



**Brief History**  
**of**  
**HMCS ROCKCLIFFE**

Laid down in the yards of the Port Arthur Shipbuilding Co., Ltd, on 23 December 1942, the Algerine coastal escort, HMCS ROCKCLIFFE, was launched on 19 August 1943 and commissioned on 30 September 1944 with Lieutenant J. E. Heward, RCNVR, in command.

The ship is named after Rockcliffe Park, a village and residential suburb to the north-east of the older section of Ottawa, on a height of land overlooking the Ottawa River.

No municipal arms have been devised for the village. However, birds, small animals and wild flowers are given protection here and, for the purpose of the ship's badge, reference is made to this by using the black squirrel, an animal plentiful in the community, as its emblem. The rodent is depicted on a broken tree branch on a silver background and, to show a connection with the sea and ships, is shown holding between its forepaws a golden fid or marline spike.

The ship's colours are gold and black.

Leaving Port Arthur on 1 October 1944, ROCKCLIFFE<sup>1</sup> arrived at Toronto on the 4th. Until the 7th, the ship carried out gunnery and engine trials on Lake Ontario, then resumed her voyage to the east. On her arrival in Montreal it was found necessary to float her into dry dock so that the port propeller shaft and an oil leakage could be examined. A satisfactory trial of the shaft was made on the 17th and the ship slipped on the 19th, calling at Quebec and reaching Halifax the 30th.

After carrying out further trials and practices in Halifax, ROCKCLIFFE sailed for Bermuda. Arriving in the islands on 17 November, she spent nearly a month in intensive exercises with other surface vessels and submarines.

En route to Halifax on 11 December, ROCKCLIFFE was ordered to make a diversion to Liverpool, N.S., to meet the 1426-ton cargo ship LIVERPOOL ROVER and escort her to Halifax.

With this her operational duties began in earnest. Following the 13th, when she was allocated from new construction to the Western Escort Force for duty with the escort group, W-6, ROCKCLIFFE began her short career of sailing in support of both local and mid-ocean convoys, the latter in those parts of their routes when they were either proceeding to or coming from the protection of the mid-ocean escorts. Her first operational duty with the group was the supporting of the convoy, SC-164<sup>2</sup>, as far as Newfoundland. On the return from St. John's, ONS-39<sup>3</sup>, was supported.

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<sup>1</sup>Standard displacement: 990 tons  
Extreme length: 225'  
Breadth: 35' 6"  
Draught forward: 10' 5"  
Draught aft: 10'  
Guns: 1-4"  
4-20 mm. Oerlikons  
2 Bren guns.

<sup>2</sup>SC convoys ran from Halifax, Sydney or New York to the United Kingdom.

<sup>3</sup>ONS convoys were slow convoys running from the United Kingdom to North America.

At this time other members of W-6 were the Algerine coastal escort, OSHAWA, Senior Officer, and the corvettes OAKVILLE and SASKATOON.

During the course of their duties Halifax, St. John's, Boston and New York were visited.

VE-day, 8 May 1945, was the official end of the German land and sea war. On this day, at 2201, the German High Command Broadcast, at allied dictation, an order for all U-boats at sea to surrender. Most of the boats surrendered in European waters, but two gave themselves up off Canadian shores, to RCN ships. One of these was the 740-ton U-889<sup>1</sup>

While proceeding toward Newfoundland on the afternoon of 10 May, W-6<sup>2</sup> — OSHAWA, ROCKCLIFFE, SASKATOON and the corvette DUNVEGAN — picked up an emergency signal from an RCAF aircraft stating that he was over a U-boat. The enemy vessel was reported to be south of Newfoundland, proceeding at 10 knots and flying the black flag of surrender.

Course was altered by the group and an hour later the aircraft and the submarine were sighted. All guns in the four ships were manned and trained on the German craft and it was ordered by visual signal to stop. The senior ship, OSHAWA, closed to loud-hailer distance and her Commanding Officer, Acting Lieutenant-Commander J.C. Pratt, RCNVR, issued orders to the U-boat which were translated by two German-speaking ratings who were with him on the bridge.

