

SENTINEL

SEPTEMBER 1967



**"BONNIE"
REFIT**



An "army" of shipyard workers swarm ashore from the Bonnie at quitting time.

The end of the job was in sight when engineers flashed boilers for first time.



The oldest skills in the world, such as carpentry, had a contribution to make.

Sometime early this fall, in an area about midway between Father Point and Rimouski, Quebec, the rocky cliffs along the St. Lawrence river will reverberate to the roar of three-inch guns. This brief firepower display — which will ensure that the anti-aircraft guns are working — will herald the return of HMCS *Bonaventure* to an operational role after being tied up for more than a year on a refit and improvement program.

Built in Belfast the "Bonnie", as she is affectionately known to Canada's sailors, is the fourth aircraft carrier to be operated by the RCN. Commissioned in 1957 *Bonaventure* steamed many thousands of

By F/L T. G. Coughlin

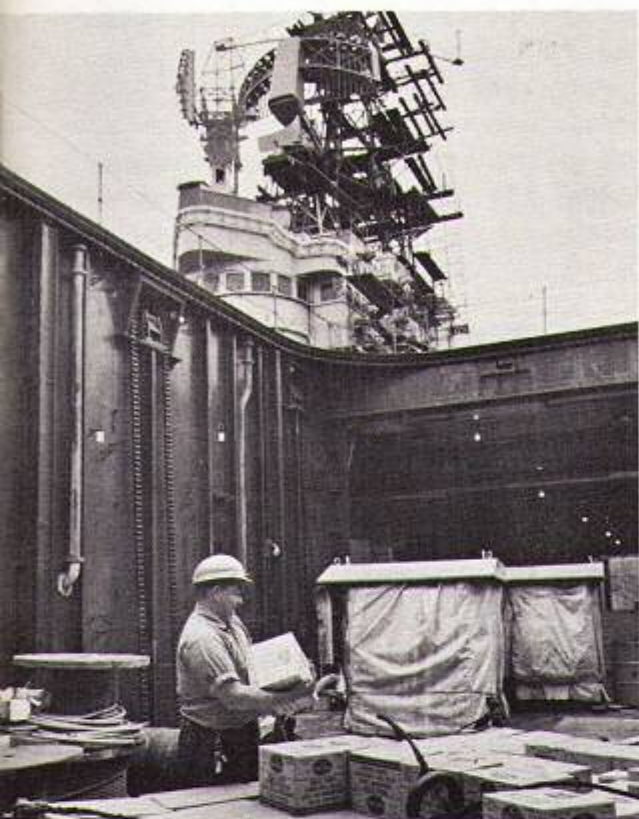
miles on operational manoeuvres including participation in several major NATO exercises. On 26 April 1966, after almost a decade of intensive operational service, HMCS *Bonaventure* slipped quietly into the Davie Shipbuilding yard at Lauzon, Quebec, to begin her half-life refit.

For both the navy and the shipbuilders, the problems associated with the *Bonnie* refit, were unprecedented. The three previous RCN carriers, *Puncher*, *Warrior* and *Magnificent* had been loaned

