

Vets visit Spain

Forty-eight veterans of the Mackenzie-Papineau battalion returned to Canada September 9 following a two-week tour of Spanish battlefields where they fought and lost against the spread of Fascism and dictatorship more than 40 years ago.

The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion was the 15th of the International Brigade, an irregular army of soldiers from many nations that fought for the Spanish Republicans.

"We were all getting older and we wanted to do this as soon as possible," said Ross Russell, a 68-year-old retired Toronto union official and an organizer of the trip.

Survivors of the Spanish Civil War came from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario. Some had joined the struggle as self-declared Communists; others were socialists and political moderates caught up in, what was considered to be, a fight for freedom.

About 1,200 Canadians were involved in the war and only about 600 survived to return to Canada in 1939.

"We didn't go before because we couldn't do the things we wanted to do (under the Franco dictatorship), such as meet trade union leaders," said Mr. Russell.

But time was running out on the veterans, who now are mainly in their Sixties, he said. The trip to Madrid, Barcelona, Teruel, Albacete and other battlefields and training grounds for the "Mack-Pap" battalion was the first and may well be the last organized visit to Spain, Mr. Russell said.

He also said the trip was designed to coincide with a push to gain official Canadian recognition of the Mack-Pap volunteers as war veterans. To protect Canada's policy of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War, the Liberal Government of Mackenzie King passed a law in 1936 making it an offence, punishable by up to two years in jail and a \$2,000 fine, for any Canadian to join the fighting, said Mr. Russell.

The law also meant none of the veterans or their widows ever received government allowances and pensions given to veterans of the First and Second World Wars. "It is a question of recognition," he said. "We want the same rights, privileges and recognition as other veterans."

Treasure diving a fascinating but dangerous sport

For 20 years, enthusiasts from across the continent have flocked to Tobermory, Ontario, the scuba diving capital of Canada, to explore the clear waters and abundant shipwrecks of Georgian Bay.

Little blue pennants stuck in the map on the wall mark diving accidents. Red pennants mark fatalities.

Stan McClellan, is the superintendent of Fathom Five, Canada's only underwater park. Since the park was opened in 1972, nine divers have died. Twenty-four others have wound up in decompression chambers, fighting the effects of the bends or embolism — air bubbles frothing in their bodies.

Mr. McClellan's office overlooks Tobermory harbour and the growing fleet of commercial tugs that carry hundreds of diving tourists each summer.

Sports divers travel to Tobermory the way Moslems flock to Mecca. Almost 8,000 come every year, despite the bone-



Sun Times photo

Brian Main, a scuba enthusiast from Toronto, prepares for a dive.

numbing water that can be as cold as one or two degrees above zero Centigrade.

"...Diving is a dangerous sport only if you are not trained for it," insists Mr. McClellan, "or if you ignore the safety rules." Divers are supposed to use the "buddy system" and submerge only in pairs, but a buddy can get lost by straying six feet away. The breathing apparatus on a diver's air tanks can freeze in deep water and only experts should go below 60 feet.

Mr. McClellan's wardens patrol the 45 square miles of Fathom Five in a radio-equipped boat to make sure divers obey the park's safety regulations, but the regulations are not laws and they cannot be strictly enforced.

"About a third of our divers come up from the United States and some come from Halifax or British Columbia to dive here," says Bettie Smith, veteran manager of G & S Watersports, a Tobermory diving centre that handles about 100 underwater explorers every weekend.

Shipwrecks lure

What they find are sunken old wooden vessels littering the lake bottom, perfectly preserved and easy to explore in the clear water — schooners, brigantines, barques, tugs, freighters and side-wheel steamers, some more than a century old. Underwater caves, cliffs, and rock formations are other attractions.

More than 50 ships are known to have sunk in the Tobermory area, 26 of them within the boundaries of Fathom Five. Some lie in ten feet of water or less. Some, like the oakbuilt schooner *Arabia*, which sank off Echo Island in 1884 with 20,000 tons of grain aboard, lie at a lethal 100 feet or more. Six wrecks lie right inside the harbour, like the 219-ton *Sweepstakes*, grounded in 1896 just 300 yards from the modern government dock.

Coral, tropical fish

Other diving areas have coral reefs, spectacular tropical fish, Spanish galleons and warmer, clearer water, but nowhere is there a concentration of accessible shipwrecks to match Tobermory's. The town, 190 miles from Toronto, stands at the tip of the Bruce Peninsula, separating Georgian Bay from Lake Huron. This was a major shipping route until about 1910, and ships had to navigate through a 28-mile funnel of reefs, rocks and islands, where 300 feet of water can change instantly to depths of ten feet.

Battling storms, coated with ice, blinded by the smoke of forest fires, steering by poor charts and with no navigation aids, vessels crashed by the dozen. The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources estimates that about 10,000 ships have foundered in the Great Lakes — 30 went down in one 1905 gale.