



Van Arty Association and RUSI Van Members News Dec 22, 2020

Newsletters normally are emailed on Monday evenings. If you don't get a future newsletter on time, check the websites below to see if there is a notice about the current newsletter or to see if the current edition is posted there. If the newsletter is posted, please contact me at bob.mugford@gmail.com to let me know you didn't get your copy.

Newsletter on line. This newsletter and previous editions are available on the Vancouver Artillery Association website at: www.vancouvergunners.ca and the RUSI Vancouver website at: http://www.rusivancouver.ca/newsletter.html. Both groups are also on Facebook at: https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=vancouver%20artillery%20association and https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=rusi%20vancouver

Wednesday Lunches - Lunches suspended until further notice. Everyone stay safe!!

The **2021** BC Military Gala is **CANCELLED.** The Sheraton Wall Ctr is booked for Apr 23, **2022**

Upcoming events – Mark your calendars (see Poster section at end for details)

Dec 23 Wednesday 'Zoom' Lunch meeting Dec 30 Wednesday 'Zoom' Lunch meeting

Jan 01 Virtual New Year's Levée – 1000hrs to 1300hrs via Zoom at the Wed Lunch site

The Royal Navy's Aerial Surprise from the Sea at Tondern

To kill German zeppelins in their roosts, the Royal Navy unveiled a secret weapon: the aircraft carrier. *Don Hollway*



Captain Bernard Smart leads the second flight of aircraft-carrier-based Sopwith 2F1 Camels to bomb the German airship base at Tondern on July 19, 1918. illustration by Simon Smith

By 1917, with the German High Seas Fleet blockaded in port, the British Royal Navy's chief concern was not enemy battleships, but airships. That April the zeppelin *L23* managed to

capture a Norwegian bark hauling contraband lumber, dropping a bomb off its bow and alighting

on the water to send a prize crew. On the morning of August 21, *L23* was shadowing the 1st Light Cruiser Squadron off the Danish coast. Over open water, a long way from British soil, zeppelin commander Lieutenant Bernhard Dinter must have been astounded to find his airship attacked by a solitary, short-range Sopwith Pup fighter. Having launched from a platform on the cruiser HMS *Yarmouth*, Flight Sub-Lt Bernard Arthur Smart of the Royal Naval Air Service dove from above and behind the airship. "I had just time to see about half a dozen [incendiary rounds] enter the blunt end of the Zeppelin, and a spurt of flame," Smart reported. Winging over to avoid a collision, he looked back to see that "The after end of the Zeppelin was now a mass of flames and had dropped so that the nose was pointing to the sky at an angle of 45 degrees while the flames were fast licking up towards the nose....[It] continued to burn on the water for three or four minutes."

Shooting down the zeppelin, though, was the easy part. There was no great trick to launching a World War I fighter from a ship, but nobody had quite yet figured out how to get one back aboard. Smart ditched his Pup near a British escort. "The destroyer was alongside in a short time," he noted, "but not before the nose of the machine had sunk and left me just hanging on to the tail." His was the first-ever successful air-to-air attack from a seagoing ship, a tactic that would change naval combat forever. As early as Christmas Day 1914, British seaplane carriers had attacked the zeppelin base at Cuxhaven, Germany—the Royal Navy's first sea/air strike—but they achieved very little. Meanwhile Captain Horst Freiherr Treusch von Buttlar-Brandenfels, commanding zeppelin L6, made the first air attack on a fleet at sea. Scoring no bomb hits, L6 struggled back to base bleeding hydrogen from 600 bullet holes, but none from British aircraft. "The flying boats the English had did not attack our airships," reported Buttlar, the eventual veteran of 221 missions, "because the latter could always outclimb them." To cover the North Sea, in March 1915 the Germans constructed two zeppelin sheds at Tondern, on the northernmost border with Denmark, naming them Tobias and Toni. The base included two 10,000-liter fuel storage tanks, hydrogen production and storage facilities, barracks for 600 soldiers and hangars for five Albatros fighters. "If only the English do not know anything about it," Buttlar hoped. "The Danish frontier



is damnably near and the spies are good."