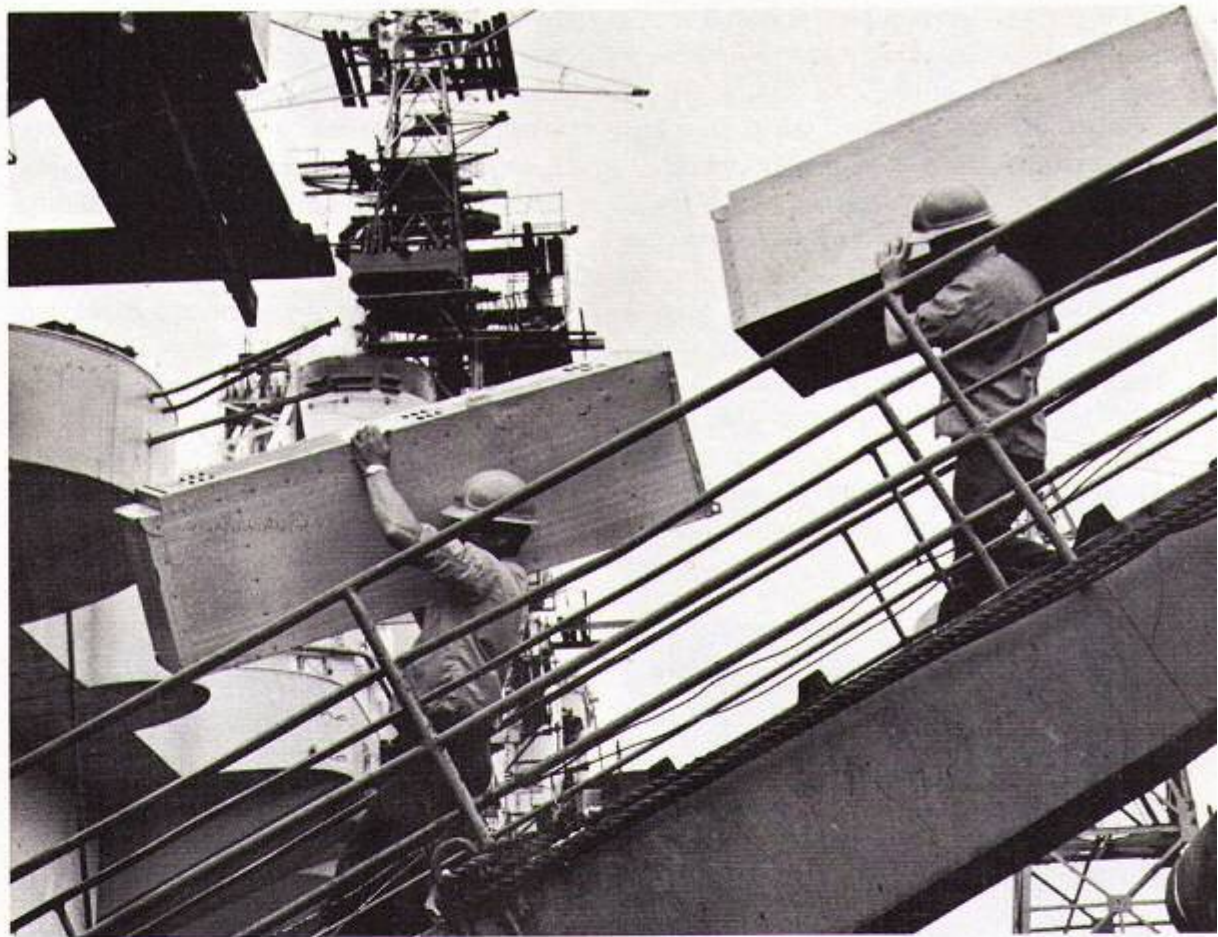
to Canada by Britain and were returned before major refit programs were necessary. For the 220 RCN personnel who remained with the *Bonaventure* throughout her refit program and the 800 shipyard workers who swarmed over the 20,000 ton carrier on a multitude of tasks, the job represented a "first" in Canada.

In preparation for the formidable task which lay ahead, the contractor and the Principal Naval Overseer at Lauzon consulted a "checklist". This checklist, called a maintenance and repair specification, together with an improvement specification, consisted of eight volumes contain-

A seemingly never-ending parade of parts and pieces were brought on board.



The aircraft lift on the Bonaventure came in handy for loading supplies.



The Bonnie's flight deck, where aircraft will fly again, resembled a junk yard.

ing many thousands of items which were to be repaired, replaced, modified, or verified as serviceable. These technical volumes, which took months to produce, represented the accumulated knowledge of many experts from the ship's company, Maritime Command Headquarters, the Naval Dockyard at Halifax and Canadian Forces Headquarters. The overall responsibility for the technical and financial coordination and administration of this job was allocated to the Commander Materiel Command and his staff under whose direction the Principal Naval Overseer and his staff acted as a field unit. All the various experts contributed to the long

list of items which had to be processed during the *Bonnie's* refit and improvement program. But even that comprehensive checklist did not include everything. There were also many "arisings".

