

NOTES: re: W.W.II Corvettes etc. for April 29th, 2005.

Original design from "whale catchers" built by "Smith Dock Company" of Middlesbrough (U.K.). The Specifications accepted by the admiralty were 205 feet in length- single 3 blade propeller

Beam 33 feet

Draft 15 feet

Maximum speed 16 knots

Endurance (at 12 knots) of 4000 miles on 200 tons of fuel.

Engine 2750 H.P. -4 cylinder Triple Expansion reciprocating Twin Cylindrical Scotch Boilers.

These ships were designed in the U.K. and built there first and in 1940 production in Canada began in many yards on both coasts and in the Great Lakes cities.

Original complement (officers and men) was 47 but by 1943 or 1944 that was up to more than 90.

The ships were small, slow and seaworthy, but relatively easy to build and filled an urgent need for escort vessels to protect convoys.

So far as my own service in the RCN is concerned- I did my initial training on the Pacific Coast- at Naden (Esquimalt). When Japan attacked Pearl Harbour December 7th, 1941 we were doing our training classes from 8 a.m. (0800) to 5 p.m. (1700) and stood a 4 hour watch at the dockyard during the night. At the end of December we were sent over to New Westminster to look after about 1200 fish boats which had been seized from Japanese Canadian on the B.C. Coast. It was June before I got drafted back to Naden and then to Halifax. I took a gunnery course there and in August was drafted to HMCS "LePas", my first ship. She was a short fore'sle corvette. At first we did escort duty between Halifax, New York or Boston and Guantanamo Bay, at the South end of Cuba. By the beginning of 1943 we were doing Halifax-Newfy (then a British Colony) and Boston. In the spring I took another gunnery course and was drafted to my second corvette HMCS Summerside. We were, for most of the next 10 or 11 months, doing escort duty on the "NEWFY-DERRY" run, which could not be considered much of a "happy days" job.

Crossing time varied from 14 days (quick trip) to 18days. Corvettes were never designed for transatlantic crossing but that's what was required. Turn-around time at either end was normally about 3 days- or about a week if we were due for boiler clean (which was roughly every 3 or 4 months). If it was in "Derry" about half the crew got 3 or 4 days leave so that we were able to get the ferry from Larne to Stranrar and train to London.

As for living conditions- we were able to use fresh water while in harbour- but at sea it was very different- fresh water was turned on for about an hour during watch changes and for a few hours during the day but we were not able to do our dhobying very often at sea- even if you felt inclined to do it! There were very few buckets (flat bottomed) and no place to dry the stuff. We did not have washing machines. We were not able to have showers at sea. If you think that we really needed a shower when we completed a crossing you are right! There was one shower outside the seamen's messdeck which served about 28 seamen and 20 stokers plus communications/cook/sickbay tiffy etc.-----so----- probably half the men on the ship. That washroom had 4 or 5 stainless

steel handbasins. A steel door at the after end of the washroom led to the heads- serving the same men---6 or 7 fixtures---no doors!! We were on the 3 watch system, so, most of the time- at sea—overcrowding was not a problem. It got a bit hectic when we got into harbour and learned when the 1st “liberty boat” would be. But after the first batch of eager beavers had gone ashore things settled down a bit, and it was possible to get on with dhobying and showering, etc. When the “happy gang” started staggering back aboard----after closing time---things got difficult for anyone wanting to catch up on sleep. Not everyone got ashore on the same day- which was a mixed blessing.