The crew of the converted battle cruiser Furious secures a naval airship that has just landed on its deck in 1918. (IWM Q20640)

The English knew, but could do little about it. Only aircraft could reach across the mine-strewn,
U-boat-infested Heligoland Bight to

attack Tondern. Two ineffective air raids, though, proved that floatplanes stout enough to operate off open water made poor fighters, and even worse bombers. What the Royal Navy needed was a fighter base at sea. For that they replaced the forward gun turret on the half-completed light battlecruiser *Furious* with a boxlike hangar, designating its roof as a flight deck. The new aircraft carrier put to sea in July 1917. Now the trick was to actually land on it. Warships were fast enough, and fighters still so slow, that their speeds comfortably overlapped. On August 2, Squadron Commander Edwin Harris Dunning, side-slipping his Pup over *Furious*' flight deck at practically a hover, made the first airplane landing on a moving ship. During a subsequent attempt, however, his Pup bounced off the deck and went over the side. Dunning drowned. To remedy the dog-leg landing pattern with a straight-in approach, over the winter the British replaced *Furious*' aft turret with another hangar and flight deck, but the ex-cruiser's centerline superstructure and funnel created such turbulence aft that pilots still preferred to ditch. The sacrifice of an airplane per mission mattered less than the expenditure of a torpedo, since in those days torpedoes actually cost more than fighters.

While the British faltered, the Germans forged ahead. Tondern, which would eventually launch more than a dozen different zeppelins, underwent up-grades to accommodate their everincreasing size. By January 1917, Toska, a huge third shed (if that's the proper word for a steel building 730 feet long, 220 feet wide and 130 feet high), could hold two zeppelins at once. But the marshy airfield proved almost as impractical for fighters as a ship at sea. "Since a machine had come to grief almost every other day owing to the fact that the landing ground was quite unfitted for aeroplanes," Buttlar remembered, "the [Albatros] fighting flight had been taken away until such time as at least part of the ground could be made more or less suitable for them." In June 1918, having traded its Pups for two-seat Sopwith 1½-Strutter reconnaissance planes and a naval version of the Sopwith F1 Camel, the 2F1 "Ships Camel," *Furious* joined the 1st Light Cruiser Squadron, steaming up and down the North Sea as zeppelin bait. Only a pair of German floatplanes ventured out against this strange new British warship. *Furious* shot back—the only occasion during the war in which it fired in anger—and launched several Camels, one of which forced a seaplane down onto the water.

The carrier's air commander, Lt Col Richard Bell Davies, a former floatplane commander and Victoria Cross recipient, urged another attack on Tondern itself. "The best and easiest place to catch a Zep was at her home base," he noted. "...The 1½-Strutters had originally been brought to carriers for this very purpose, but the numbers available were small and as reconnaissance aircraft they were precious....We would have to use Camels. Their range was not large...but Tondern would be just within range from a point near the Danish coast." Operation F.5 was approved for late May. Two flights of Camels would make the attack. Captain William Jackson, a veteran of the deck-landing trials on *Furious*, would lead Captain William Dickson and Lieutenant Norman Williams in the first wave. The redoubtable Smart, now a captain, would lead Captain Thomas Thyne and Lieutenants Samuel Dawson and Walter Yeulett in the second. Switching the standard Camel load of four 20-pound Cooper Mark II-A bombs for a pair of special Mark III 49-pounders, they practiced attacks on shed-sized targets marked out on their Scottish air base and dropped live rounds in the Firth of Forth to acquaint themselves with the effects. Davies reluctantly cut 19-year-old Yeulett when he could not master the technique.

Steaming out in late May, Furious almost immediately encountered a U-boat contact—possibly the first brush between the two supreme warship types of the future—and retreated to port. On June 27, this time screened by the 1st Light Cruiser Squadron and the 13th Destroyer Flotilla, it put out on Operation F6. From midnight on the 28th a storm built, lashing the ship with 25-knot winds and 12-foot waves by dawn on the 29th. Just taking the Camels out of their hangar risked having them blown off the deck. The fleet returned to Scotland with the Germans none the wiser. "It was about a week before we were able to try again," Davies wrote. "In the meantime, practice continued, Youlet [sic] improved rapidly and I agreed to put him back in the team." Operation F7 commenced at 1203 hours on July 17, with *Furious* accompanied by five battleships of the 1st Battle Squadron and five cruisers of the 7th Light Cruiser Squadron, plus a destroyer escort—the world's first carrier task force. At midnight, leaving the dreadnoughts behind, Furious steamed as close as possible to the Danish coast, but before the Camels could be launched another storm blew up. Rather than retreat yet again to port, the carrier and cruisers delayed 24 hours, sailing back and forth under the cover of the battleships, out of sight of land. At nightfall, under threatening skies, Furious again steamed landward for a final attempt. At Tondern, "The evening was fine and clear," Buttlar recalled. "... From the windows of my flat I could see the aerodrome, which was about half a mile away." The smaller sheds were obsolete—Tobias held only a dirigible balloon and Toni was being dismantled—but the double shed, Toska, housed two zeppelins, Buttlar's L54 and the even newer L60, with almost 2 million cubic feet of hydrogen each, not to mention several tons of bombs waiting to be loaded.



