



HOMELAND STORIES

Safe Haven: War Guests, the Princess and Gold

Character Education

- Appreciate the broad spectrum of helping others in times of crisis
- Develop the capacity to see complexities and make judgements
- Build a hierarchical system of values

Facts

- By early 1940 over 10,000 British children had been evacuated to Canada as War Guests, many with their schools or accompanied by their mothers; others stayed with relatives
- Princess Margriet of the Netherlands was born January 19, 1943, in an Ottawa maternity suite designated “extraterritorial” so that she would have Dutch citizenship
- When the HMS *Emerald* arrived in Halifax with 2,229 boxes of British gold ingots and securities totalling \$650 million, it was the largest single transfer of wealth to date

Before the Readings

- List the charities or services that target children. Why are there many organizations dedicated to helping children?
- What things about Canada make you proud? List some people, arts and sports accomplishments, and historic events that make you proud. Be prepared to defend your choices
- The veterans who risked their lives for Canada during war deserve recognition for their sacrifices. Who on the home front deserves recognition? Make up a hierarchical list of those who you feel should be recognized for their contributions

HOMELAND MINUTES



1918 Staff at Sun Life Building, Montreal
www.SunLife.com

Nerves of Steel: David Mansur and Alexander Craig

“Hope you don’t mind our dropping in unexpectedly like this, but, we’ve brought along quite a shipment of ‘fish’, said the slight, bespectacled British banker Alexander Craig. “Actually, the ‘fish’ are a very large portion of the liquid assets of Great Britain. We’re cleaning our vaults—in case of invasion, you know. The rest will come over shortly.”

David Mansur for the Bank of Canada was astounded by Craig’s pronouncement. He had expected shipments of gold and securities on July 2, 1940, but had no idea of the extent of the responsibility he was about to assume.

When the last of almost 500 crates of securities, checked over many times, was inside the Buttress Room, in the third subterranean basement of the 24 story, granite Sun Life Assurance Company building Craig handed David Mansur a receipt to sign for the

Bank of Canada. It was a sum so large that most people would have gasped. Mansur has to take it in stride as nearly \$5 billion worth of securities and even some of the Crown Jewels of England would arrive in Canada over the next three months.

Within days of the July arrival of the first shipment Mansur had ordered the construction of a burglar-proof vault 18.3 metres square and 3.4 metres high (60 x 11 feet) inside the 24 story Sun Life Assurance Building in Montreal. The difficulty lay in finding steel during times of war. When 3.2 km of abandoned rail road was found nearby, it provided 870 rails to reinforce the .9 metre thick cement walls. Sensitive sound devices in the vault's ceiling recorded everything above a faint whisper.



A Mountie outside the vault of the United Kingdom Security Deposit in Montreal / Sun Life Assur. Co.

Bank officials had to pair up daily to match two different combinations required to open the vault. The securities were kept in 900 four-drawer filing cabinets. RCMP officers were on 24 hour guard duty, eating and sleeping in the building.

It was not time to rest, however. Just outside the stuffed securities vault Mansur equipped a Deposit Office and recruited 120 Canadians. The retired bankers, brokers and investment firm secretaries took an oath of secrecy and under Craig's supervision began the onerous task of unraveling the bundles from Britain. By the end of *Operation Fish* those bundles translated to nearly 2,000 boxes with almost 2,000 different stocks and shares.

Craig's secret staff worked 10 hour days, six days a week unpacking, checking and classifying securities. More than 112 kilometres of tape were used to tie together each individually owned parcel. Six thousand query slips went to London to correct discrepancies in cross-checked lists. A team of secretaries worked exclusively on clipping coupons from shares that had not been touched.

By September 1940, Craig knew that they had everything they were supposed to have. "I don't believe we lost a single coupon. Not a certificate was missing. In view of the pressure under which they were assembled and shipped, it was quite extraordinary."

