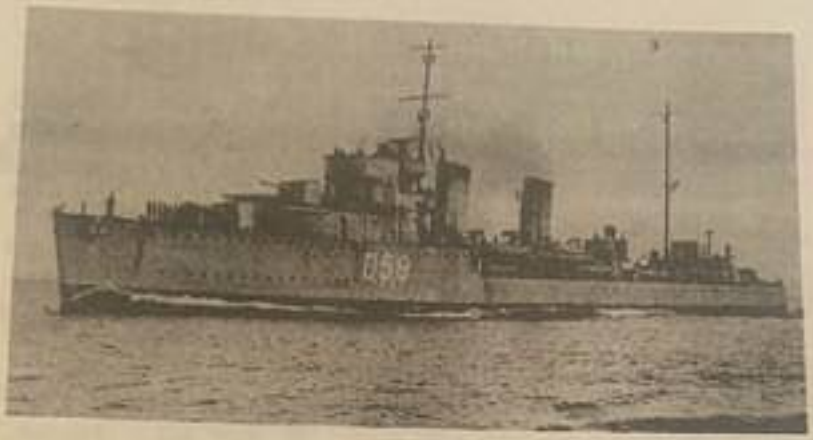
Bill

HMCS Skeena

"Go Forth"



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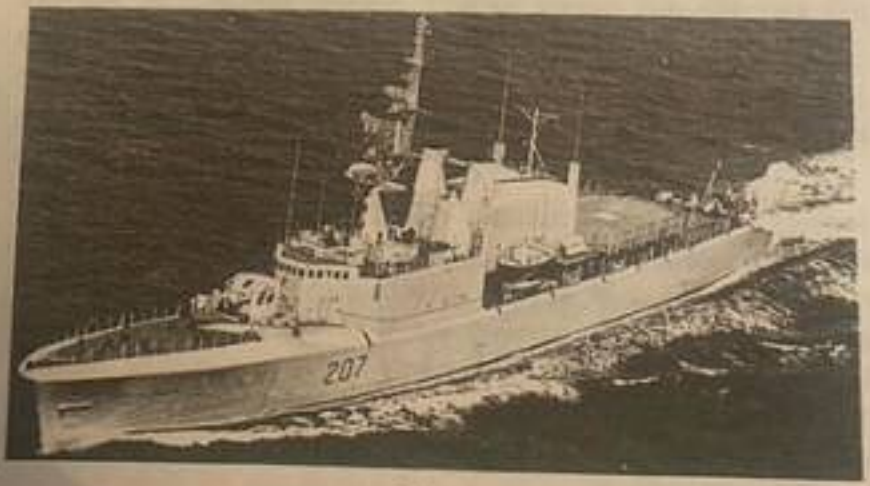

1965

THE HERITAGE

The first ship of her name to enter service in the Royal Canadian Navy, HMCS SKEENA was commissioned at Portsmouth, England, on June 10, 1931, as one of the first two destroyers ever built specifically for Canada.

On September 11, the day after Canada declared war, she took her place in the Halifax Force whose six destroyers were busy around the clock doing their part in establishing the port of Halifax as a major convoy terminal.

Throughout the winter and spring of 1940, the Halifax Force carried the burden of local escort for North Atlantic Convoys. On May 24, 1940, the Skeena, St. Laurent and Restigouche were dispatched overseas from Halifax to aid in the defence of Britain against threatened invasion.

The Skeena's duties through that summer and fall consisted of a variety of missions including anti-submarine sweeps in Coastal waters, routine escort patrols and the rescue of survivors from torpedoed merchant vessels.

In March 1941, the Skeena went into refit in Halifax, joining the newly-organized Newfoundland Escort Force on completion.

Her first encounter with the German "wolf pack" menace came in September, 1941, while she was senior ship of a four ship mid-ocean escort with a slow east-bound convoy of 64 merchant ships. From September 9th to 11th, the convoy, labouring at 5 knots past the southern tip of Greenland, was badly mauled by a pack of seventeen U-boats. Outnumbered four to one, the escorts made a valiant effort to ward off the enemy but, in spite of their best efforts, sixteen merchant vessels were torpedoed.