U-889 was ordered to steer a course for Bay Bulls, Newfoundland. W-6 then took up positions around the U-boat, each ship keeping her guns trained on it. A few hours later, a signal was received ordering the Senior Officer to detail two ships of his group to escort U-889 to Shelburne, N.S. DUNVEGAN and ROCKCLIFFE were picked for this task, while OSHAWA and SASKATOON continued on the voyage to Newfoundland.

About 2200 the U-boat Captain sent a signal by lamp in English to the senior ship DUNVEGAN: "And so to bed. Have a good night".

Twenty-four hours after the group had intercepted the U-boat, DUNVEGAN and ROCKCLIFFE turned it over to the frigates, BUCKINGHAM and INCH ARRAN, who escorted it to the entrance of Shelburne harbour where it was boarded and its Commanding Officer made a formal surrender.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The other was U-190.

<sup>2</sup> At the time, W-6 was escorting convoy SC-175.

<sup>3</sup> U-889 was later used for experimental work which included firing of acoustic torpedoes and investigation of the special hydrophone system with which the vessel was equipped. The Tripartite Naval Commission sitting in Berlin in November 1945, agreed that only thirty German U-boats should be kept and that they should be divided equally between the UK, the US and USSR. Among the ten allocated to the United States was the U-889 which, unlike the older U-190, was in operational condition. It was sailed to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on 11 January 1946, under US escort.

For ROCKCLIFFE the war in effect was over on 6 June for, on this date, she was transferred from group W-6 to the Halifax Force. In company with OSHAWA, she had escorted convoy ONS-51 to New York. With her companion she was now ordered to sail to Halifax via Boston.

At the end of June and the beginning of July, ROCKCLIFFE and OSHAWA visited such local ports as Country Harbour and Pictou in Nova Scotia, Charlottetown and Summerside in Prince Edward Island, and Bathurst in New Brunswick.

After her return to Halifax on 10 July, preparations were begun to place the ship in reserve. With this in mind, she was transferred to the administration of the Naval Officer in Charge (NOIC), Sydney, to be taken in hand for reduction to care and maintenance. In company with the Algerine coastal escort, PORTAGE, she left for the Cape Breton port on the 21st.

Later plans for the future of the coastal minesweepers required that they should be drawn out of reserve at Sydney to be sailed to the West Coast, and ROCKCLIFFE, who had been paid off on 28 July, was re-commissioned on 24 October 1945, with Acting Lieutenant-Commander A. E. Gough, RCNR, as her Commanding Officer.

After calling at Halifax for certain repairs necessary before she could undertake her long voyage, ROCKCLIFFE steamed to Shelburne to join the ships who would sail with her. These ships were all Algerines: WINNIPEG, BORDER CITIES, OSHAWA, and SAULT STE MARIE. They sailed on 10 November and, before arrival in Esquimalt on 21 December, they visited Kingston, Jamaica; Cristobal and Balboa in the Canal Zone; Manzanillo and Salina Cruz in Mexico; and San Pedro in California.

ROCKCLIFFE was paid off into the Reserve Fleet in Esquimalt on 14 January 1946. In the following year it was decided to commission her as a depot and accommodation ship for the Senior Officer Ships in Reserve (SOSR) and staff. This event took place on 3 March 1947 when Lieutenant-Commander J. W. Goldby, DSC, RCN(R), assumed command.

In a memo dated 14 January 1948, the Flag Officer Pacific Coast recommended that ROCKCLIFFE, who was still the Reserve Fleet depot ship, should be operated during the summer months for week-end cruises by Reserve Fleet personnel. This proposal was objected to in some quarters because it was felt that the reduction in the Reserve Fleet Complement and lack of fuel made it impracticable.

