

**RCN LCdr(ret) Roy Busby CLDO**(Clearance Diving Officer) was born at Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, England in 1932 and joined the RCN in 1954 at HMCS YORK, Toronto, Ontario as an Acting SLt. (SSA), awaiting a Regular Force Divisional Officers Course. On 15 February 1954 he underwent his Divisional Officers Course at HMCS CORNWALLIS in Nova Scotia, thereafter becoming a MARS Officer. Roy then served aboard Minesweepers HMCS MINAS 189 and HMCS SAULT STE. MARIE 176. In 1956 he took his CLDO course in the Royal Navy HMS VERNON in Portsmouth, England. Roy also served aboard HMC HURON and HMCS HAIDA in 1958. He retired from the RCN in Ottawa, Ontario in 1988 – a total of 34 years in Canada’s Navy!

My involvement with the RCN Diving Branch began in February 1956 aboard HMCS SAULT STE. MARIE while at anchor in Tortola Bay, British Virgin Islands. The EO(Engineering Officer) wanted to replace a sea water inlet valve on the bottom of the ship, and he asked my cabin mate Lt. Jean Denis Vincent, who was qualified CLD\*, if he would go down and insert a wooden plug in the aperture. Jean asked me if I would like to go down with him and help. So, on bathing suit, weight belt, fins, mask and diving tanks, and away we went. From then on, I was hooked!

When we got back to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Jean asked me if I would like to go to England for a year on a long diving course with the RN. Apparently he had seen a message in the Ships Log requesting volunteers for the long CLDO course, so we both volunteered! Then began three weeks of sheer freezing hell over at the RCN Diving School, which was located in two concrete barges alongside the NAD (Naval Armament Depot)berth in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. This is where we met Lt. Alan Sagar, OIC of the Diving School and, among others, LS Andrew Nelson “Ike” Eisner, who we later found could be quite fiendish! We were joined there by Lt. Al Booth, and for the next three weeks we learned the basics of CDBA(Clearance Divers Breathing apparatus) in swim mode for ship’s bottom searches, and CDBA attached to the Sladen Suit(Clammy Death!) for jackstay searches. All of which we performed without gloves in the freezing waters of Halifax Harbour. This is where we learned about the “fiend” in Ike Eisner, when he had us warm our frozen hands in hot water!!! Following this pre course, we were then informed that we had been selected to be loaded on a course in HMS VERNON over in England, commencing in mid- April 1956. So off we sailed on the RMS EMPRESS OF SCOTLAND as First Class passengers, the last time we would be treated as First Class, until we had successfully completed the RN course and were on our way back to Canada, in January 1957. While in England doing our in-routine at HMS VERNON, we met LCdr Ross Dickinson, who had just completed the CLDO course as part of the first contingent of Canadian Officers to undergo this RN CLDO course. I believe there were six of them on that course, but I can only recall five names, Lt. Art Rowse, Lt. Frank Bayfield Davis, Lt. George Colwell and SLt. Mike Lafontaine. On completion of our course, Jean and I were posted to CANOCDU ONE (Canadian Operational Clearance Diving Unit – One), under the command of LCdr Charlie Smedley in HMCS GRANBY. Other Officers were LCdr Ross Dickinson(XO – Executive Officer, or second in Command) and Lt. Len Corbett. Also at the Unit was Lt. Tommy Thompson, who ran the R & D Shop. Charlie and Len were both ex WW II TGM’s(Torpedo Gunner’sMates), and Tommy was an Ordnance type. Al Booth was posted to CANOCDU TWO in Esquimalt, British Columbia. This then was my introduction to the RCN world of diving, and pretty well ends the narrative part of my recollection of the Clearance Diving Branch up to that time. The next section will deal with the facets of our training with the RN, and explain the areas of underwater activities upon which they place emphasis, which I will describe in separate sections.

**TRAINING WITH THE ROYAL NAVY.** The Diving School was located in DEEPWATER, a captured German ocean-going Tug moored alongside at HMS VERNON, and this is where we had our initiation to surface swimming in the RN dry suit. The DEEPWATER was just over 200 feet long, and held away from the jetty by three "catamarans" on one side, and three more catamarans holding off CLEARWATER, an other vessel on the outboard side. The order was given *"Over the side now, and around and over the cats, go!"* Much later, it seemed, twelve very exhausted Naval Officers crawled up the ladder and flopped on the deck, to be told *"Grab your flippers, let's go for a run!"* The course was completely designed around the theory and practical use of the CDBA, with its application to "Operation Awkward", involving ships bottom searches. The emphasis was on speed of the search from the time that "Awkward" was called. To this end, the first weeks of the course were held at an old torpedo testing range on Horsea Island outside Portsmouth, for our "conditioning". This is a man-made lake, 30 feet deep and approximately 1000 yards long. It was ideal for the CDBA set in the O2 mode, which limited the set to 33 feet. Also the lake was ideal for a morning run around it, in an Avon dry suit to "warm us up", followed by either a surface swim up and back down the lake, or an underwater swim up and back as far as we could make it back, before the O2 ran out! Initially, we were issued Avon rubber dry suits, which were not very comfortable, and hell to run in. Plus you had to ensure your bladder was well drained before the morning fun, or else you ended up with one warm leg! About two months into the course we were honoured to be the first course to be issued the new Dunlop suit - two way stretch suits which were much more comfortable to wear, both on the surface and underwater.

