

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

RCN SERIES-PART III  
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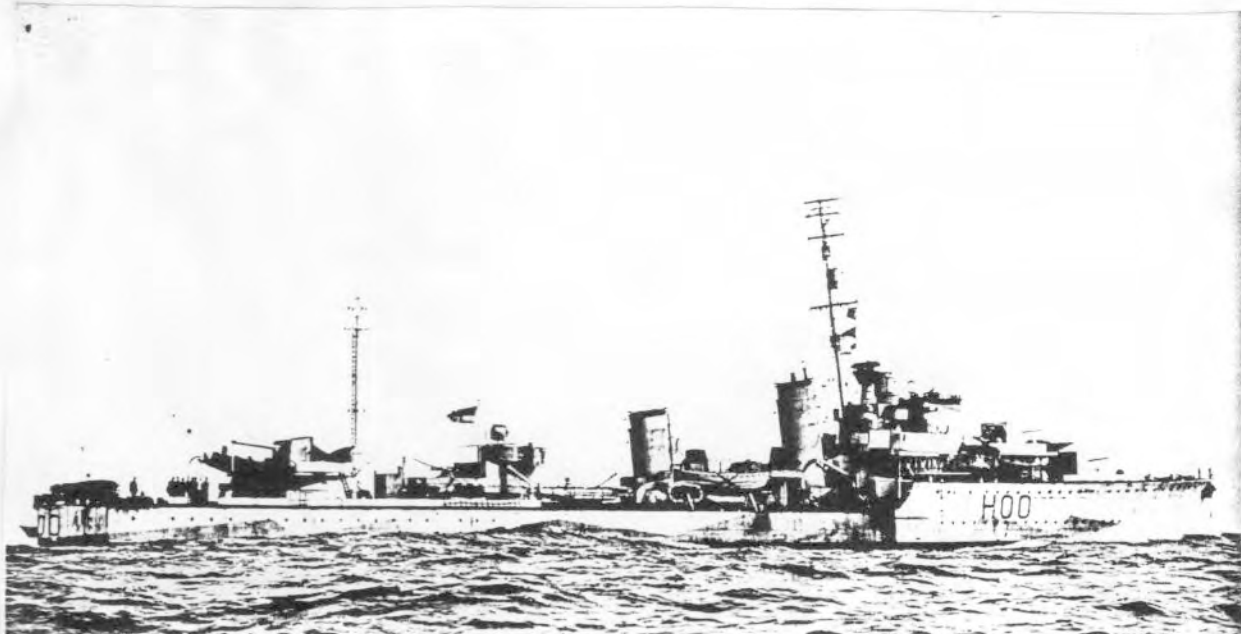
HMCS RESTIGOUCHE-I  
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KEN ANNETT

HMCS RESTIGOUCHE

Class - River class destroyer  
Builder - Portsmouth  
Commissioned - 15 June 1938  
Paid off - sold for scrap  
          - 9 Nov. 1945  
Displacement - 1,375 tons  
Extreme length - 329' 6"  
Extreme breadth - 33'  
Draught - 11' 2"  
Main engines - Parsons geared turbines  
Full speed - 32.25 knots  
Endurance - 4,830 n.m. at 15 knots  
Armament - 4-4.7" guns, 8-21" torpedo  
          tubes, other weapons.

Battle Honours - Atlantic 1939-1945  
                  North Sea 1940  
                  Meditereanean 1943  
                  Biscay 1944



*Restigouche, 1941*

HMCS RESTIGOUCHE (I)

HMCS RESTIGOUCHE, first of name, was formerly HMS COMET, one of four destroyers of the "C" class built for the Royal Navy in Portsmouth Dockyard under the 1929 programme. She was commissioned in the Royal Canadian Navy on 15 June 1938.

The ship was named after the Restigouche River which rises in Madawaska County in Northwestern New Brunswick and flows in a northeasterly direction across Restigouche County to empty into the Bay of Chaleur.

HMCS RESTIGOUCHE left Portland, England, on 6 September 1938 in company with HMCS OTTAWA, the former HMS CRUSADER, and made landfall at Gaspé, Quebec, on the 13th. The following month they left for the West Coast, arriving at Esquimalt, B.C. on 7 November.