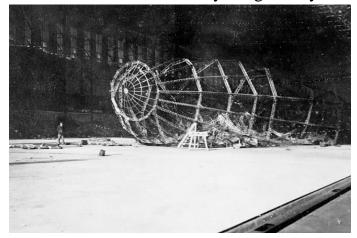
Furious steams toward Tondern with its complement of Sopwith Camels.
(IWM Q20627)

Out in the North Sea, *Furious* braved deteriorating weather. "With the wind as it was," Davies reckoned, "it seemed doubtful the Camels could get back to the ship after the attack. However...they would certainly have enough petrol to cross the Danish frontier."

Facing the loss of his precious few carrier-trained pilots to drowning or internment, Davies nevertheless gave the go-ahead. On the morning of July 19, at 0315 local time, about 80 miles northwest of Tondern, *Furious* launched seven Camels, in two waves, on their historic raid. Almost immediately they encountered trouble. Thyne's plane suffered engine problems, and he was forced to turn back and ditch. The rest sighted the Danish coast and followed it south, turning inland off Tondern. Jackson, in the lead, sighted the target at approximately 0435. "While I was still half asleep I seemed to hear the whir and whiz of a propeller....It was not the note of a Zeppelin at all!" remembered Buttlar. "...I jumped up and rushed to the window, from which I could get a view of the whole aerodrome. Suddenly a shadow passed over our house, a few yards above the roof, absurdly low....A British aeroplane!" That may have been Dickson, whose first bomb, released from 700 feet, inadvertently landed in Tondern's market square. Jackson, though,

went straight for the immense double shed. At least three 50-pounders pierced its roof. Inside, almost 4 million cubic feet of hydrogen awaited only a spark to ignite.

"My heart was in my mouth," said Buttlar, who peddled a bicycle toward the fray. He saw Toska's windows light up from inside and fire gush through the holes in its roof. Luckily for the Germans, in preparation for the day's operations, the huge shed doors were open; the funeral pyres of the dying zeppelins were able to escape rather than building up inside. "In a terrible straight column, lit up with flames, the smoke rose skyward from the shed...," the captain continued. "Gruesomely beautiful it was, this giant flame of sacrifice in which our *L54* and *L60* perished....I was cycling like mad toward the aerodrome when suddenly a terrible thought flashed through my mind. The heavy bombs were still in the shed!" A detachment braved the flames inside Toska to roll the stored bombs—some already dangerously hot—outside.



A German soldier surveys the remains of L54 in the wake of the British raid. (IWM Q47940)

Either by design or poor navigation, Smart's flight arrived 10 minutes after Jackson's, and not from seaward but from the east, inland. They found the Tondern defenses now wide awake. "Three AA batteries close together attracted my attention," reported Smart. "... When in position I gave the signal and dived on the remaining

large shed [Tobias], releasing my bombs at 800 to 1,000 feet. The first fell short, but the second hit the centre of the shed, sending up a quantity of smoke or dust." The dirigible inside Tobias flamed up. Another bomb struck a wagon loaded with hydrogen cylinders but failed to explode. "In the centre of the aerodrome, in front of their hutments, the seamen were standing with nothing on but their undergarments, or half naked, and firing with their rifles as hard as they could," recounted Buttlar. "They might just as well not have been there. The Englishmen continued circling round without climbing an inch higher." Quite the contrary, according to Smart: "The whole surroundings were thick with mechanics or soldiers armed with rifles and machine-guns, which gave so disconcerting a fire that I dived with full engine to 50 feet and skimmed over the ground in a zig-zag course to avoid it, and by the time I got clear I was unable to see the sheds on account of the thick screen of smoke from the first shed."