The ordeal of the four ship escort was an example of of the harrowing trials and difficulties faced by the sadly inadequate escort forces in the North Atlantic early in the war. An official report refers to the incident as an "appalling tale of disaster". In the sense that one quarter of the of the convoy was destroyed, that is what it was. Yet, it seems almost incredible that 48 merchant ships made port following a three day battle during which a single destroyer and three corvettes were pitted against no fewer than seventeen submarines.

Sometime later, Skeena joined the Mid-Ocean Escort Force which was formed early in 1942 and absorbed the Newfoundland Escort Force.

In March, 1943, the Skeena returned to the Western Approaches Command with three other Canadian destroyers and fifteen corvettes. She continued on escort duty in the North Atlantic until the Spring of 1944 when she was placed under the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, to take part in invasion operations.

Throughout the tense days of June, 1944, she sailed with the Canadian Support Group EG-12, based at Plymouth. Engaged on anti-submarine patrols to protect cross-channel shipping during the Neptune landings, EG-12 was also employed in covering the vitally important build-up of convoys which continued throughout the summer. In this event, German submarines never made any whole-hearted attempt to smash the Allied anti-submarine screen.

During July, the Skeena and other ships of EG-12 took part in an action against a strong enemy surface force escorting U-boats. Of three large "flak" ships encountered, two were sunk and one left abandoned and heavily on fire. The U-boats, once the attack began, dived and returned to Brest.

On August 12, the Skeena took part in a heated engagement in Audierne Bay with an enemy force believed to consist of three armed trawlers and two large vessels. The trawlers were destroyed and heavy damage was inflicted on one of the other enemy ships.

Skeena's life was nearing its end. Caught in the grip of a North Atlantic gale she was driven ashore on the Iceland island of Videy during the early hours of October 25, 1944, with a loss of fifteen lives. The long action-filled career of a veteran destroyer thus came to a close.

Behind she left the battle honours:

Atlantic 1939-44
Normandy 1944
Biscay 1944

These are borne by her successor.

COMMANDING OFFICER

LCDR K.D. Lewis, CD, RCN was born in Ottawa, Ontario on the 14th of November, 1926. Prior to entering the Royal Canadian Naval College at *Royal Roads* British Columbia in 1944, he completed his primary and secondary school education in various Ottawa schools including Glebe Collegiate Institute.

After graduating from *Royal Roads* in 1946 he served for several years on loan to the Royal Navy in several ships of the South Atlantic Fleet stationed in South Africa. In 1948 he returned to Canada and between then and 1965 served in the following appointments:

1948 – *HMCS Swansea*
1949 – Various Junior Officer Courses in England
1950 – *HMCS Micmac* as Ship's Gunnery Officer
1952 – *HMCS Cornwallis* on Staff of Leadership School
1953 – Specialist Gunnery Course in England (Whale Island)
1954 – *HMCS Naden* as Parade Training Officer
1956 – *HMCS Algonquin* as Squadron Weapons Officer
1958 – *HMCS Shearwater as Air* Weapons Officer
1960 – *HMCS Chaleur* as Commanding Officer
1961 – Naval HQ's as Flag LCDR to the Chief of Naval Staff.

In 1963 LCDR Lewis completed the RCAF staff course and then served on the staff of the Flag Officer Atlantic Coast until assuming his present appointment as Commanding Officer of *HMCS Skeena*.

He is married to the former Diana Evans of Halifax, Nova Scotia and has two children. He is keenly interested in yachting including ocean racing and takes an active oart in skiing activities whenever possible.

HMCS "Skeena" was commissioned August 14, 1965, at Davie Shipbuilding Limited, Lauzon, Quebec, Canada following a thirteen month conversion.

The "Skeena" was the fifth of the St. Laurent destroyers to be converted to operate all-weather Sea King helicopters in anti-submarine warfare. These helicopter destroyers have also been fitted with variable depth sonar.

"Skeena" had been paid off in July, 1964 for conversion. She was originally commissioned in 1957 at Burrard Drydock Company Limited, North Vancouver, British Columbia and was based at Esquimalt, B.C. until 1964.