The outbreak of war was brought RESTIGOUCHE back to the East Coast. She and OTTAWA sailed for Halifax on 15 November 1939. Arriving on 7 December, they joined the Halifax Local Defence Force. Their first task came three days later when they sailed as local escorts for troopships carrying men of the First Canadian Division.

RESTIGOUCHE sailed herself for the United Kingdom in May, 1940 to reinforce the island kingdom's defences against threatened invasion. On 25 June she entered the harbour of Bayonne, France and embarked fifty-nine persons fleeing before the German advance. When, in the evening of that same day, the destroyer HMCS FRASER collided with HMS CALCUTTA, cruiser, she rescued 107 men from FRASER and six from CALCUTTA.

At the end of April, 1944, RESTIGOUCHE was withdrawn from mid-ocean escort duty to join EG-12, a group formed at this time to carry out anti-submarine patrols in support of the armies invading the continent. On 5 July the RESTIGOUCHE and her group attacked

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three armed enemy trawlers in the English Channel. All three were hit and at least one sank. On 7 August, after the group was joined by HMCS ASSINIBOINE, an attack was opened on three more armed trawlers. All the enemy ships were set on fire and two of them were driven ashore. In August, Support Groups EG-11 and EG-12 worked together and in early September they were merged formally as EG-11. On 18 August members of this group destroyed the submarine U-621 in the Bay of Biscay. RESTIGOUCHE was present, but received no credit for the kill. She was patrolling in case more enemy vessels might be lurking in the area.

In the Spring of 1945 HMCS RESTIGOUCHE was withdrawn from EG-11 and reassigned to the Halifax Force. She continued with local convoying until the end of the war.

In July and August, 1945, she made two trips to the Clyde to bring naval personnel home from HMCS NIOBE, the RCN depot in Greenock, Scotland.

HMCS RESTIGOUCHE was paid off on 6 October 1945 at Sydney, N.S. In November she was sold to International Iron and Metal Company of Hamilton, Ontario and towed up the St. Lawrence River to be scrapped.



The Ships of Canada's Naval Force  
1910 - 1981  
Macpherson and Burgess

### RESTIGOUCHE

Completed in 1932 as HMS *Comet*, she was purchased at the same time as *Ottawa* and commissioned as *Restigouche* at Chatham, U.K., the same day. Like her sister, she arrived at Esquimalt November 7, 1938, and left for Halifax November 15, 1939. She performed local escort duties from that port until May 24, 1940, when she left for Plymouth. Upon arriving there on May 31 *Restigouche* was assigned to Western Approaches Command. While assisting in the evacuation of French ports she rescued survivors of *Fraser*. She left Liverpool at the end of August for a brief refit at Halifax, returning to the U.K. in January, 1941. In June, 1941, "*Rustyguts*" was allocated to Newfoundland Command, and in April, 1943, became a member of EG C-4, in the interval toiling ceaselessly as a mid-ocean escort. On December 13, 1941, she suffered storm damage en route to join convoy ON.44, and extensive repairs were carried out at Greenock. She was allocated to EG 12 in May, 1944, for invasion duties, including

*Continued on p. 156*

### RESTIGOUCHE

D-Day, and afterward carried out Channel and Biscay patrols from her base at Plymouth. She returned to Canada in September, 1944, for a major refit at Saint John, N.B. and Halifax, and upon completion proceeded to Bermuda for working up. Returning to Halifax on February 14, 1945, she performed various local duties, and after VE-Day was employed for three months bringing home military personnel from Newfoundland. Paid off on October 5, 1945, she was broken up the following year.



## OLD "RUSTYGUTS" WINS A BATTLE

*Many ships of Canada's wartime Navy knew what it was to feel the force of a full Atlantic gale. Destroyers, frigates, corvettes, minesweepers and other craft — all had occasion at one time or another to do battle with the elements. Seas that built up to awe-inspiring heights, then smashed at them with pile-driver force . . . shrieking winds so strong they plucked the crests from the waves and blew them along in clouds of stinging, smothering spray . . . sodden clothing . . . broken crockery . . . clammy messdecks a-slosh with salt water . . . these things, and more, combined to test to the limit the strength and endurance of our ships and the men who sailed them.*

*Out of the war's many stirring storm stories, one has been selected for the Christmas issue of The "Crow'snest." It has been chosen because it is appropriate to the season. This is it:*

ON the morning of December 12, 1941, a group of seven ships sailed from Hvalfjord, Iceland, with orders to rendezvous with and take over escort of a convoy bound for North America.