Winston Churchill noted in his war memoirs that by November 1940, the British Treasury had liquidated \$335 million worth of American shares requisitioned from private owners in Britain. The former owners of the securities were paid at 1940 market prices and had to accept payment in sterling, a proviso that freed up dollars for Britain to make additional war purchases.

At one time or another Mansur had 600 Canadians involved in the Security Deposit's secret operations. *Operation Fish* had involved thousands of ships' personnel and hundreds of dock and rail workers on both sides of the ocean. Never before had so many people kept so great a secret so well. It took nerves of steel to oversee such a significant venture. David Mansur of the Bank of Canada and Alexander Craig of the Bank of England had them.

(Compiled and condensed from "How Britain's Wealth Went West" by Leland Stowe, 1963)



Members of the third contingent of évacuée children from Britain arriving in Canada. July 7, 1940 | Gazette / Library and Archives Canada | PA-142400

Reading 1: War Guests

Even before WWII was declared and the Blitz on Britain began, anxious parents searched for ways to get their children out of harm's way in case of bombings or invasion. Over 10,000 children were evacuated from the Britain's major cities by private schemes before CORB, the Children's Overseas Reception Board, was set up by the government in June 1940. CORB selected and arranged for 1,532 children to come to Canada.

Children's Aid Societies in Ontario were asked to find homes for "British War Guests". The Toronto CAS was

flooded with families volunteering to take a child; 400 individuals volunteered their time to assist with tasks related to the War Guests. Although the CAS screened and approved 2,200 families they required only 145 and the CAS Catholic counterpart 16. The children became wards of the Department of Public Welfare under the *British Child Guests Act*.

In October 1940, Princess Elizabeth made her first broadcast; it was a message to evacuated children. Christmas 1940, 13-year-old Canadian War Guest Robert Brown was heard across Canada and in Britain via radio. After speaking about eating ice cream and playing some jolly sports, Robert continued, "Is school different? Well Oakwood Collegiate in Toronto, where I go, is a great school. But there are things here that are not different. There is love—of country and Empire and freedom—so strong that it has made us strangers feel at home."

In Windsor, Ontario the Ford Motor Company was doing its part. Ford of Canada president Wallace Campbell and his wife Gladys created the "Bundles from Britain" program. Windsor area Ford executives, car dealers and the employees of auto supply plants hosted 100 children, the sons and daughters of British Ford employees in the London area. The Campbells hosted 23 children in the top floor of their large home creating a lovely dormitory.

Peter Horlick a 13 year-old "Blitzkrieg Kid" came to Canada in 1940 with the "Bundles" program. He lived with the Angstroms on Riverfront Road in Amherstburg. When he attended General Amherst High, a school with only about 200 students at the time, it was the first time he had been in a co-ed class. Peter recorded the memories of his pleasant time.

"Mr. and Mrs. Angstrom were now Aunt Hazel and Uncle Carlton and Barbara became my older "sister" Barb. My room was a huge bedroom on the north end of the house with a great view over the Detroit River. They owned an 81 hectare farm that stretched down the 10th Side road to Malden Road and as well, they were leasing another 324 hectares across the road, to assist in the war effort. There were Belgian horses, milk cows, Berkshire hogs and Leghorn chickens, plus various crops. Uncle Carlton and the farm manager, Bert Madill, showed me how to look after the animals and generally be a "regular farmhand".

The CORB Sea Evacuees as they were also called stopped coming to Canada after the sinking of the *City of Benares* September 17, 1940, which only 13 of 90 Child War Guests survived. Those children remaining in Canada for the war's duration had both positive and negative experi-

ences. Peter Horlick, re-called to Britain to serve when he was 17 years old, represented the positive. "When all the official papers had been filled in, there came several rounds of long and very, very difficult goodbyes. I left the Windsor area from the station at the foot of Ouellette Avenue on Christmas Day 1943. I left behind very enduring memories of some wonderful people who I came to love as my own parents."

