

Sailing enthusiast authors Flags of the World guide

■ Brian Dexter
Special to the Beaver

Vicki de Kleer is making it much easier for anyone to identify key flags of the world.

The ability to do this quickly and establish what a certain flag signifies has been essential to mariners for centuries and also to armies in battle needing to distinguish friend from foe.

In today's world, travellers can also glean useful information from flags. For example, when a cruise ship is about to set sail the Code flag "P" is flown to advise passengers to hurry back aboard.

As well, people can often identify teams at big sporting events by the national flags they carry or insignia that's worn, even when at home watching events on TV.

Now, a handy and innovative colour-coded 64-page guide that de Kleer has devised permits anyone, who sees an unfamiliar flag, to put the right name to it almost instantly.

"I can do it in about 14 seconds by using key designs in the guide," says de Kleer, 75, who has sailed Lake Ontario for more than three decades and in the 1930s as a young child sailed out of the Isle of Wight off England's south coast. "A freighter captain told me he wished he'd had something like this guide 20 years ago."

The almost pocket-size soft cover book *A Visual Guide to Flags of the World* by Vicki S. de Kleer comes from Nimbus Publishing Ltd. of Halifax, Nova Scotia, at \$12.95.

It was launched for general sale May 28 at Bookers bookstore, a short drive from where de Kleer sails her Alberg 22, named Sparrowhawk, out of the Bronte Harbour Yacht Club.

The guide includes brightly-coloured graphics of more than 400 flags, those of nations, territories and states, flags used in the International Code of Signals and special flags such as those of the United Nations and Red Cross.

Undoubtedly, the most import feature of the guide is its ability to allow someone seeing an unfamiliar flag to zero in on a page with flags of similar design within seconds, among perhaps a dozen, is the flag, clearly identified.

De Kleer says, "The thing with this



FLAG BOOK: Author Vicki de Kleer holds her Flags of the World guide.

guide is that you are using visual design to help identify flags, not listings by country or the alphabet. And you don't need to cart around an encyclopedia to do the job."

De Kleer sees her guide as being a practical reference tool for the military, customs officials, diplomats and students, especially in multicultural class settings. Tourists too, she adds, should find it handy, especially on cruises or while travelling overseas.

De Kleer, a retired assistant professor at the Ontario Veterinary College in Guelph, got the idea for her guide in 2000 when she sailed the Atlantic from Halifax to Amsterdam with a fleet of tall ships representing 25 countries.

She crewed aboard Britain's 170-foot Lord Nelson, a sail training ship out of Southampton that allows men and women with disabilities to crew. At Halifax she was amazed at the numbers of flags flown by the fleet. Her book is dedicated to the Lord Nelson's officers and crew.

De Kleer says she's always had a habit of colour-coding things to help organize her life and during the tall ships voyage developed the idea of a simple visual guide to flags of the world that organizes flags mainly by graphic element.

National flags from Abkhazia to Zimbabwe are included in the guide along with flags that form the International Alphabet and pennants that make up the International Code of Signals, dating from 1932.

A flag with a red diamond on a white

background, for example, is the letter "F" but when flown by a vessel can also mean "I am disabled. Communicate with me."

The guide includes a glossary that covers 40 items about flags. You learn for example that a Jack is the flag at the bow of a vessel.

As well, you're told, flags date back at least 5,000 years. Some early versions weren't made of cloth but carved from wood into insignia such as lions or eagles.

Also in the guide is an intriguing vexilological puzzle. It uses a pattern of red, white and blue stripes to contain at least 12 flags of nations plus four letters of the alphabet and the number 3.

De Kleer notes that the flags of some nations, usually geographically close to each other, have the same combination of colours for their flags. This is the case with Guyana, Burkina Faso and Togo or the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Egypt and Yemen.

On flag etiquette de Kleer stresses that a flag should always be treated with respect and never allowed to touch the ground or trailed in water behind a vessel. Also, it's a point of honour that a flag be maintained in good condition with its colours kept bright.

The worst insult, she adds, is to stamp on or burn somebody else's flag and national flags should never be made into clothing, towels or other such items.