The group consisted of the Canadian destroyer "Restigouche" (Senior Officer) the Canadian corvettes "Agassiz", "Amherst", "Bittersweet" "Chicoutimi" and "Orillia", and the British corvette "Celandine".

Spirits were high in "old Rustyguts", for Halifax was her ultimate destination, and for many of her crew that would mean leave and Christmas at home.

The wind was fresh, the temperature not far above freezing, and

occasionally a squall of snow swept over the line of ships; but there was little, other than the usual falling barometer, to indicate the state of things to come.

Early in the afternoon, the first real portent arrived in the form of a signal advising that the convoy had been slowed by bad weather and was considerably behind schedule. The "Restigouche" immediately went up to 22 knots and drove on ahead to search for the merchantmen.

She failed to find any trace of the convoy by dark, and so returned to the corvettes. Throughout the remainder of the night the ships proceeded, in line abreast, along the path it was calculated the convoy would follow.

Early in the morning of the 13th the barometer began to fall rapidly and the wind and seas to increase. By afternoon the glass was down to an unbelievably low 27.76 inches. Then the storm broke in all its fury.

Although contact with the convoy had by this time been established and its approximate position (some 30 miles distant) ascertained, there was to be no rendezvous.

A matter of greater concern than the relief of the escort now confronted the Senior Officer of the Canadian group: The little ships under his charge must be preserved from the onslaughts of what had developed into a full-fledged, raging hurricane.

### **Every Man for Himself**

"Restigouche" ordered the corvettes to heave to, suggesting that they endeavor to make good as nearly as possible a course that would intercept the convoy. He himself did the

same. It was now every ship for herself.

It was still daylight but the wind-driven spray had reduced the visibility to zero. The seas were mountainous, the wind was a thing of incredible power.

The stubby corvettes bobbed up and over the seas. The thin-plated destroyer, with her long, narrow hull, knifed into them and was slugged unmercifully. Worse still was her tendency to fall off into the trough; the rudder was almost useless and only by using port and starboard propellers alternately was the "Restigouche" kept pointing into the weather.

Within half an hour from the time the storm broke, all the destroyer's canvas covers, splinter mats and carley floats had been ripped off or torn to shreds, and her boats reduced to matchwood. At 1700 the foremast split, with a tremendous crack, below the crownest. The upper section broke off and the steel lower section bent back until the stump rested against the fore-funnel. There it was secured.

To the eerie shrieking of the wind was added the wail of the ship's siren; aerials and halliards from the mast had been borne down on the siren wires. This lasted for ten minutes, until the tangle had been cleared away.

The ship's wireless went with the mast, but the W/T department wasted no time in rigging a jury aerial. Within half an hour they had broadcast a test message and received an acknowledgment from Whitehall.

### **Carnage on the Quarterdeck**

The seas were playing similar havoc on the quarterdeck. Depth charges, torn loose from their lash-

ings were rolling wildly about, and the tiller flat had been broken off by the after funnel. The funnel itself was knocked 45 degrees to starboard.

With every roll, water cascaded into the two flats and it became imperative to cover the open hatches. This was undertaken by Sub-Lieut. Moore, RCN, and the ship's main, Chief Petty Officer William Montgomery. They were successful, but not without cost. As they were completing the job, Sub-Lieut. Moore was thrown against a depth charge rail, breaking his leg.

There was four feet of water in the tiller flat and six feet in the stewards' flat. The former was pumped out during the night but no headway could be made in the latter, due to a clogged line.

There was danger that the pressure of water in the stewards' flat would force the bulkhead between the flat and the wardroom, so some of the damage control party undertook to shore the bulkhead from the wardroom side. They found the wardroom so full of fumes from calcium flares set off by water in adjoining compartment that they had to don Salvus breathing apparatus to avoid being overcome.

Meanwhile, up above on the quarter-deck, others were engaged in the dangerous task of corraling the stampeding depth charges and jettisoning them over the side.

