

### **Commander Bob Edwards (the Bearded, not the Bald!)**

Commander Bob Edwards has had an interesting and full naval career since joining the Canadian Forces fresh out of Dalhousie University in April 1971. His early years included sea-time in both West and East Coast ships, including duties as Navigating Officer in three destroyers, a job that he loved. HMCS *Yukon* was one of Bob's favorite ships, largely because virtually the entire ship's company remained together over a two-year period of very active sea-time, and because of the cast of characters onboard, such as then Ordinary Seaman Earl Corn.

Ask him about his experiences in *Yukon* alongside in Lisbon with the NATO Squadron during the 1974 "Carnation Revolution." This is when the Portuguese Navy had gone over to the rebel side, and the city centre was being held by Loyalist troops. As the Navigator crouched by the chart table, the CO, Gregor McIntosh, stood on the engaged starboard wing and yelled out to note in the log that tanks were around the ship and that there was gunfire forward of the ship.

Then there was the ship's deployment to the West Coast in 1974. Following his mentor, noted bird enthusiast Commodore Hughes, Gregor appointed *Yukon*'s Navigator as the ship's "bird expert," and directed him to obtain all pertinent information prior to the ship's departure. On one notable occasion going through the Panama Canal, the Navigator was consulted as to the species of bird that was perched on the 3" 70 gun mounting. Bob, without needing to check the bird publications, replied, "That's a black bird, sir," much to the amusement of those on the bridge, but not to the amusement of the Captain. However, Gregor later



recounted that he saw a similar bird in Panama City, and asked the taxi driver what type of bird it was – to which he replied, “We call those black birds.”

Bob could probably recount a number of other stories from his *Yukon* days – such as the safe use of thunder-flashes and grapefruit guns - but he’d have to consult with his legal advisor about the statute of limitations.

Commander Edwards subsequently completed the Combat Control Officers’ course at Fleet School Halifax and served out West as the Weapon’s Officer in HMCS *Saskatchewan*, and then as the Operation’s Officer in HMCS *Restigouche*. Ask him about shadowing a Soviet AGI off the Strait of Juan de Fuca for a week, and about her “lifebuoy sentry,” armed not with a kisbie ring, but with an AK-47 assault rifle. Ask him also about what happened to the Soviet naval fur cap that fell overboard.

Bob then served a very interesting three years on exchange with the US Navy in Norfolk when the US was building-up to a 600-ship Navy. He served as the Operation Test Director for the upgrade to the FFG-7 Guided Missile Frigate and the US Marine Corps’ LCAC, a high-speed air-cushioned landing craft, and enjoyed the high-sea state LCAC trials in the Gulf of Mexico.

After Staff College in Toronto, he was appointed Executive Officer of HMCS *Ottawa* under the command of Kim Beardmore, and then Al Dunlop. Ask him about Command Headquarters’ reaction to the “Happy Face” funnel covers.

After “labouring in the staff trenches” for 2 ½ years in Maritime Command Headquarters, Bob was rewarded with command of the destroyer HMCS *Gatineau*

for the next two years. Ask him about charging through the Great Belt in Danish waters at 26 knots in the van of a NATO Surface Action Group at 0300 when one of the Group feigned an engineering casualty --- she couldn't handle the speed. (Note-to-file: It was a "safe speed" according to the International Rules of the Road.)

After Command, Bob attended Dalhousie University to achieve his Master's Degree in international relations, and was then posted to National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa in the Directorate of Peacekeeping Policy. Ask him about his recc  adventure to the Central African Republic where the army had mutinied (thanks Admiral Jim King!). The order from Air Force authorities was for the Aurora Maritime Patrol Aircraft to land and drop off the team, but to keep the engines going and take-off as quickly as possible (thanks Colonel Hennebury!). He then recalls being dispatched with the doctor to scout out the perimeter of Bangui in an Oxfam-Quebec van, and report back to the team leader. The report, in essence, was "no bullet holes in us, so it should be OK for Canadian troops." It is with deep regret that he had to turn in his very nice jungle uniform -- but he was allowed to keep the boots.

Finally, Bob was released from the tentacles of NDHQ in July 2000 to return to the warm embrace of Halifax and Dalhousie University's Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, where he has served the naval and academic communities in an outstanding manner for the past six years. It is my understanding that he will continue to support programs here at Dalhousie, but may take the odd day off in retirement to enjoy kayaking.