

H.M.C.S. "OWEN SOUND"

Seldom in Canada's Navy has a warship been commanded by a native of her own namesake city, but that's the happy situation prevailed in the proud corvette HMCS Owen Sound. Her captain was Lieut.-Cdr. John Manuel Watson, RCNR, born and raised in the busy County Grey city of Owen Sound, Ont.

Three other Owen Sound men were members of the ship's company at one time. They were: Lieut. Robert P. Horton, RCNVR; Chief Engine-Room Artificer R.A. Faulkner, RCNR, and Coder William Grady, RCNVR.

Lieut.-Cdr. Watson, a veteran of more than five years' sea duty in World War II, became a deckhand on Great Lakes freighters and steamers at the age of 15. He earned his coastal master's ticket and was captain of his own ship in the Lakes before the war. Watson enlisted with the rank of chief skipper in August 1940 and attended the commissioning in November that year of the pioneer corvette, HMCS Collingwood at Collingwood, Ont.

Watson served in the Collingwood for almost two years, first as navigator and then as executive officer. Later he commanded the corvette HMCS Woodstock for a year in the Mediterranean and other waters and took part in the North African landings. He then stood by the newly-launched Owen Sound until her commissioning at Collingwood, Nov. 17, 1943.

HMCS Owen Sound was definitely one of the RCN's "happy ships", noted for her merry spare-time concert parties and singsongs. A fine piano was among the many gifts received by the ship from the citizens of Owen Sound, and more than a dozen men in the crew could play it expertly enough to accompany a rousing songfest.

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In an interview, Lieut.-Cdr. Watson, speaking of the electric phonograph and the continuous supply of records received from Owen Sound once said "We have got everything from Bach and Debussy to "Oklahoma" and the swing favourites, and the lads love it".

The ship was commissioned by Mrs. Garfield Case, wife of the mayor of Owen Sound and by Nov. 1944 had seen enemy action. While on convoy duty in the North Atlantic in early March 1944 she assisted the Canadian destroyer St. Laurent in bringing a Nazi submarine to the surface with depth charge attacks, for eventual destruction by the St. Laurent's 4.7" guns. For his share in this action Lieut.-Cdr. Watson received mention in despatches. He and his wife, the former Margaret McClarty of Owen Sound, live at 811-15th St. East, with their seventeen year son and three pretty daughters.

Foot Note

Flower class (revised) Corvette
Collingwood Shipyards Ltd. -- builder
Commissioned 10th Nov. 1943.
Transferred to War Assets Corp. July, 1945.