In May 1948, a Naval Board meeting considering the proposals relating to ROCKCLIFFE, noted that it was desirable to have as many ships at sea as possible. Providing, the Board observed, that the placing of HMCS ROCKCLIFFE in full commission did not interfere with training or essential maintenance of the Reserve Fleet, there was no objection to her being manned from local sources and utilized for short cruises to sea. Given such leave, the ship began trials which she completed on 4 June.

This was the time of floods in the Fraser River Valley in British Columbia. HMC Frigate ANTIGONISH was sent to New Westminster to operate as the headquarters ship for Commander O. C. S. Robertson, GM, RD, RCN, who was the Senior Naval Officer In Charge for the Fraser River. On 14 June, University Naval Training Division (UNTD) commitments making it imperative that the frigate be relieved, ROCKCLIFFE was ordered to New Westminster for the purpose. After a two-week stay in this port, she steamed out on the 30th for Ganges Harbour, Salt Spring Island, off the south-eastern part of Vancouver Island, having first embarked ten Supply and Secretariat School men (Supply branch) and twenty-two sea cadets.

In August 1948, another voyage, with men for training aboard, was made to Ganges Harbour. It was reported during this month that the Superintendent of the Defence Research Pacific Naval Laboratory had requested the use of HMC ships fitted with certain anti-submarine equipment to take part in joint USN-RCN operations in Nodales, one of the innumerable channels between Vancouver Island and the mainland, from 8 October 1948 to the end of February 1949. The Flag Officer Pacific Coast proposed using ROCKCLIFFE for this purpose until the return of HMC ships from a Pearl Harbor cruise would permit the assignment of the destroyers, HMCS CRESCENT and ATHABASKAN, to the operations.

On 19 October 1948, ROCKCLIFFE joined the patrol vessel, HMCS CEDARWOOD, south of Brothers Island at the entrance to Esquimalt harbour, and the two ships proceeded in company at ten knots to Active Pass, which leads into the Straits of Georgia, and on to Seymour Narrows and Nodales Channel. Here they were joined by the patrol vessel, HMCS EHKOLI.

From the 21st to the 30th, the ships worked under the direction of the Senior Oceanographer.

In the following month, ROCKCLIFFE joined company off Brothers Island with HMCS CEDARWOOD and EHKOLI, the experimental submarine, USS BAYA and the experimental ship, EPCE(R) 857. All ships proceeded in company to Nodales Channel via Seymour Narrows. This Group was classified as Task Force 214 and, from 10 November to 2 December, was employed in experimental operations. On 3 December, the force proceeded to Nanaimo, from which port ROCKCLIFFE sailed independently to Esquimalt.

The months passed. ROCKCLIFFE remained a depot ship but she did not sail again until 3 September 1949, when, after embarking reserve personnel and two officials of the United Services Institute, she proceeded to Bremerton, Washington, in company with SAULT STE MARIE.

ROCKCLIFFE was finally paid off into reserve on 15 August 1950. On 4 April 1960 she was sold by Crown Assets Disposal Corporation to Burdick Trading Co. Ltd, Vancouver, B.C.

The ship has been awarded the following battle honour:

ATLANTIC 1945

## COMMANDING OFFICERS - HMCS ROCKCLIFFE

30 Sep 44 - 28 Jul 45	Lt	JE Heward	RCNVR
24 Oct 45 - 14 Jan 46	A/LCDR	AE Gough	RCNR
3 Mar 47 - 30 Mar 47	LCDR	JW Golby, DSC,	RCN(R)
31 Mar 47 - 15 Oct 48	CDR	H Kingsley	RCN
16 Oct 48 - 3 Dec 48	LCDR	JB Bugden	RCN
4 Dec 48 - 25 Apr 49	CDR	H Kingsley	RCN
26 Apr 49 - 10 Jul 49	LCDR	JB Bugden	RCN
11 Jul 49 - 6 Sep 49	LCDR	HR Beck	RCN
7 Sep 49 - 21 Apr 50	A/Capt	H Kingsley	RCN
22 Apr 50 - 15 Aug 50	CDR	JS Davis	RCN

