

Wartime career sketch

by Temp. Lieut. Thomas (Tom) Holland Burdon, RCNVR
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My name is Tom H. Burdon. I was in the first or "charter" Officers' Training Class at Royal Roads, B.C. when it opened to train officers in the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR). I was there from Jan. 1, 1941 until the end of the first class March, 31, 1941.

After graduating from the three month course I was appointed Sub. Lieut. to *HMCS Camrose*, a corvette under construction at the Simard Shipyard in Sorel, Quebec. It was commissioned on June 30, 1941, and we sailed to Halifax for final supplies, ammunition etc.

The commanding officer of *Camrose* at that time was an RCNR Temp. Lieut. named Louis R. Pavillard. The first Lieut. was Temp. Lieut. George M. "Mickey" Hope from Halifax. *Camrose* was assigned first to convoy escort duties on the "Triangle" run between Halifax, New York, and St. John's Nfld.

Subsequently we were assigned to convoy escort of North Atlantic convoys going east to Europe. We escorted convoys from Nfld. to south of Iceland, then went to Reykjavik, Iceland, for repairs, re-supply, refuelling and then returning to mid-Atlantic to escort convoys going west to North America.

During my stay on *Camrose* we were part of the escort group for S.C. 48, a 52 ship convoy, which was attacked by a U-Boat "wolf-pack" 400 miles south of Iceland on Oct. 15 until Oct. 17, 1941 and 9 merchant ships and the British corvette, *HMS [Gladiolus]* were sunk.

The US destroyer *USS Kearney* was hit by a torpedo but managed to remain afloat and get to Iceland for repairs. On Oct. 18th *HMS Broadwater* was sunk by U-Boat 101. I later discovered that my brother [Fred Burdon], a radio operator in the Merchant Marine, was on the Merchant ship *S.S. Philip T. Dodge* as lead ship in the starboard column of the convoy. The five ships in the line on their port side were sunk, along with the four ships behind them.

After about nine months on *Camrose* I was transferred to Halifax where I took the small A/S (anti-submarine) course and then taught the course for a few weeks there, before being appointed to *HMCS Columbia*, a "three-stacker" lend-lease destroyer from the US. I served on *Columbia* until Feb. 3, 1944. During that time it was commanded by Lieut.Cdr. Robert A.S. "Liver-lips" MacNeil, RCNR, and also by Bernard D.L. "Barney" Johnson, an RCNR Lieut. Commander.

I remember leaving on an RCAF cargo plane of some kind from the airport in Nfld. to fly to Halifax, and as we took off, another plane landed and caught its wing in a snow bank on the side of the runway, and did a U-ey, but did not crash! That was the coldest trip on a plane that I ever took.

From the *Columbia* I was transferred on Feb. 3, 1944 to *HMCS Cornwallis* in Digby, N.S. where I took the big A/S (Anti-Submarine) course, and then was retained there to teach the course for three months.

From there I was appointed to *HMCS Leaside*, a Castle Class corvette that was being built in Middlesbrough in England. The commanding officer was Lieut. Gordon G.K. Holder, RCNVR, and I was the first Lieut. A/S. It was commissioned a couple of months later. (During the interval I took courses in damage control in London, and watchkeeping and other duties at Tobermory in Scotland.)

Leaside sailed around the north of Scotland to Tobermory, where we took working-up exercises (WUPS), and finally left there to take up Atlantic convoy duties out of Londonderry, Ireland.

After the war ended, I was appointed from *Leaside* to *HMCS Brunswicker* in Saint John, N.B. as discharge officer, where my responsibilities were to locate jobs for discharged personnel to "civvy street". I received my discharge in March 1946.