in Toronto from mostly Salvation Army musicians who owned their own instruments and selected by audition, the band was drafted to Halifax on January 8, 1940, for active duty with HMCS Stadacona. Lt AE Zealley was Stadacona’s first bandmaster.

The *usefulness* of the Stadacona band and its tremendous effect on the morale of the bluejackets was immediately recognized by the Naval Board in Ottawa with the result a band was authorized for HMCS Naden using Zealley’s guideline of no expense to the Government. The Naden band had been formed early in the decade of the 1930’s as a voluntary band.

The daily routine and main purpose of naval bands was mandated to include three parades daily, noonday concerts and weekly dances for their ship’s company, and in addition, civic engagements for charitable purposes. This role was soon overshadowed by their exceptional ability to play symphonic concerts, making them immensely popular both with the public and naval audiences.

In November, 1942, Lt. Zealley was appointed Director of Music for the Royal Canadian Navy and authorized to establish the RCN School of Music in Toronto where all future naval bands were to be organized and trained at the only service school of music in Canada.

The school had a very humble beginning in a small cubicle office at HMCS York. Lt. Zealley and his staff set about the task of organizing a 40-piece band for York and at the same time, a reserve band “pool to be available for draft as a unit or individually as replacements to bands already formed. The school allowed 10 weeks to train a band for duty at a naval station. Aiding in this training venture were Warrant Officer E. Huggins, PO Harry Shepherd, CPO Vernon Gooch, PO “Dinty” Moore, LBD1 Wright, Bd A. Riuttala, PO1. Burt, and PO G. Barker, and many others.

Initially, almost all who joined were professional musicians from all areas of Canada, and their training was in ensemble and learning the naval tradition, marching and discipline. Lt. Zealley's first "graduation" concert at York in early March 1943, was before an audience of 2,000, after which most of his school were drafted to HMCS Protector, Cornwallis, Stadacona, St. Hyacinthe and York.

The York band was established after months of interviewing, testing, selecting and rehearsing, and had in its sections some of the finest musicians in Canada — the top professionals from the studios of Toronto. The band of HMCS York was, arguably, Canada's finest military band at the time and greatly impressed the 50 members of the Canadian Bandmasters Association present at one of its concerts.

The bands of the School of Music and York, usually massed for public concerts. The April 1943 issue of *Crowsnest* commented: "He (Lt. Zealley) has probably created a record in band organization work without equal in the Dominion of Canada, having organized six bands to the satisfaction of all Commanding Officers where the bands are stationed. All of this work has been completed in the short space of nine months." The six bands identified in Zealley's book "Famous Bands of the RCN" which helped to celebrate the seventeen bands he helped to organize.

Alfred Zealley was promoted to Lt. Commander in July, 1943. In the slightly more than two years of its existence, the School of Music graduated more than 500 musicians, having organized and trained them for approximately 19 bands, including three cruiser bands at sea and the York band. The quality of musicians accepted and then posted to the various new bands after the initial recruiting draft was; many past members have noted it, a mixture — from the very good to the competent.

In December 1944, the RCN School of Music was disbanded and Lt. Commander Zealley was appointed to the RCN Depot as drafting (demobilization) officer for bands until his retirement in June 1945. It would be at least seven years before HMCS York would again march to their own band. A 30-piece trumpet band, with drums and bell lyres, made its first public appearance at the Toronto Trumpet Band Festival on May 3, 1952, followed by a succession of notable engagements.

Several reserve bands were organized following the war, notably the HMCS Star in Hamilton and the HMCS Hunter in Windsor as well as the HMCS Tecumseh in Calgary.

The regular full time naval bands which were organized following the war included the Naden band in Victoria, the Stadacona band in Halifax and the Cornwallis band at the training base Cornwallis NS. The Naval air training station HMCS Shearwater also had a band after the war.

From one band in December 1939 to 19 bands organized by February 1945 is a record to be justly proud of. International recognition of Lt. Cdr Zealley's musical prestige was forthcoming during the summer of 1944 when he guest conducted the Goldman Band, reputed to be the finest professional band in North America. The band played several concerts in Central Park, New York City each year. Zealley was introduced by Dr. Franco Goldman as the "Father of Canadian Naval Bands".

RCNVR Bands 1940-1945

- **HMCS Stadacona.** Halifax, NS by A.E. Zeallev 8 Jan 40. Disbanded in June 1942 for form nucleus of Cornwallis and St Hyacinthe. Reorganized in October 1942 with a few original members.
- **HMCS Cornwallis.** Cornwallis, NS Jun 42. Largest of RCN bands Empire.
- **HMCS St Hyacinthe, St Hyacinthe,** PQ Jun 42. The home of RCN Signal School.
- **HMCS Avalon, St. Johns, Newfoundland.** Oct 42.
- **HMCS RCN School of Music.** Toronto, ON. Dec 42.
- **HMCS York, Toronto,** ON Authority given in Mar 43.
- **HMCS Protector. Sydney, NS** Apr 43. The first complete 'product' of the RCN School of Music Band arrived in Apr 43.
- **HMCS Chatham, Prince Rupert, BC** June 43. Drafted from the School of Music, Po Sunderland was first Bandmaster, followed by Po Guy Noakes.
- **HMCS Shelburne. Shelburne, NS** Oct 43. Drafted from the School of Music.
- **HMCS Niobe** (atfloat) Jan 44.
- **HMCS Avalon, St John's, Newfoundland** Nov 43
- **HMCS Chippawa. Winnipeg. Man** Feb 44. Brass band, saxes added in danceband.
- **HMCS Donnacona, Montreal, PQ.** Reserve band that 'went active' in Dec 43
- **HMCS Discoverv. Vancouver.** BC Jul 44.
- **HMCS Land and afloat Sep 44. HMCS Brunswicker, St John. NB** 15 Jan 44. Pipe band with eight members, and an additional seven as heir employment allowed.



Zeally took up his post in early 1940 and his official photograph is seen at the left. Following the Second World War Zeally began to campaign for a Naval Military School of Music similar to the one he had developed during the war. He did see his dream come true as CPO Harry Bateman an ex Royal Marine musician and CPO Emile Michaux helped to organize a apprentice school in 1954 in Esquamalt.

In 1961 the institution was designated an RCN school. Zeally wrote an enormous number of articles for various military and civilian journals in Canada and was appointed associate Editor of the Canadian Military

Journal. He constantly worked to develop and raise the standards of military bands and community bands in Canada.

He was a very quiet unassuming man and spoke very little about his work. His granddaughter Jane spoke reverently of him and her visits to his home in Toronto. He had three children Charlotte Dugal, Edward (Ted) Zeally a member of the RCN Special Branch and Daniel who was a drummer during the 2nd World War in the HMCS York band in Toronto. Zeally passed away May 15th 1961 at age 82. In today's world Zeally would have undoubtedly been nominated for the Order of Canada. His work certainly deserved this honour and the respect that goes with the title.

The RCN School staff is shown below:



Front Row-L to R Unknown Officer, Lt Commander Zeally. Back Row L to R WO E Huggins, PO Dinty Moore, CPO Vern Gooch, PO Harry Shephard, CPO Johnny Burt.