As a six-year-old child, de Kleer often sailed in The Solent off England's Isle of Wight with her father, John Scaramanga, on a Dragon-class sailboat. The family

lived at Arundel, West Sussex, but spent much of the summer on the island. It was exciting for Vicki to sail near to big liners and warships either at anchor or heading in and out of Southampton and Portsmouth.

In 1940 she sailed to Canada as a World War II childhood evacuee and crossed the Atlantic in a ship that was packed to the scuppers with children and zig-zagged on its own as it was too late in leaving port to join the convoy to which it had been assigned.

The vessel arrived safely in Halifax without incident, although many ships in the convoy were lost in German U-boat attacks.

De Kleer spent five years with a U.S. family in Rhode Island, where she was again able to sail, before returning to Arundel. In 1950 she decided to make

Canada her home and after university studies pursued a career as a veterinarian, ending up teaching anatomy at the Ontario Veterinary College.

Meanwhile, for recreation, de Kleer continued to enjoy sailing, on trans-Atlantic voyages (in 60-foot racing yachts and square riggers) as well as on Lake Ontario. She holds a Yachtmaster Ocean Certificate with the Royal Yachting Association of England and has taught sailing for the Canadian Yachting Association.

At Oakville, de Kleer started a sailing program for the visually impaired that continues to thrive in its 28th year.

De Kleer will be signing copies of her book "A Visual Guide to Flags of the World" at Chapters, Oakville Town Centre II at Dorval Dr. and the North Service Rd. on Saturday, July 9 from 2 - 4 p.m.

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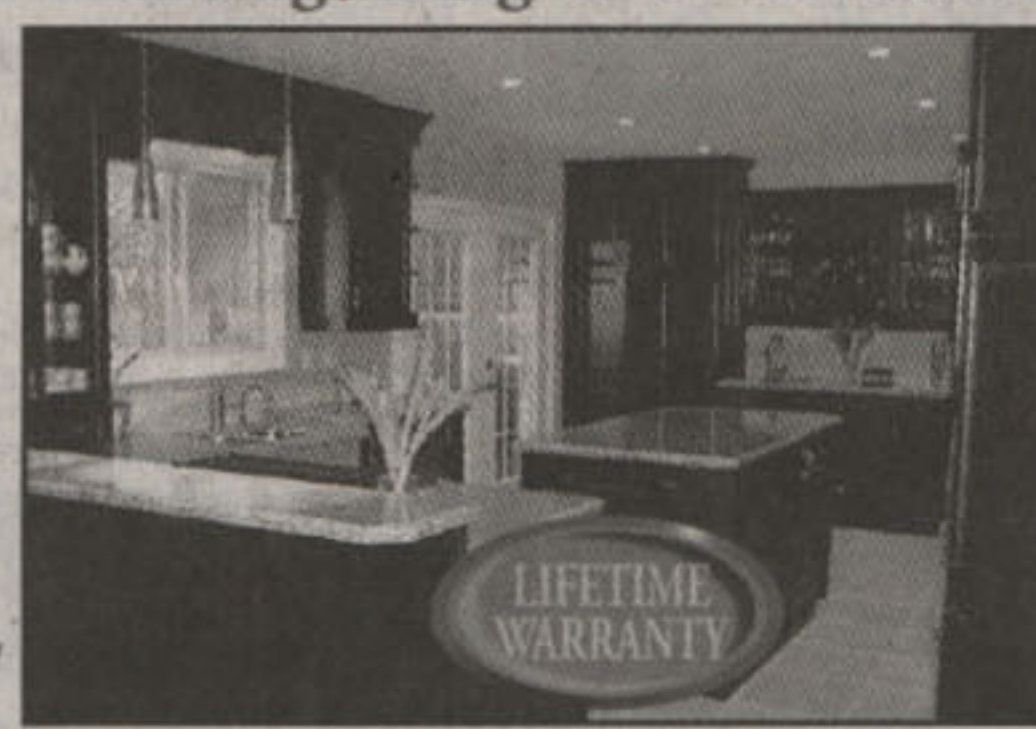
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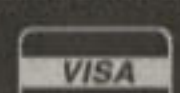
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