The next phase was the use of the Sladen suit, with the CDBA set in the 60/40 and the 40/60 O2/N2 modes, carrying out bottom jackstay searches to depths in excess of 33 feet to carry out searches for bottom ordnance, as opposed to limpets on ships hulls. During this phase, we were given a brief introduction to the MRS(Mine Recovery Suit). This was something like a Standard diving suit, except it was non-magnetic and acoustically safe, for working on mines of all types. It was a two piece suit sealed around the middle. On completion of all this training, we were given a brief exposure to the Siebe Gorman "hard hat" Standard suit, and an even briefer exposure to the new RN CABA(Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus). We were told in no uncertain terms that they would not be necessary to us in our future, as we would be Clearance Diving Officers and not general purpose Divers, and would not be using air as a diving medium!!!! Before proceeding to our next phase of training, we did get a chance to play with a WW II chariot in Horsea Lake. Our final phase of diving training was carried out in Portland Harbour, further down along the coast, where we practiced and carried out day and night attacks on warships moored in the harbour. The most interesting facet of this training was that we all got to carry out lock-out/lock-in operations from two Xcraft - HMS STICKLEBACK and HMS SHRIMP, which were four-man midget submarines. I'm sure we all felt like those intrepid Divers who carried out the sinking of the German Battleship TIRPITZ in the Norwegian Fjord - only without the danger. Another very interesting phase of our training, was the free ascent to the surface training in the 110 foot submarine escape training tower at HMS DOLPHIN, across Portsmouth Harbour from HMS VERNON. That is one exercise that really gives one confidence to know that an ascent can be made safely from 110 feet without diving equipment.

**MINE DISPOSAL TRAINING.** With our diving training finished(no more CDBA, long runs and swims, but most of all – no more charging cylinders with a hand booster pump), we proceeded to the Mine Disposal School. Here, an "ancient" RN Lt. WW II mine disposal expert, baffled us for four weeks with an amazing array of British, German and the odd Japanese mines of all shapes and sizes, arming, fuzing and firing devices, along with handouts on how to de-arm them, and the warning there would be a written test to follow at the end of the course. We think he took pity on us, because all 12 of us passed. He did advise

that all of us had been blown up at least once! This was followed by a week at the demolition range, learning various RN explosive techniques involved with the destruction of underwater ordnance.

**BOMB DISPOSAL TRAINING.** This was a four week course carried out at the Royal Engineers Bomb Disposal School in Kent. The course started with bomb location techniques employing magnetometers and grid searches, with the object of locating the bomb, it's depth, and the angle at which it is lying. Next step was for all to grab shovels and start digging, with instructions on the various shafting techniques that were being used. Then on to the classrooms to study the theory of arming, fuzing and firing mechanisms in mostly WW II German bombs of differing types, and a few British and some American. We were not shown any current British or US bombs as most of their mechanisms were classified! And besides, the current workload in Britain was disposal of WW II German bombs, which were still being disposed of in 1956. The end of the course was more practical instruction in the use of explosives in the disposal of UXO's(Unexploded Ordnance). An amusing incident occurred during a lecture on the rendering safe of a German 250 kg GP bomb. The lecturer, Q(Quartermaster Sergeant) Thomas, noticed a Canadian Officer, who shall be nameless, who was apparently not paying attention. He asked what would happen if one of these bombs were to be found somewhere in Canada. The miscreant answered, with a straight face, *"With Canadian ingenuity and an eye for business, someone would put a fence around it and charge admission"*. Complete silence in the classroom, until Q Thomas broke into a smile, and then roared with laughter!!! On completion of this phase, we all returned to HMS VERNON for final lectures, some study time, followed by final exams, and that was the end of our CLDO training – we were all now experts! We three Canadians were now fully qualified to go home, and do what? The RN Officers were all assigned to various operational mine clearance duties around the United Kingdom, ready to put their new-found knowledge to work,

**SALVAGE TRAINING.** This training had been added to the content of the Canadian CLDO course, and was carried out at HMS SAFEGUARD in Rosyth, Scotland at the RN Salvage School. It consisted of four weeks of the theory of raising sunken vessels, by de-watering by pump, de-watering by air, and lifting by means of inflatable pontoons. This was all carried out in a classroom, with no practical training. The next phase consisted of practical training in the use of various techniques of surface cutting and welding, followed by the Seafire underwater cutting torch, and the oxy/arc cutting torch. This latter training was carried out in a glass sided tank, in the Siebe Gorman "hard hat" suit. It was a very gentlemanly experience, after the rigours of Portsmouth. In Scotland it was winter and very cold, so the civilian diving "handlers" warmed our underwear in front of an open fire, before helping us into it!! So this was the end of our training with the RN, and we were ready to return to Canada clutching the piece of paper saying we were qualified CLDO's. We all took some well-earned leave to enjoy London.

This first section covers my initial experience with the Diving Branch of the RN, in which I started to explain the difference between my "basic" training with the RN, and the different world I entered when I returned to Canada. My next section will cover all that I learned during my years as an active, and inactive Diver in the RCN, and about what I can remember of what took place before I became part of the history of Canadian Military Diving. I believe that this was what our friend in Switzerland, Haydn was looking for, ie. the way Canada, and other Commonwealth Navies formed their own diving organizations, and developed their own training systems designed to meet their national requirements. To be continued.