The ship's peacetime complement is approximately 210 officers and men. She has an overall length of 366 feet, a beam of 42 feet and a mean draught of 13.3 feet. Her maximum displacement is 2800 tons. Her twin screws are powered by geared steam turbines producing 30,000 draft horse power. She has a speed of more than 25 knots, and a high degree of manoeuverability is produced by twin rudders.

She has been designed specifically to deal with the modern submarine under a variety of weather conditions, including the worst extremes of northern waters.

The "Skeena's" rounded lines will counter ice-formation during the winter, facilitate in countering the effects of atomic fall-out, and provide additional buoyancy. Her anchors are housed in recesses, or anchor pockets, equipped with manually-operated doors to keep out ice-forming spray. The bridge is closer to the ship's centre of gravity, its windows are heated and equipped with electric wipers.

CONSTRUCTION

"Skeena" was wholly designed and built in Canada. A large percentage of her equipment was manufactured in Canada, much of it for the first time.

A new, Canadian-engineered, technique known as "unit construction" has been employed in the building of this and and all other ships of her class.

"Unit construction" means that the hull and main components of the vessel are so designed that they can be built in units. In HMCS Skeena, for example, these units range in weight anywhere from five to twenty-six tons. The Ship is not built in the conventional manner, that is, from the keel up. Each unit is built separately, then carried to the building ways where it is positioned for final welding to the hull. This means that the hull grows by the addition of complete sections, rather than by a plate or a rib at a time. This method combines shipbuilding with modern structural engineering practice. In an emergency demanding large numbers of Destroyer Escorts, structural steel manufacturers could be given specific sections to fabricate at great speed. Drawings are so designed that a reference to the shipbuilder would be unnecessary. The sections could be shipped to the shipyard, which would, in effect, become an assembly plant. The result: many ships in short order.

HMCS Skeena is all-welded, with the welding being subjected to X-ray tests in insurance against hidden defects. A large quantity of aluminum has been worked into the Ship's interior and superstructure, contributing to an overall reduction in weight, and higher speed.

WEAPONS

Anti-submarine weapons are the vessel's principal armament. They include one mortar mounting, capable of

firing three projectiles simultaneously with great accuracy. They are directed to their target by sonar fire control systems. The Ship is also equipped with homing torpedoes, which can alter course and pursue an enemy target taking evasive action on or below the surface of the sea.

The other weapons include a twin 3-inch 50 caliber gun capable of an extremely high rate of fire. While primarily an anti-aircraft weapon, it may be used in surface action. Radar-controlled systems find the range and bearing of the target for the guns' crew.

DAMAGE CONTROL AND DECONTAMINATION

The "Skeena" has an extensive damage control organization. The damage control headquarters is linked by special telephone switchboard to strategic points in the ship. To reduce the danger of flooding and prevent contamination of the air conditioning system, the hull has been built without scuttles. Those on the superstructure are sealed and have eight weight aluminum deadlights. Discharge outlets are fitted in compartments below decks for fast pumping. For fire fighting, three pumps, each capable of handling tons of water per hour, are located at strategic points. The paint is fire resistant.

The ship can be sealed against chemical attack and, in such an emergency, air can be brought in from the outside through filtration units. Exposed personel can be decontaminated within the ship. The ship has equipment for "hosing down" exterior surfaces that have been contaminated.

PROPULSION MACHINERY

The motive power of the ship is provided by two main turbines geared down to twin shafts. This class is the first in the British Commonwealth or the United States in which

hardened and ground gearing has been used, except experimentally, reducing substantially both the gearing weight and housing dimensions.

Auxiliary machinery is powered either by turbines, electricity or diesels.

The two water-tube boilers are of extremely compact design, with steam maintained at a constant high pressure and temperature. Remote and automatic controls are used to an extent rarely used in a warship.

The boiler room, not being pressurized can be sealed off from contamination, like any other space in the ship.

ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT

The Skeena has electronic and electrical systems more extensive -- and more complex -- than those carried in Second World War ships twice her size. Much of her electrical and electronics equipment is of Canadian design, with most of it produced in Canada.

Practically every function of the vessel is dependent on electrical power, and this includes armament, navigation, cooking, ventilation, air conditioning, communications, etc. She carries more than 50 miles of electric cable and is the first escort vessel in the RCN whose main electrical power is 440 volts alternating current. Direct current was in standard use during the Second World War in Canadian warships.