Jackson, Dickson and Williams were long gone. Smart followed. "The clouds were now very low and a general haze made visibility bad," he reported. "...I slowed down to wait for the others, but after doing a circuit at slow speed and with still nothing in sight, I decided it was inadvisable to wait longer as I had already been in the air nearly two hours and the wind had increased." Out at sea the fleet anxiously waited for the Ships Camels to return. "At last [they] hove in sight," Davies later recalled, "and landed in fairly rapid succession near the destroyers." But only two. Dickson put down at 0555 and was picked up. Smart spent 15 minutes on the tail of his bobbing, half-sunken plane, losing his lifebelt, swallowing a good bit of seawater and feeling "done in by the

time the boat arrived...three able bodied seamen clutched hold of me and hauled me aboard like a sack of flour." No other Camels returned. Williams, Jackson and Dawson decided they didn't have the gas. They landed in Denmark and were interned, but not closely watched. All three soon escaped to Britain. Yeulett evidently misjudged his fuel status. Days later his remains and Camel washed up on a Danish beach. He was the only fatality in the attack on either side. "After hanging about off the coast until quite sure that the rest must have come down somewhere (we hoped in Denmark)," reported Davies, "we shaped course for the Forth." Mission accomplished. "I stood facing the burnt-out wreck of my ship," Buttlar recalled of the collapsed duralumin skeletons inside Toska. "I had watched many ships perish, but this was the first time I saw my own destroyed."

He could count himself lucky. Most dying zeppelins' crews burned with them, but at Tondern only four men were wounded. "The attack had been carried out extremely smartly, and had been an entire success," Buttlar admitted. "Two airships had been completely destroyed, and the airship base had been rendered harmless for some considerable time." In fact, Tondern was thereafter only used as an emergency landing field. After the armistice the border changed; instead of one of the northernmost towns in Germany, Tondern became Tønder, one of the southernmost towns in Denmark. The secret of the aircraft carrier was out. Though *Furious* launched no more raids during the Great War, afterward it was rebuilt as a full-length flattop, the only aircraft carrier to serve in both world wars. By then carriers had replaced battleships as the supreme weapon at sea, today rivaled only by the ballistic missile submarine. A *Nimitz*-class nuclear-powered supercarrier comprises nine squadrons of fighter-bombers, helicopters and support planes, over 60 aircraft all told, more than in the inventory of many nations. Each carrier is a mobile air force, the ultimate combination of warship and warplane—one of the world's oldest weapons, and the newest.

Fresh Water Flattops

The US Navy's Forgotten Great Lakes Aircraft Carriers

"Despite their importance, the Wolverine and Sable have become little more than two curious footnotes to the larger history of the Second World War." MilitaryHistory



The USS Sable underway in the Great Lakes during the Second World War.

(Image source: WikiCommons)

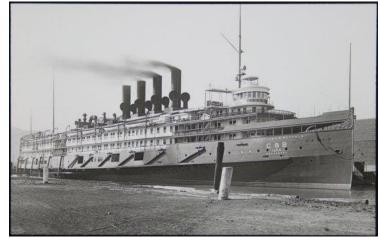
Although the US commissioned a staggering 151 aircraft carriers during World War Two, it's safe to say that none were quite like the *USS Wolverine* and her sister ship the *USS Sable*. Not only were the two flattops the only

American wartime carriers powered by coal (most naval vessels of the era ran on fuel oil), both served their entire military careers on Lake Michigan – a landlocked Great Lake in the middle of North America. And while these freshwater fighting ships faced no enemy and fired no shots in

anger, both were invaluable to the American war effort. Together, they prepared thousands of naval aviators for the dangerous job of landing planes on pitching and rolling flight decks at sea. And it was squadrons of these same naval aviators that would help turn the tide against the Axis. Yet despite their importance, the *Wolverine* and *Sable* have become little more than two curious footnotes to the larger history of the Second World War.

Before it was converted to an aircraft carrier, the USS Wolverine was the Lake Erie luxury liner the Seeandbee. (Image source: WikiCommons)

Commissioned in 1942 as a training ship for naval aviators, the *Wolverine* began its life in 1913 as the paddle-wheel steamer *Seeandbee*, a Lake Erie luxury cruise liner capable of carrying 1,500 passengers. The 500-foot-long vessel featured



500 private cabins, a saloon and a great formal dining hall, complete with an orchestra. For years, the *Seeandbee's* berths were filled with upscale travellers looking to get from Buffalo to Cleveland overnight in style. But as ticket sales slumped during the Great Depression, the ship's future seemed bleak. It wasn't until 1942 that she won a new and entirely unexpected lease on life.