Up forward, the situation steadily became worse. The forepart was taking a frightful pounding. The galley fires went out, to be replaced by a steam jet rigged by an ingenious engine room department. At 4 o'clock on the morning of the 14th the main steering system failed and for an hour the ship had to be steered by main engines. At 5 o'clock a sea struck with such violence that the starboard dynamo was knocked out of action and the ship thrown into darkness until repairs could be made. The gyro and steering engine alarms added their notes to the din.

Dawn brought a slight cessation of

the wind but no relief to the situation. It was, in fact, becoming increasingly grave. The forward magazine and shell room were found to be flooded to a depth of about seven feet and two oil fuel tanks were believed to have leaked salt water, pointing in both cases to the likelihood of sprung plates in the ship's bottom.

In these circumstances, it was decided to save the forepart of the ship from any further pounding by altering course so as to bring the wind and sea directly astern. There were some anxious moments while the "Restigouche" rolled dangerously in the trough; many remaining upper deck fittings were carried away as the seas struck her broadside on, but she gradually came around and nosed on to her new course.

This seemed like comparatively smooth sailing, but steering was every bit as difficult as before and the danger of broaching to persisted. However, the quartermasters quickly got on to the new technique and handled the wheel with skill.

The ship was in such a state that the captain considered it essential that he make port as soon as possible. Halifax was now out of the question, and at noon he decided to make for the Clyde. To him at about the same time came a signal advising him that the convoy he had set out to meet had been dispersed, in accordance with a suggestion made by him in an earlier message. This relieved him of his responsibilities in that connection.

#### **Cold Water, Hot Jive**

The next day, the 14th, was a Sunday, but there was no Sunday routine on board the "Restigouche." Throughout the day, officers and men toiled at repairing their ship or bailing out the flooded compartments.

Except in the case of the tiller flat, the ship's pumps had not been able to cope with the ingress of water, and in order to make any progress in reducing the level in the flooded compartments it had become necessary to organize "bucket brigades."

Through all this the ship's radio-speaker system continued to operate and the crew worked cheerfully at its various tasks to the accompani-

ment of the latest swing music. Jazz may have seemed incongruous at a time when the "Restigouche" was fighting for her life, but it definitely played a part in maintaining morale.

Her crew was still on the job when, on the afternoon of the 16th, the "Restigouche," with a decided list to port and evidence of her mauling all too plain, steamed at a triumphant 26 knots up the Clyde and made her way, at sunset, through the harbor gate at Greenock.

It was to be three months before "old Rustyguts" would be fit for sea again.

Like their ship, her officers and men were bruised, battered, exhausted; many had had articles of kit and other valuables destroyed or damaged; worst of all, the Christmas at home that so many of them had been joyfully anticipating a few days before was not to be.

They had reason to look sourly on the world in general and destroyers in particular.

Instead, as their ship drew up to her berth, to be cheered like the heroine she was by a welcoming crowd of dockyard "mateys", there was pride in her men's bearing and humor in their eyes. They and their ship had fought a good fight—and won.

Summing up in his report of proceedings, the commanding officer of the "Restigouche", Lieut.-Cdr. (now Commander) D. W. Piers, RCN, stated:

"The behaviour of the entire ship's company, their incessant labours for over 48 hours, and their continued cheerfulness, were entirely in keeping with the highest traditions of the Service. There was not a dry stitch of clothing left in the ship. The only hot food available was that which could be prepared by using a steam jet. The steam heating and water supply had to be shut off. The decision to proceed to Greenock, as opposed to the long hoped-for Christmas at home in Halifax, was accepted cheerfully. Every man, regardless of rank, rating or branch, worked ceaselessly day and night for the good of the ship."

## DESTROYER ACTION

(From Lieut. Wessely Hicks, RCNVR)

A UNITED KINGDOM PORT(--For the second time in a little over a month, A Canadian destroyer group, led by H.M.C.S."QU'APPELLE", has slid in close to the enemy-occupied coast of France and destroyed three heavily-armed German trawlers. The group, which has been harassing the enemy since before "D" day, reached port today with a total of six enemy ships to its credit. A Royal Navy destroyer, H.M.S."ALBRIGHTON", commanded by Lieut. J.J.S. Hooker, R.N., shared in the Canadian ships' latest kill.