The meals on corvettes were generally pretty good- considering what the cook had to put up with. We had “general messing” (officers and crew got the same stuff). We had fresh bread in harbour and for the first 2 or 3 days out. After that you cut off the green mold and toasted what was left for a few days. After that there was hard tack available. It can be shattered with a chipping hammer and softened in hot water. But we did have lots of square eggs, bacon, canned veggies and

sometimes even canned peaches. I'm sure we were never really undernourished. I think cooks deserve credit for doing their best in the circumstances. My first corvette had only one cook for about 75 men (it was a short fo'c'sle). The second had 2 cooks—one of them was a bit "spewy" in bad weather----but he tried to do his job. I volunteered to help the cook (on the first ship) make bread after we had run out of commercially made stuff. He had a small "bread bin"- Made of wood with a metal lining—which we used to mix bread in by pounding the dough down to an even depth with our fists and then flopping it over and repeating the process a few times. The galley was shut up tight and kept warm to help the bread dough rise. Every time I reached over and picked up the stuff to flop it over I dripped sweat all over the mix. I said to "Dutchy"---the cook----that all that sweat might produce a poor batch of bread. He said "don't worry about dat bye—we just won't need to put much salt in her". Anyway, after about 3 hours of work we made enough bread to last us about a whole day. Nobody complained about the salt.

Corvettes were not fancy or fast but the men who sailed in them were, for the most part, good shipmates and they did a job that had to be done. I don't regret any of my corvette time. I met some good people on those ships.

Later we got more ships---bigger, faster and better equipped for convoy escort ;duty. We were sent down to the English Channel for a month to train with other escorts for the Normandy invasion. That was early April, 1944 that we went to the Channel.

We were eventually sent up to Millford Haven in Wales, to wait for the big day. We were told----early on June 4th----that all leave was cancelled and no one could go ashore for any reason. Later we learned that June 5th was the "big day". But later we were sent out into the Bristol Channel to anchor off Lundy Isle. Apparently "management" had decided to postpone everything for 24 hours. We joined a convoy of big ships and troop carriers and arrived at Omaha Beach---on the Cherbourg Peninsula---around mid-day June 6th, 1944. That was an American beachhead and virtually all troops going ashore there---apart from a few communications people---were U/S military and marines, etc.

The paratroops had gone inland earlier. I guess we were too small a ship to bother with. So far as I know we were never fired on by shore artillery. There were a few "R.Boats" and "E.Boats" in the night but they too were looking for more important targets apparently. We did beachhead escort work for 6 weeks or so I think, but by that time the beachhead was well established and we were sent home to Halifax and granted a few weeks leave. Canada entered the war in 1939 with no corvettes and finished with 123 by the end of W.W.II.

After I came back from leave I went to HMCS NIOBE (the Canadian base near Greenock) and was sent down by train to Portsmouth to take a first-class gunnery course at Whale Island. I completed that course near the end of April, 1945 and returned to Niobe and was drafted to HMCS ONTARIO, an "Enterprise" class Cruiser of about 10,000 tons that had just been completed at Harland & Wolf's yard in Belfast. She was to proceed, following work-ups, to the Pacific to join the R.N. (or Australian) fleet. We did initial work-up at Scapa Flow and then went to Malta for a month or so of more intensive training. We spent a few

days in Alexandria and then went, via the Suez, to Columbo, Ceylon. While we were there the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. That caused the people in charge to change plans. We were sent up to Trincomolee and anchored for a few days while the folks in charge decided what to do. A few days later we were sent to escort 2 troop ships of Royal Marines (under Lt. Gen. Festing of Royal Marines) to occupy Hong Kong. We went via the Strait of Malaca, through the South China Sea and into Hong Kong Harbour. The HMCS Prince Robert (a Canadian ship which had been a passenger ship in B.C. before the war) had already arrived. HMS King George V was also anchored out.

The marines went ashore. We sent landing parties. The Japanese surrendered and built compounds in which they were imprisoned without too much difficulty. There was a victory parade and all that sort of thing. Those of us who went ashore as landing party did what amounted to civilian police duties until late October. HMCS Ontario

left Hong Kong and went, for the first time, to the west coast of Canada,
via Guam and Pearl Harbour. She never fired a shot at the enemy.
She had a complement of about 1000 and was a very different ship from
the corvettes I had been accustomed to.

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