Thousands of travellers cruised between Buffalo and Chicago in style aboard the SS Seeandbee. (Image source: WikiCommons)

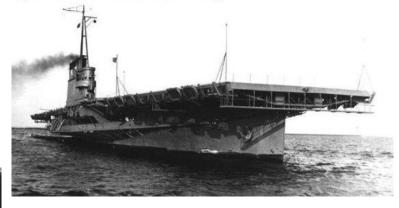
Within weeks of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Washington bought the aging steamship and began converting her for military use. The navy was desperate for training aircraft carriers for the coming onslaught of rookie pilots and deck crew and the admirals couldn't spare a single serving flattop for the role. But ships like the *Seeandbee* could easily fit the bill. In just four months, work crews cut away the vessel's superstructure and fitted her hull with a 500-foot wooden flight deck, complete with arrester cables. A small bridge along the starboard side was also added. Re-christened the *USS Wolverine* (IX-64) and commissioned in August of 1942, the vessel, which lacked the hangar decks and defensive weaponry of a serving aircraft carrier, would be little more than a floating runway. Yet despite her shortcomings, the *Wolverine* was a

handy platform for pilots to practice take offs and landings, thus freeing up frontline carriers for combat duty. By early 1943, the vessel was sailing daily from Chicago's Navy Pier into Lake Michigan where she'd conduct flight training operations.

By 1943, the navy needed even more carrier pilots trained, so in May the *Wolverine* was joined by another flattop, the newly refurbished *USS Sable*. This newer carrier had been converted from the 518-foot-long paddle-wheel liner *Greater Buffalo*, the former pride of the Detroit and Cleveland Navigation Company's Lake Erie fleet. In her prime, the *Greater Buffalo* treated passengers to luxury staterooms, a vast dining hall, an onboard movie theatre and even its own radio station. But by 1941, the *GB* sat idle. The following year, she too was acquired by the navy and retrofitted with a flight deck — this one made of steel. Eight rows of arresting cables were also added and a bridge. Down below were pilot briefing rooms, living quarters, mess halls and even laundry facilities for both aviators and crew. Together, the two unlikely vessels became known affectionately as "the Cornbelt Fleet" — a nod to the ships' landlocked Midwestern cruising grounds. By the late spring of 1943, the *Sable* and *Wolverine* were launching and recovering single-engine warplanes flown by aviators from Chicago's Glanview Naval Air Station. Training ran seven days a week. When operations were in full swing, 100 fliers a day were earning their carrier qualifications on the two ships' decks.

The USS Wolverine was about 250 feet shorter than a frontline Yorktown-class carrier.

(Image source: WikiCommons)



The Cornbelt Fleet at anchor at Chicago's Navy Pier. (Image source: WikiCommons)

A Navy trainer touches down on the USS Sable somewhere off Chicago. (Image source: WikiCommons)



But it wasn't all smooth sailing for the Cornbelt Fleet. Despite steaming off the so-called Windy City, the air on Lake Michigan was often too calm to allow for safe carrier flying. The wind over deck (WOD) speeds necessary for aircraft launch and recovery were a far cry from those found

on the world's oceans. The often still air also kept heavy frontline combat planes like Hellcats, Corsairs and Avengers from getting stiff enough tailwinds for safe touchdowns. Take offs were also a challenge. Even SNJ Texan trainers, Navy variants of the lightweight AT-6, often had trouble operating from the *Sable* and *Wolverine*. In fact, wind conditions were sometimes so calm, flight operations had to be suspended altogether for days at a time. Yet despite these limitations, the carrier pilot training program was a resounding success. Nearly 18,000 fliers conducted more than 116,000 landings and take-offs on the two vessels between 1943 and 1945. During that period, fewer than 300 planes were lost.