Reading 2: The Princess



Princess Margriet, 1945
www.koninklijkhuis.nl

As the Nazi steamroller flattened resistance in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, Norway, France, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, the leaders and royalty of those countries had to make swift decisions about whether to stay or flee. June 14, 1940, was a low point. The British army had retreated through Dunkirk, Norway had surrendered, Italy had declared war on Britain and France and the Germans had entered Paris.

Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, who had but one child, Princess Juliana, decided to send her to Canada to secure the royal line. The princess arrived in Ottawa on June 24, 1940, with her two daughters the Princess Beatrice, then two-and-a-half years old and the Princess Irene, a mere nine months old. Juliana's husband, Prince Bernard, was serving with the Royal Air Force in London but visited frequently with his wife.

Royalty spotting Canadians eagerly embraced Princess Juliana. Installed in Stornaway, now the residence of the Official Opposition in Canada, the queen-to-be connected with the people. She enrolled her daughters in public school, shopped personally for groceries and lined up for movies. When news of her pregnancy leaked out in 1942, Canadians overwhelmed with the war, followed Juliana's progress like that of a rock star.

As the granddaughter of Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands was about to be born in Ottawa, Canadian politicians scrambled to declare the maternity ward of Ottawa Civic Hospital "extraterritorial" or outside the Canadian domain. Rendered as unaffiliated with any jurisdiction and technically international territory, the newborn princess derived her citizenship from her mother only, thus making her solely Dutch.

Princess Margriet, the daisy of freedom, was born January 19, 1943. Queen Wilhelmina and Prince Bernard made the dangerous trip to Canada to attend the baptism at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Ottawa on June 29, 1943. Among the baby's multiple godparents were Queen Mary, the wife of King George V and President Roosevelt.

To thank Canada and its people for their wartime hospitality the Princess Juliana in 1945 sent Canada 100,000 tulip bulbs, a gift that has blossomed over the decades to make the Tulip Festival in Ottawa an international event. In 1995 and 2005 the Princess Margriet returned to Ottawa to open the International Tulip Festival and to mark the 50th and 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands.

Canada has but one princess, and in the eyes of Canadians, Margriet, symbolizes a special friendship. For Canada's veterans, it isn't Queens Wilhelmina or Juliana who represent their sacrifice, it's that little baby who cried her first tears on Canadian soil. That little sprite, now 67 years of age, personifies for living veterans their sacrifices during WWII.

Young Canadians today coming from cultures around the world should feel proud that veterans from their country of choice liberated the Netherlands and that they have a princess who Canadians kept safe. Princess Margriet points the way towards a Canada where welcome, security and empowerment go hand in hand.

Reading #3: British Gold



HMS Emerald World War I E-class Cruiser ~ photo pre-war 1934

Right at war's outset it was evident that Britain needed American war supplies. The Bundles from Britain project was the name given to an operation to transport British gold to Canada to pay for American war supplies. At a secret conference, Captain Augustus Agar of the HMS *Emerald* and four other ships' captains received a directive:

Two million pounds in gold bars is to be embarked in each ship to Halifax. A railway truck is expected to be placed alongside each ship about 01.00 October 7. Each truck is expected to contain 148 boxes each weighing 130 lbs. The total number of boxes is numbered Z 298 to Z 741 inclusive. Guards are to be put on each truck on arrival at the ship. Embarkation is to commence about 06.30 or as soon as daylight permits. Adequate steps are to be taken for supervision of each box from unloading from truck to stowage in ship. Finally a receipt is to be forwarded to C in C Western Approaches on the attached form.

(quoted in Draper, p 37)

When the *Emerald* sailed from Plymouth, England the crew wore tropical whites to throw off German spies. In a convoy with two old battleships, the HMS *Revenge* and HMS *Resolution*, her sister ship, HMS *Enterprise* and an old cruiser the HMS *Caradoc*, the *Emerald* ran into some of the heaviest seas that Captain Agar had encountered in his long, illustrious career. By the time they reached Halifax the *Emerald* had lost much of its deck equipment including life boats and rafts and even its spotter plane, a Fairey Seafox. The gold got through though and, with Canadian help, on to its purpose.



