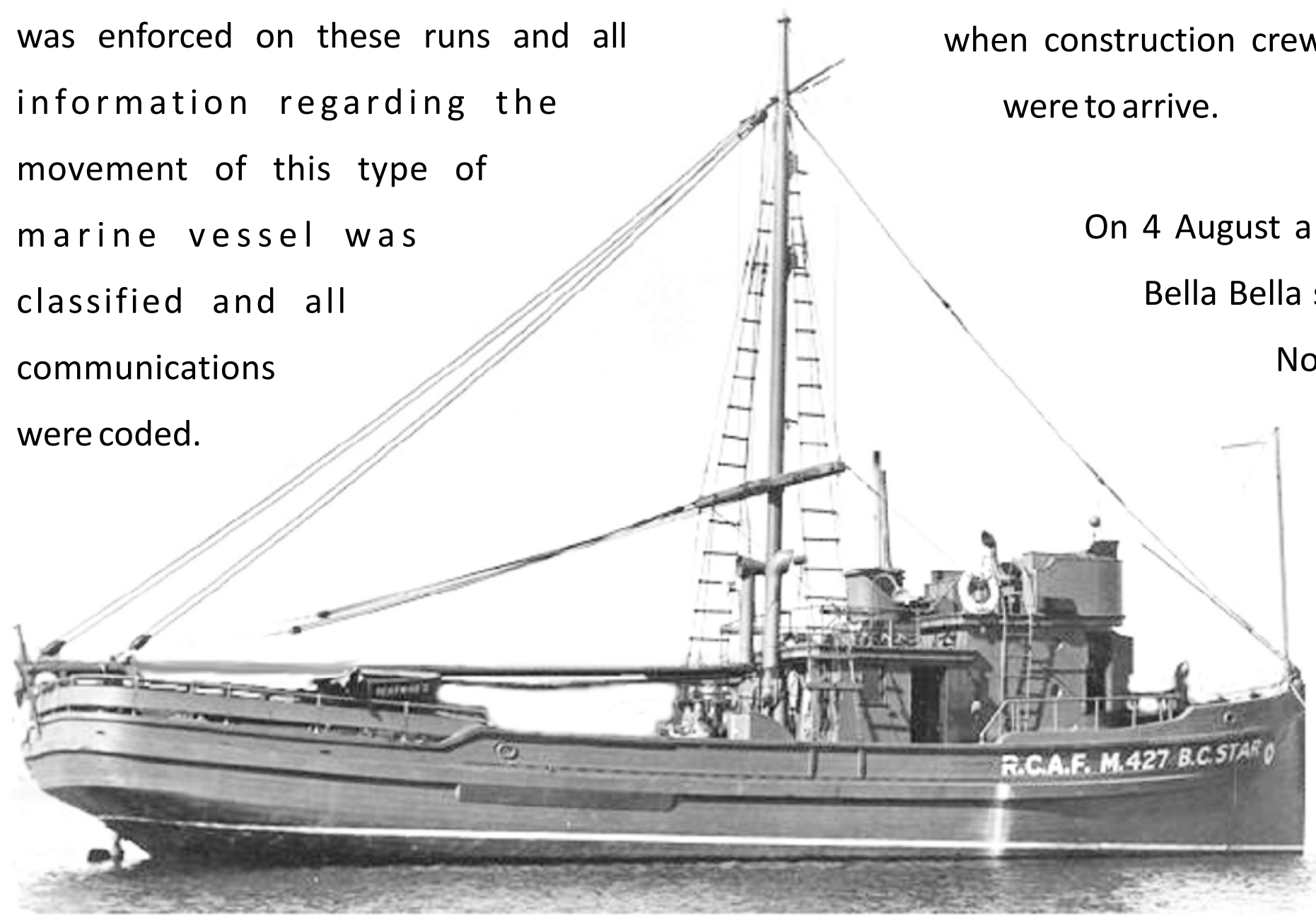


# The Story of M427 “BC Star”

During the buildup of the war effort on the West Coast many new remote early warning radar units were built and maintained. The RCAF requisitioned tugs and fishing craft that were then attached to the Marine Section to service these otherwise inaccessible stations. These vessels were the "work horses" that plied back and forth on their unscheduled runs moving construction crews, material, and heavy equipment up and down the coast of British Columbia. To help keep these radar units existence and location secret radio silence was enforced on these runs and all information regarding the movement of this type of marine vessel was classified and all communications were coded.



On 23 July, 1943, M 427 BC Star was scheduled for one of these runs. She departed Bella Bella with her 10 man crew, five No. 9 CMU personnel assigned to the construction project and a cargo of 43 tons of gravel and cement. They were bound for the new radar site at Cape St. James in the Queen Charlotte Islands. No. 28 (RU) Cape St James had no way of knowing that the supply boat was on its way as they had not yet received the necessary cypher equipment to decode the movement message. Radio silence was enforced on the ship and no one missed her until 3 August when construction crews queried when their supplies were to arrive.

On 4 August a Stranraer from 9 BR Squadron Bella Bella started the search. On 5 August Norseman #2470 was sent from Bella Bella to search the area and on 8 August a search was carried out by the M 536 SKEENA MAID. An intense sea and air search covered a wide area for several weeks with two bodies and some wreckage

being found. On 3 September an unidentified airman's body was found on Price Island. A tombstone was erected at the Meadow Island Cemetery, Bella Bella, B.C to remember the unknown airman.

Rumours circulated about the vessel being attacked by a Japanese submarine, and this information was enhanced by crewmembers aboard another RCAF marine vessel inbound to Alliford Bay. They reported that they were listening to a Ketchikan Alaska radio station when its program was interrupted by a strange and unidentified transmission "Star out of bread and water. Alliford repeat message. Thank you. Good Afternoon" However, no conclusive evidence ever came to light that explained why the Star went down. Possibly the hull had simply opened up under the weight of her cargo and M-427 sank so quickly that no life boats were launched and no distress signals were sent. This mission resulted in the largest loss of life in the history of the RCAF Marine Branch. After the loss, marine craft procedures were revised to ensure prompt reporting of arrivals and departures.

The men are commemorated on panel two of the Commonwealth Air Forces Ottawa Memorial dedicated to air force personnel lost without trace in Canada,

the U.S. and neighbouring lands and seas during the Second World War.

The crew/passenger list for the BC Star on the 23 July 1943 listed the following personnel;

- ✦ *R128864 Cpl Charles Gordon Glover*
- ✦ *R186865 LAC Harold Fredrick Dakenfold*
- ✦ *R173910 LAC George Thornton Stead*
- ✦ *R213870 AC1 Titus Vollhoffer*
- ✦ *R220368 AC2 Maurice Daniel Onuski*
- ✦ *R58625 Sgt Philip Eric Olsen*
- ✦ *R87823 LAC Clarence James Sherlock*
- ✦ *P4319 FSgt Roy Henry Drouillard*
- ✦ *R146033 Sgt Jack Douglas Hearfield*
- ✦ *R220720 AC2 Gilbert Campbell McFadyen*
- ✦ *R151826 FSgt William Ernest Mitchell*
- ✦ *R128695 Sgt Jonathan Charles Slater*
- ✦ *R255739 AC2 Arthur Garnet Davies*
- ✦ *R124630 Sgt William Murray MacNeill*
- ✦ *R56918 Cpl Tadeusz Ledwig Polec*