

Launching the *R.G. McBeath*



The Vancouver Police Department's new patrol boat carries the same name as the vessel it replaces. What would be even better is if the force had enough vessels to honour a few more heroes.

BY TIM LYNCH

In the chilly, gray morning air on April 9th 2008, the Vancouver Police Department's Marine Squad officially launched its new patrol boat with a formal naming ceremony.

The sophisticated 33-foot Eaglecraft vessel cost \$500,000, and was built by Daigle Welding & Marine of Campbell River in eight months. It is powered by twin Volvo D6 330-horsepower drive packages delivering 660 horsepower, good for a top speed during sea trials of 38.8 knots at 3,575rpm and a fully-laden cruising speed of 32.5 knots at 3,100rpm. Equipped to make patrol duty as comfortable and effective as possible, it has a towing bitt for assisting vessels, a boarding system for police divers, and a special stretcher for scooping persons in distress — or bodies — out of the water. State-of-the-art electronics include a Raymarine C120 GPS/plotter/radar/depthfinder combo, Raymarine loudhailer, two Raymarine 54 VHF radios, and various police-supplied computers and electronics.

The name given to the new patrol boat follows a tradition in which the VPD remembers one of its own: 23-year-old constable Robert Gordon McBeath, a decorated First World War hero (see sidebar), was shot dead on his beat at Granville and Davie St. on October 9th, 1922, while arresting Fred Deal for impaired driving. Deal, an American from Florida, had been carrying a concealed hand gun. He served twenty-one years in a Canadian prison for his crime.

An Emotional Ceremony

The Christening ceremony of the new **R.G. McBeath** was held at the Main St. Pier adjacent to the Police Marine and Waterfront Unit Office on Waterfront Road. The march in of Scottish drummers in full regalia, with bagpipes playing a Scottish lament, set the tone for the inauguration. The patrol boat circled in front of the assembled dignitaries, led by the Waterfront Team's other vessel, a well-used 5.9 meter Zodiac, under the command of Constable Barbara Bluschke. The National Anthem was sung, and Patti Marfleet of the Police Board performed the Christening with a bottle of Champagne.

Vancouver's chief of police, Jim Chu, spoke about the contribution that the Marine Unit makes in crime prevention and detection in the Port of Vancouver, while mayor Sam Sullivan acknowledged the contribution that the Marine Unit makes to policing services in the City. Sergeant Neil Gillespie of the Waterfront and Marine Team paid tribute to Robert G. McBeath. The service was concluded by VPD Chaplain Jim Turner who gave the prayer and blessing.

A Policing Challenge

Observing the new vessel's official launch, I was reminded of the unique policing duties the Waterfront Team has to perform in



In Honour of a Hero

Four years prior to being shot on the streets of Vancouver, Robert Gordon McBeath was a 19-year-old Lance Corporal in the Seaforth Highlanders of the British Army. On November 20th 1917, during the battle of Cambrai in France, he volunteered to deal with a nest of machine gunners that checked the advance of his unit and which had caused heavy casualties. He moved off alone, armed with a Lewis gun and a revolver. Finding that several other machine guns were in action, McBeath attacked them with the assistance of a tank and drove the gunners to the ground in a deep dugout. McBeath rushed in after them, shot the first man who opposed him and then drove the remainder of the garrison out of the dugout. He captured three officers and thirty men. There were in all five machine guns mounted round the dugout, and by putting them out of action he cleared the way for advance of the British Army. For this demonstration of bravery McBeath was awarded the highest decoration for bravery in the British Empire, the Victoria Cross.



the marine setting. (see “Vancouver Police Department Marine Squad,” **Mariner Life**, April 2007). It was interesting to note that the proceedings emphasized “The Port of Vancouver” rather than “The Vancouver Fraser Port.” The Port of Vancouver itself borders eight municipalities, each with their own fire and police departments (see “On Guard For Thee,” **Mariner Life**, October 2007). The newly amalgamated port covers and even larger area, and several more jurisdictions. Vancouver City is the only one of the municipalities within the port with a full-time marine police unit, although New Westminster has recently put a 7.3 meter Titan RHIB in the water, and the Waterfront Joint Force Operations (JFO) headed by the RCMP recently purchased a 6.3 meter Titan for policing duties. New Westminster and the JFO are planning weekly patrols.

Looking at the challenges in terms of local and transnational organized crime (as well as terrorist threats) that the VPD Waterfront Team can expect to confront with their new patrol boat and RHIB Zodiac, it is interesting to compare the resources Vancouver’s force is supplied with to benchmarks for such policing duties in other jurisdictions. The Port of Seattle is relatively well resourced in law enforcement capabilities, as might be expected given the paramilitary culture in the U.S. and the availability of Homeland Security funds as a consequence of 9/11.

What is perhaps more surprising is the extent to which Toronto dedicates resources to marine policing: That city’s marine unit includes three twin-diesel patrol boats capable of 35 knots, a 30-foot fibreglass boat used in rescues (and which carries 75-person life rafts), a 44-foot aluminum multi-function vessel with twin diesels, and four RHIB Zodiacs. All of these vessels are equipped with the latest in electronics and radar. The force also uses two 110-horsepower Personal Watercraft (PWCs) built by Sea Doo. A dedicated Service Boat is staffed by Marine Mechanics and there is also a V.I.P. boat for special occasions.

During the thirty years I lived in Toronto I never regarded it as a maritime city; but understandably a regional police force can justify a more comprehensive and integrated police marine unit to serve its citizenry. Perhaps the powers that be in the City of Vancouver hope that by naming the City’s police patrol boat after Lance Corporal Robert Gordon McBeath, its crew, and the people they serve, will be protected by his spirit.




Tim Lynch is a public policy analyst living in Steveston. All articles referred to above can be seen at www.infolyнк.ca/bcmaritimepolicy.html. Send comments to tim@infolyнк.ca.



COVE YACHTS (1979) LTD.
 COVE MARINA • 6261 GENOA BAY ROAD
 DUNCAN • BRITISH COLUMBIA • V9L 5Y4
Located in Maple Bay

Full Service Boat Yard
Haulouts to 100 Tons & 23' Beam
Volvo Penta & Yanmar Sales & Service
Service Most Marine Engines and Drives

Telephone (250) 748-8136 • Fax (250) 748-7916 Email: cove-y@shaw.ca



Riverside Towing Ltd.
 General Marine Towing
 & Log Storage

16031 River Road Richmond, BC V6V 1X5 Tel: (604) 273-7551 Fax: (604) 273-5918