
Ship refits being studied

The Government is considering refitting up to ten destroyers to keep them afloat until new ships are built, Vice-Admiral Andrew Collier, commander of Maritime Command, said recently.

The Defence Department has launched a competition for a \$3.5-billion shipbuilding project that would supply six new frigates between 1985 and 1989. They will replace six St. Laurent-class vessels now more than 20 years old.

The St. Laurent-class destroyers are not being considered for a refit because it would cost too much to keep them in service, Admiral Collier said.

A great Canadian inventor

February 8 is the hundredth anniversary of an invention by a remarkable Canadian of the past century, Sir Sandford Fleming. It was he who invented international time zones.

Sandford Fleming, a man of many interests and achievements, completed his formal education by the age of 17 in a grammar school in Scotland, roughly equivalent to a Canadian high school. A year later, in 1845, lured by the descriptions he had heard from his uncle who had served in Canada as an army officer, he left Scotland for Canada.

Although there were only about 20 miles of railway track in the country when the young Fleming arrived in Canada, the greatest railway boom in history was about to begin, and he was responsible for much of it. He surveyed the laying of track from Montreal to Toronto and throughout southern Ontario. He was responsible for building the Intercolonial Railway from Montreal to Halifax, and later went on to map out a route for the Canadian Pacific Railway across the continent to Vancouver.

Global time zones

As a railwayman, Fleming was aware of the inconvenience of the practice of measuring time more or less by the sun.

So, in 1879, he outlined a scheme for a system of international time zones, by which time would change hour by hour in a regular succession. This would serve not only the railways but also travel by ship and communications by telegraph.

(Fleming was a pioneer in this field, having prepared the charts for the cable from Canada to Australia and New Zealand.)

The Czar of Russia heard of Fleming's proposal and called an international conference, which met in Rome. A second conference in Washington was attended by delegates from 25 nations who adopted Standard Time. Fleming, one of the delegates, was hailed as the originator of this orderly system of measuring time around the world.

Rare giant turtle arrives in Ottawa

Scientists at the National Museum of Natural Science in Ottawa recently unveiled a 1,000-pound leatherback turtle.

The six-foot, ten-inch male, which drowned in a Prince Edward Island fisherman's net in September, had just been shipped frozen from the East Coast in a fish truck after being identified by Nova Scotia museum staff.

Francis Cook, the National Museum's expert in reptiles and amphibians, said scientists, who have been waiting for a turtle like this for a long time, had a giant turtle tank built nearly 14 years ago. The specimen may be the only leatherback left intact, he added.

"One estimate says there are only about 1,000 female leatherbacks in the world. And estimates are based on all known nesting beaches where the females have to come ashore to lay eggs."

"The baby turtles are hard to keep in captivity and die soon after. We have no idea how long it takes to grow a turtle of this size. Females grow much larger."

Fleming produced books and pamphlets on many subjects, as diverse as postal communications, water currents in the Great Lakes, and the geology of Niagara Falls. A permanent memorial is the Royal Society of Canada, of which he was a co-founder and president for several years.

Queen Victoria knighted Fleming in her Jubilee year. He died in 1915 at the age of 88.

(The preceding material was prepared by Marcus Van Steen for Canadian Scene, April 28, 1978.)

"It is thought that a marine turtle in northern waters is an accident," Mr. Cook said, although reports have documented sightings off the East Coast since 1889.

Most marine turtles become sluggish when they leave the warm Gulf Stream waters and head into colder parts of the ocean because their blood temperature drops to match surrounding water temperatures, Mr. Cook said.

"However, leatherbacks found in cold water are very active and have food in their stomachs. The turtle is almost warm-blooded because the blood temperature is about 18 degrees above the water temperature."

"These things are rare and endangered and this is a good opportunity for us to examine him. The leatherback flesh is not regarded as a delicacy as is that of the green turtle. It can even become a deadly meal at times."

Because the turtle has already thawed, scientists must work quickly to reproduce the specimen in a plaster cast for later exhibitions before the real animal is preserved in formalin, Mr. Cook said.