She has five generators capable of producing 1,400 kilowatts, approximately equal to the power required to service a city of about 10,000 population. About 330 motors and motor generators provide the motive force for a wide variety of equipment.

COMMUNICATIONS – RADAR – SONAR

There are three radio rooms for transmitting and receiving low, medium, high, very high and ultra-high frequencies. A fourth is equipped with direction-finding equipment. A message centre is equipped with teletype, and a cryptographic room with coding devices.

The "Skeena" has radar systems for gunnery, fire control, navigation, surface warning, air warning, and air early warning. Ultrasonic beams from sonar sets of the latest design probe the waters beneath the ship for the detection and pursuit of submarines.

The Skeena's internal communication include twelve separate telephone systems, including lines for such specialized uses as docking ship, damage control, radar maintenance and fuelling at sea. She has twelve sound broadcast systems. Entertainment broadcast arrangements provide for radio receiving record playing, and tape recording. A choice of two programs is offered over the twenty-nine speakers in the ship.

A Canadian designed remote control system makes it possible to broadcast or receive from any one of thirty positions throughout the vessel.

LIFE SAVING AND MEDICAL EQUIPMENT

Carley floats and wooden rafts formerly used in warships have been entirely replaced by rubber rafts. The 20-man rafts inflate automatically on their release into the sea. In addition to emergency rations each carries a full quota of survival gear, including a signals kit, heliograph mirror, fishing gear, collapsible bailers, parachute drogue (sea anchor), floating sheath knife and plastic whistle.

The Ship's medical staff is provided with a hospital in miniature. The sick bay is comparable in size to that of a

cruiser. There are four berths, a bathroom, an operating table with the latest type arc lights, well stocked drug and medical lockers, and diagnostic facilities.

ACCOMMODATION, DINING ARRANGEMENTS, PROVISIONING

The Skeena's men sleep in bunks, each equipped with foam mattress and individual reading lamp; each man has an aluminum clothes locker specifically designed for sea, and additional drawer space for personal belongings. Mirrors and electric shaving outlets have not been forgotten. Each of the living spaces has a recreational area for off-duty relaxation.

The Officers' cabins, which also serve as offices, are arranged for single and double occupancy, except for one designed to accommodate four junior officers. The Wardroom has a pantry, dining room and lounge and is roomier than those in older ships of similar size. The Commanding Officer's quarters have bedroom, bath, dining room and lounge.

The Ship's company is fed on the cafeteria system. The galley, centrally located, has a bakery and pastry, meat and vegetable departments. Its equipment includes electric bread-slicers, automatic toasters, steam pressure cookers and electric coffee urns. It has a dairy with ice cream and milk machinery. A dish-washing machine and a garbage disposal unit are other features.

The main dining space, which doubles as a cinema in in the evening, has kitchen-type fire-proof tables and cushioned chairs. Lighting is fluorescent. The Chief and Petty Officers have a separate dining space nearby, while the Commanding Officer's pantry, two decks above, and the Wardroom pantry, one deck above, are served from the

galley by a dumbwaiter.

The Ship has storage for ninety days' frozen provisions compared with fourteen days in escort ships built during the Second World War. She has a cold room for meat and fish, a cool room for dairy products and a chill room for fruit and vegetables.

The laundry is equipped with washing machines, spin drier, pressers and hangar facilities.

THE SHIP'S BADGE

The badge of HMCS Skeena is symbolic of the river after which the ship is named. The word "Skeena" is said to have been derived from the Indian words "Iksh shean (or shyen)" meaning "out of the clouds".

The source of the river Skeena, like that of many rivers of the British Columbia coast, is far inland among mountains whose tops are shrouded in cloud and mist. It is therefore natural that the Skeena should be known as the river "out of the clouds".

The ship's badge thus consists of a base suggesting clouds. From this there leaps a fine salmon. The latter has been included in the badge in honour of the first HMCS Skeena, which adopted the salmon as an unofficial badge during the Second World War. Heraldic art thus continues to play its part today, as in the past, in maintaining tradition. The heraldic description of the badge is as follows:

"Azure, out of a base invected argent,
a salmon sinisterwise proper."

The ship's colours are white and blue.


1867 1967