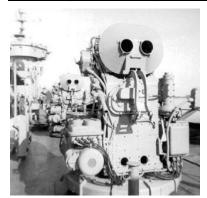


A Grumman Wildcat cracks up on the deck of the USS Sable.
(Image source: WikiCommons)

With the war won, the need for carrier pilots ended virtually overnight. Both ships were decommissioned within weeks of Japan's surrender. While the *Wolverine* was sold off for scrap, the Great Lakes Historical Society offered to convert the *Sable* into a floating museum at Put-in-Bay, Ohio. Sadly,

the plans fell through and in 1947 the carrier was sent to a shipyard in Hamilton, Ontario to be broken up. All that remains of the *Wolverine* and *Sable* now are photos and some newsreel footage. like this... https://youtu.be/pkjcsLE-yF8

Who (or What) Is It?



Last Week: Don't want to keep you all in suspense over the holidays – These are ship mounted, automatic missile launchers. More details in January.

This Week: Next quiz in January

From the 'Punitentary'

What should you do if your car stalls on Christmas Eve? You get a mistletow.

Quotable Quotes

Santa Claus is anyone who loves another and seeks to make them happy; who gives himself by thought or word or deed in every gift that he bestows. *Edwin Osgood Grover*

Dues 2021

As of Jan 1, memberships dues are payable for, Vancouver Artillery Association, the Royal United Services Institute - Vancouver Society and 15 Fd Regt Officers Mess Associate Members. Details below.

\overline{VAA}

Dues for the **Vancouver Artillery Association** are \$25, payable to the Vancouver Artillery Association.

VAA dues can be paid by etransfer (preferred method):- by sending payments to:- president.vcrgunners@gmail.com

Dues cheques can be mailed to:

Vancouver Artillery Association 27048 35B Avenue, Langley BC V4W 0C3

RUSI Vancouver

Dues for **RUSI Vancouver** are \$50 (\$25 for students), payable to RUSI Vancouver.

By eTransfer (preferred method):- richmark@telus.net

By mail:-Treasurer, RUSI Vancouver 1998 Ogden Avenue, Vancouver BC V6J 1A2

15 Fd Officers' Mess

Dues for **15 Fd Officers' Mess Associate Members** are \$60, payable to 15 RCA Officers Mess. Send to:

Treasurer, 15 Fd Regt Officers Mess 2025 West 11th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V6J 2C7

Wednesday Digital Video Lunch

No need to worry about COVID-19 when you go digital. Pop into our video lunch at **noon** on Wednesdays and say hi. All you need is a laptop, tablet or smartphone. These sessions are being hosted by the Vancouver Artillery Association and are **open** to all – especially those who attended our Wednesday lunches.

Join us to check up on your old lunch buddies.

https://zoom.us/j/710845848 Password:- Ubique



Zoom is the leader in modern enterprise video communications, with an easy, reliable cloud platform for video and audio conferencing, chat, and webinars across mobile, desktop, and room systems. Zoom Rooms is the original software-based conference room solution used around the world in board. conference, huddle, and training rooms, as executive offices and as well classrooms. Founded in 2011, Zoom helps businesses and organizations together bring their teams in frictionless environment to get more a publicly traded done. Zoom is

company headquartered in San Jose, CA.

Join our Cloud HD Video Meeting now

Use the link above on your computer Zoom program or dial in on your phone 778 907 2071 Meeting ID: 710 845 848

Invite 2 friends! We have room for 100! See you on Wednesdays at noon. Bring your own lunch and beverage of choice.

NOTE:- a password is now required to join the Wed lunch Zoom Meeting (see above)

UBIQUE 150 "Good Shooting' Video Contest



UBIQUE 150 "Good Shooting" Video Contest

In conjunction with the commemoration of 150th Anniversary of A & B Batteries, The Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery is pleased to announce a video production contest.

Prizes will be awarded to 3 winners: 1st place winner receives \$2,000; 2nd place winning entry receives \$1000; 3rd place prize is \$500.

Important dates

Submissions accepted between 1 January – 30 April 2021

Judging starts 1 May 2021 Winners announced 26 May 2021

Eligibility

Submissions are open to teams consisting of current and/or retired members of The Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery. Each team can submit more than one entry but only one prize will be awarded to any unit.

If you missed it, the Free webinar recording and accompanying resources are available on our website.

Learn about:

Part 1: Pre-Production (Planning for Your Shoot)
Part 2: Production (Getting the Shot You Need)

Part 3: Post-Production (Bringing Your Vision Together)

All details on the contest and the free Webinar are at ubique150.org