Captain Augustus "Gus" Willington Shelton Agar, VC, DSO, RN
Victoria Cross Reference Migration Project | Simon Manchee

Operation Fish was initiated eight months later while *The Battle of the Atlantic* raged. Churchill concerned about Britain's progress in the war, determined to transport 1,800 million pounds sterling of British gold and securities to Canada for safe keeping. The HMS *Emerald* was called upon again, this time under a new captain, Francis Cyril Flynn, to undertake the first voyage to transfer valuables.

In June 1940, at Greenoch in Scotland the *Emerald's* magazines were loaded with 2,229 bullion boxes each containing four bars of gold. Four hundred and eighty-eight boxes of securities worth in excess of 100 million

pounds sterling were also stashed below. The weight of the gold made the ship sit low in the water.

Like Captain Agar, Captain Flynn had a rough crossing but against great odds arrived safely in Halifax. A CNR train waited on a siding specially screened from prying eyes. During the super-secret unloading every box was checked and then transferred to one of 12 baggage cars. That evening the train sped to Montreal where the cars containing the boxes of securities were uncoupled. Waiting to meet the train at Bonaventure Station were David Mansur, the Acting Secretary of the Bank of Canada and Sidney Perkins of the Foreign Exchange Control Board.

Mansur and Perkins realized that the Bank of Canada was about to assume responsibility for almost everything Britain possessed. It was an awesome responsibility. Mansur had scouted out the 24 story granite Sun Life Assurance Company building in Montreal which was then the largest commercial building in the Commonwealth; it had three subterranean levels. He planned to deposit the "United Kingdom Security Deposit" in the Buttress Room in the third basement.

The Montreal police cordoned off streets just after 1 a.m. and accompanied by armed Canadian National Express guards, the assets made it safely to the Sun Life Assurance rear ramps where Canadian Mounted Police took up the worry beads. Later a newly constructed burglar-proof vault with three-foot walls held the dozens of trainloads of securities that joined the first one.

The remaining cars with the gold from the *Emerald* headed onwards to the Bank of Canada in Ottawa. About a week later the HMCS *Bonaventure*, the battleship *Revenge* and four destroyers picked up three liners off Scotland for a tempestuous trip to Halifax. Once again against incredible odds, amid fog, icebergs and enemy U-boats a \$2 billion shipment of British gold and securities made it safely to Canada.

By the end of *Operation Fish*, there were 60 million ounces of British gold in the vaults of the Bank of Canada in Ottawa on Wellington Street. Military men and RCMP disguised in working clothes handled the heavy influx. Finally when the workmen couldn't keep up with the shipments, crates of gold lined the hallways of the Bank—naturally under 24 hour RCMP supervision.

During three months as these incalculable treasures made it through an ocean filled with a minefield of hazards, 134 ships were sunk—not one from *Operation Fish*.

Starting July 1940, Canadians had the responsibility to safeguard the wealth and hopes of a nation, the mother nation of the Commonwealth. They kept that trust. Not an ounce of gold or a single security was lost and not a single secret revealed. To this day young Canadians don't know the heavy weight that rested in Canada's vaults and on her shoulders.

After the Readings

- Of the readings on War Guests, Princess Margriet and British gold and securities in Canada, which one impressed you most and why?
- Why did parents and the British government risk so very much to send "valuables" to Canada?
- Which was most important, providing safe haven to British children, British gold or European royalty? How does one prioritize or create hierarchical values?

Extensions

- Canada provided safe haven to British children, British gold and European royalty. To whom did they NOT provide safe haven and why?
- *Operation Fish* was filled with exciting adventures on the seas and in Canada. Research it further and present a report to your class
- *The Lord of the Flies*, *The Lion*, *the Witch and the Wardrobe* and many other stories deal with the evacuation of children. Compile a list of stories based on evacuees and present an annotated list to your class

Sources

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Audio Video Clips

- CBC Digital Archives: Netherlands' Princess Margriet born in Ottawa archives.cbc.ca/society/family/clips/12821/