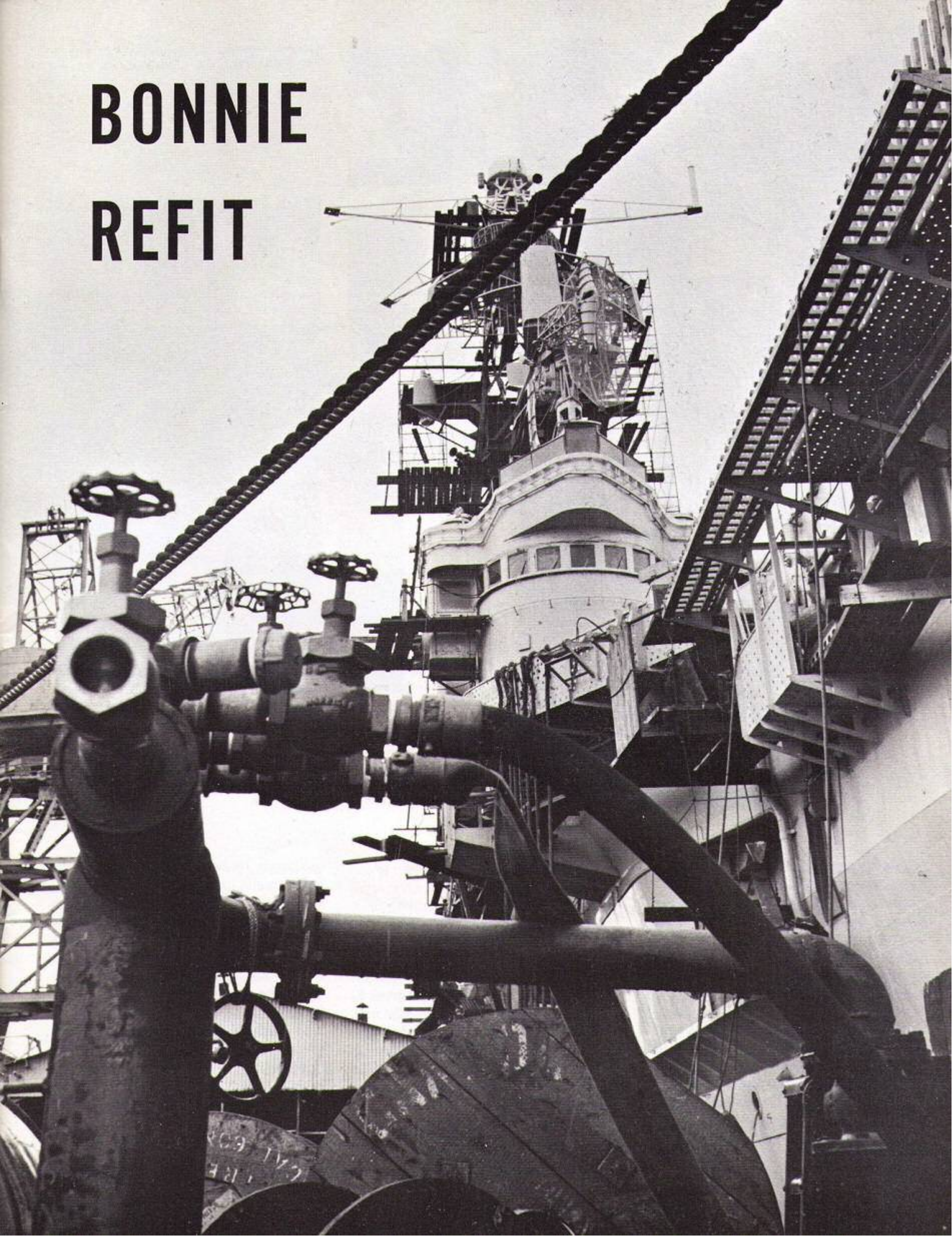
Arisings are tasks which, although not entirely unexpected, cannot be determined beforehand. For example, an item on the checklist could call for the dismantling, cleaning and reassembling of an electric motor. When that motor was taken apart, however, it might reveal scored bearings, frayed wires and worn-out brushes all of which must be repaired before the motor is cleaned and reassembled. Many hundreds of these arisings

occurred as the refit program progressed.

Sailors take a quiet pride in a gleaming ship so, for those who served in *Bonaventure* during her refit, it was a trying time. Pumps and other equipment had to be put ashore by crane. Sand blasting soon littered the decks with paint chips which mixed with rain and snow combined to form a minor quagmire.