In this second action, the Canadian group contacted the enemy shortly after 2 o'clock on a night which was lighted fitfully by the moon. Visibility varied from average to poor. The ~~sea~~ sea was calm. When first sighted, the German trawlers were about three miles distant, sliding along close to the French Coast towards Penmarch Point about 25 miles south of Brest at an estimated speed of 12 knots. The Canadians were headed north on an opposite course at 15 knots.

Almost as soon as contact was made, the destroyers altered course and proceeded eastwards towards the coast of France, closing the enemy. As the gap narrowed, the destroyers again altered course and came up astern of the Germans, increasing speed to 20 knots and travelling on a parallel course.

Shortly after 2.30 in the morning, with the trawlers no more than 2 miles distant, the destroyers illuminated with star shell and the action was joined.



In line ahead, the Canadian ships, led by H.M.C.S. "QU'APPELLE", and followed closely by H.M.S. "ALBRIGHTON", H.M.C.S. "ASSINIBOINE", H.M.C.S. "SKEENA" and H.M.C.S. "RESTIGOUCHE", surged past the trawlers, pounding them with their 4.7's. The Germans dropped smoke floats in an effort to escape, but the destroyers clung to them like burrs on a woollen sweater.

On that first run past, repeated hits were scored on the enemy ships. Then the destroyers came about and went in again, and once more the three trawlers were pounded. It was during the second run that the enemy ships, in the obscurity of their own smoke screen, were observed to be firing on each other.

"The smoke screen apparently confused the Germans more than it did us," says Commander John Dudley Birch, D.S.C., R.N.R., the Senior Officer of the destroyer group, "for they started firing at each other. We were quite pleased to see them doing our work for us."

When the destroyers completed their second run past, two of the German ships had been forced ashore, burning fiercely. The third scampered off to the south, but was picked up by the destroyers immediately after a third hammering run past the grounded ships.

"QU'APPELLE" scored an immediate direct hit on the third trawler and the rest of the group smashed it in succession. H.M.C.S. "QU'APPELLE" and H.M.C.S. "SKEENA" broke off the action then. H.M.C.S. "ASSINIBOINE", commanded by Lieut.-Commander Robert W. Welland, D.S.C., R.C.N., and H.M.C.S. "RESTIGOUCHE", commanded by Lieut.-Commander David W. Groos, R.C.N., of Victoria, B.C., led by H.M.S. "ALBRIGHTON", continued the engagement until the enemy ships were completely destroyed.

Approximately one hour and ten minutes after the first salvo had been fired, the action was broken off. Only one of the Canadian ships was hit and she received very superficial damage. ~~■~~ No casualties were suffered.

So close were the Canadian ships operating to the coast of France that a shell from one of the destroyers set fire to a building. All through the action it burned, an innocent beacon on the shore. German shore batteries illuminated the destroyers from time to time and twice shells smacked the water about 40 yards from H.M.C.S. "QU'APPELLE".

"They were more of a nuisance than a danger," says Lieutenant Commander P.P.X. Russell, R.C.N., the commanding officer of H.M.C.S. "SKEENA". "They did no damage, of course, but we had to watch them all the time."

It was just a little over a month ago that this same destroyer group waltzed in on the Germans' doorstep at Brest and hammered three German armed trawlers into blazing hulks. I was aboard the destroyer H.M.C.S. "RESTIGOUCHE" during the first engagement. In that action, the Canadian ships closed the enemy to less than a mile and pounded them with every gun they possessed.

It was a mad, destructive night, ripped by concentrated Oerlikon and Pom-Pom fire and punctuated by the crash of 4.7's and six-pounders. Officers in the group to whom I have talked say that the first was by far the more ~~■~~ exciting action.

This time, the Canadians stood off and used their heavy guns, tearing the Germans to pieces outside the range of their armament. In the first action, fought in the confined waters off Brest, the Canadians were forced to close the enemy who concentrated heavy fire on them. The destroyers suffered casualties then, but more than avenged them. Now, they repeated the punishment, came off with no casualties, and proved that they were more than a match for the Germans, even on their home ground.

