

CFL pays overdue attention

Navy team that won '44 Grey Cup special guests

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THE GAZETTE

Grey Cup stories will heat up across Canada over the next few days, but surely none will be more special than those told on the CPR Grey Cup Special train from Calgary to Vancouver.

Honored guests on the Rocky Mountaineer Railtours ride, which will have an overnight stop at Kamloops, will be 14 members of the Navy Combines – HMCS Donnacona and HMCS St. Hyacinthe – who won the 1944 Grey Cup.

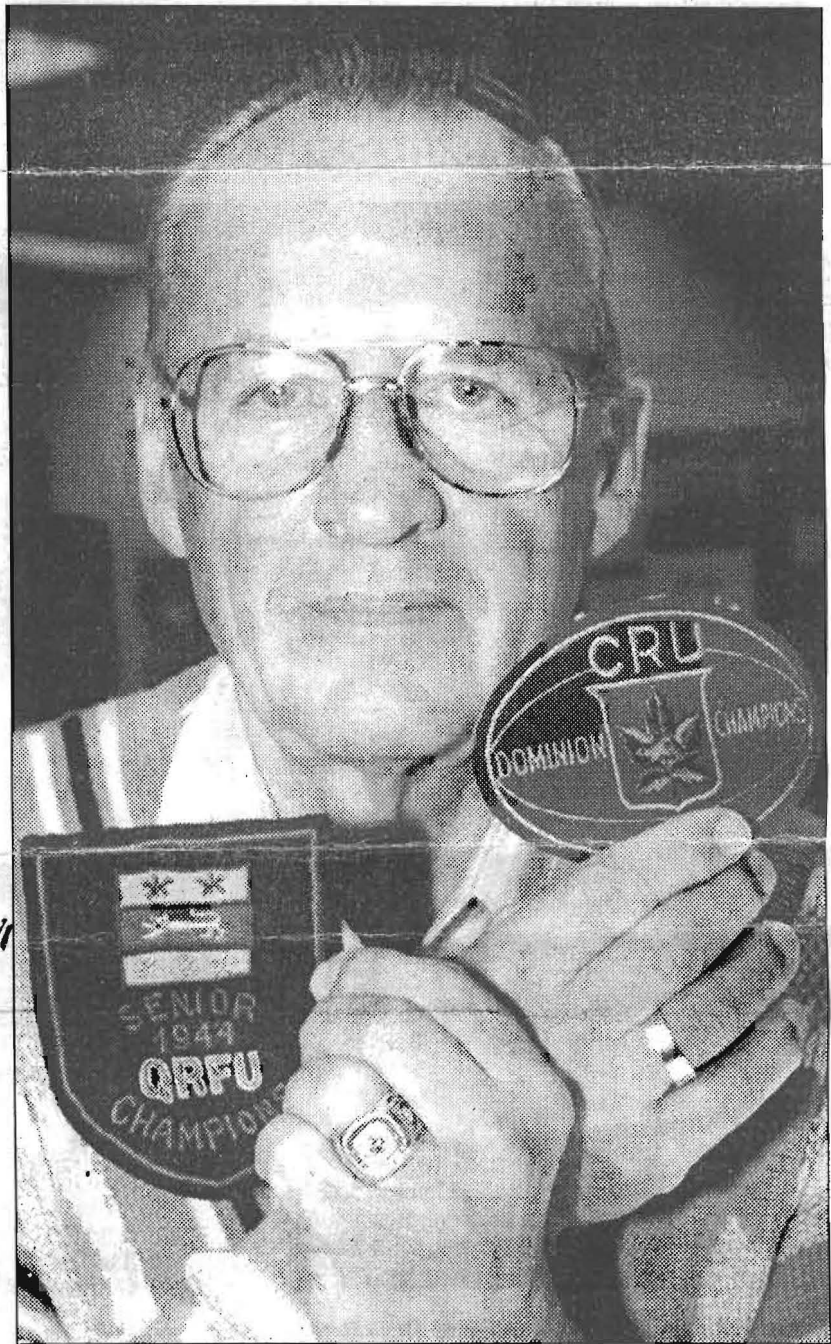
Their scheduled arrival in Vancouver Friday with the Grey Cup in hand will mark the 50th anniversary of the Combines' 7-6 win over the Hamilton Wildcats at Hamilton on Nov. 25, 1944. They will be weekend guests of the CFL, which is taking the opportunity to honor belatedly all those who served Canada in the armed forces during World War II.