In the hangar deck, where *Tracker* aircraft once parked, the shipbuilders constructed tool cribs, piled tons of materiel and seemingly-endless miles of wire, while power-leads porcupined a bulkhead. Men were everywhere doing everything. Sparks flew from acetylene torches

BONNIE REFIT



Pressure and good humour is reflected in the faces of the men on the job



*Lt-Cdr Buchanan
electrical engineer*



*Cdr Sackburgh
executive officer*



*Mr. Coleman
superintendent*

and bulkheads echoed to an ear-shattering racket produced by electric drills, saws and sanders. To the casual eye it was chaos. But to the civilian/military team whose responsibility it was to produce a better ship, everything was going according to plan.

During the 16-month refit program *Bonaventure* remained in commission, under the command of Captain R. H. Falls. The complement of officers and men, however, was only a fraction of the *Bonaventure's* normal crew of approximately 1,300 personnel. Although relatively few in number, the sailors made an incalculable contribution to the refit program. Many of these seamen had served in *Bonaventure* even before she began her refit and were able to draw upon their own knowledge and experience to

pin down the problem areas. In addition, by staying with the ship during the refit, the sailors became thoroughly familiar with the new equipment and systems being installed. They will be well qualified to brief the rest of the ship's company on the "new" *Bonaventure* when she returns to sea. In addition to helping the office of the Principal Naval Overseer check on the progress and standard of work being done, the ship's company carry out normal ship maintenance, fire protection and security of the ship.

For those who sailed in *Bonaventure* before she went into refit and have not seen her since, the next encounter will produce a number of surprises. A great space saver has been the closing in of some boat decks. Helicopters will be used for many tasks previously carried out by

the seaboats carried in *Bonaventure*. Therefore many of the boats were removed, the open boat decks covered with steel plates and the area made available for recreation. Even more important, the "citadel", that portion of a ship which can be closed off under nuclear warfare conditions, has been extended.

Some bulkheads have been removed between small cubicles and other bulkheads built where none existed before. The end result is that about 30 new compartments have been created. During all these changes one of the main factors considered was that of crew comfort. The *Bonnie* will be a better ship in which to live and work. More space will be available for recreation; conditions in the seamen's galley will be improved and, thanks to more efficient insulation on

steam pipes and greater use of air conditioning, a more comfortable temperature will be maintained in the ship.

Since much of the mechanical and electrical equipment has been either replaced or updated, the maintenance workload will be less, thus improving the overall effectiveness of the ship. One new item which is sure to find favour with the pilots is the improved landing system. One of the mirrors, which gave pilots a spot of light as a reference point during landings, has been replaced by an illuminated prism. This prism will give a clearer presentation of the reference point "meatball" than was possible in the past.

When *Bonaventure* slips her berth at Lauzon and heads down the St. Lawrence river she will be fully stored. Before HMCS *Bonaventure* can rejoin the fleet, however, she will spend some time alongside in Halifax for some equipment trials. Only when all systems are proved to be operational, will she put to sea. That important occasion is one which is eagerly awaited by both *Bonaventure* veterans and newcomers to the ship's company.

The most senior sailor aboard, in both rank and service with the ship, is *Bonaventure's* Commanding Officer, Captain Falls. He began his career in *Bonaventure* as the first Commanding Officer of No.

870 (*Banshee*) Squadron. He served a second tour as Lieutenant-Commander Flying, a third as Commander Operations and now is the Commanding Officer.

At the other end of the scale, in terms of service in *Bonaventure*, are those such as Lieutenant A. J. Walzak, the weapons officer. Lt Walzak had never sailed in *Bonnie* but he had served in destroyers which provided a screen for the carrier during manoeuvres. His first appointment to the ship came during her present refit. Like everyone else on board, Lt Walzak is looking forward to the day when HMCS *Bonaventure* rejoins the Fleet at sea.



Lt Parrish
signals officer



Lt-Cdr Erns
senior engineer



Lt-Cdr Chiddenton
weapons officer (air)

During the *Bonnie's* refit program she remained in commission and normal routine was carried out including the ever-popular pay parade.