Travelling to reunion

Montrealers Wally Patch, Sam Abbott, Dick Swarbrick, Charlie Ellis, Wally Charron and Lou Segatore leave today by Canadian Airlines for tonight's opening function in Calgary. Mickey McFall, a multi-sport star from Verdun who has lived in Toronto for years, heads an Ontario delegation that includes Ottawa's Moe Segal, Malcolm Baker, John Crncich, Jack Wedley, Al Hurley and equipment man Paul Kenwood. Ian Barclay will travel to Calgary from his Vancouver home.

Most reunions are stages for exaggeration to embellish the exploits of the past. In the case of these midshipmen and the uniqueness of a service team winning a major championship in wartime, unadorned anecdotes and memories are more than enough.

Coach Glen Brown's lineup varied from game to game because of duty postings. Two of the best-known stars on the team – scatback Murray Hayes and centre Don Loney – played a few games, but were posted elsewhere at playoff time.



TEDD CHURCH, GAZETTE

Dick Swarbrick shows off Grey Cup crests and ring honoring 1944 win.

and it didn't really matter what they did during games.

"These guys were great," Swarbrick said about Dave Kotavich and Jim Spicer. "They tried to join up as boilermakers, because if you

Davey, who threw a pass to Johnny Taylor for the Combines' only touchdown in the Grey Cup win, died less than three weeks ago.

Recognition is long overdue for this group, a collection with half-a-

Everyone equal

From one scrimmage to the next, ordinary seamen didn't know if they were facing a fellow deckhand or an admiral – well, a lieutenant-commander, at least.

"We had this young guy who really wanted to show us he could play," recalled Maisonneuve product Dick Swarbrick, an outside (wide) receiver on the championship team.

"He was having trouble handling a new guy at scrimmage one day. He was calling the guy every kind of birdbrain and worse. When we go back and change, the new guy puts on his commander's uniform.

"The young guy didn't shout as loud or use the same adjectives when he called him 'Sir.'"

Two cooks were MVP candidates

up as boiler-makers, because if you had a trade you started as a petty officer with more pay.

"The Navy didn't need boiler-makers. The kids were told they could join as writers (secretaries) or cooks. These were tough kids from the Point. They didn't look like writers and for sure not like secretaries.

"They said they'd be cooks. They went to cooking school for six weeks, but couldn't even cook soup. But they sure helped.

"By the time we finished practice at McGill and got down to barracks, supper hour was over. The cooks had keys to the kitchen. They made sandwiches an inch-and-a-half thick. We were happy."

Unfortunately, Kotavich and Spicer are among the 14 team members, including coach Glen Brown, who are dead. Dutch

and group, a collection with half a dozen high-school youngsters, several Big Four veterans from Toronto, Hamilton and Ottawa teams and career Navy men.

There was no party after their huge upset win. No arrangements had been made for the return trip from Hamilton.

The players couldn't get out of town quickly enough. They had been promised a few days in a first-class hotel as a prize for reaching the final, but wound up in a deserted barracks – with no heat.

The Navy tried to return the Grey Cup because of a rule forbidding service clubs from playing teams of civilians. The league refused. As individual keepsakes

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CUP *Getting a Grey Cup ring made it Christmas to remember*

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from their win, the players received tiny crests – one reads CRU (Canadian Rugby Union) Dominion champs and the other QRFU (Quebec Rugby Football Union) champs.

It was 25 years after the fact before players had the opportunity to pick up championship rings – at \$300 each. That came about because of a family “misunderstanding” and evolved into a particular surprise for Swarbrick.

“Milt Scully isn’t a very big guy,” Swarbrick said about his 5-foot-8, 160-pound Combines’ teammate at flying wing. “He bragged a lot about winning a Grey Cup and one day his son called his bluff.

“He said, ‘you’ve been giving us all this football stuff but you don’t look like a football player. Show us.’ Milt found some clippings but his

son said, ‘that’s just damn newspaper BS, let’s see your ring.’

“Scully got together with Crnich and another guy. They got every clipping they could find and went to see the commissioner in Toronto.”

In the midst of his 16-year hitch as CFL commissioner, Jake Gaudaur was a receptive audience. He made arrangements with a jeweller and it was decided that anyone in the team picture or whose name was in the Grey Cup program could buy a ring.

Swarbrick’s surprise?

“My wife (Jannette) heard about it from one of the other wives,” said the recently retired Molson Brewery plant engineer. “She had one ordered, had a diamond placed in the helmet, and put it in a little box under the Christmas tree.

“That was a Christmas-and-a-half for me.”