

Part 10 of this Diving Branch History is devoted to all those intrepid Naval Divers who came before us in the early years of Naval Diving in Canada. It will include the Diver's stories from the pre WW II, WW II and post WW II (up to the early 1950's) years, when the underwater tasks were conducted utilizing Standard Dress with Mk 5 helmet. These stories are as told to the Editor, or from news articles of that era. Part 10 will be about diving experiences in Newfoundland & Labrador, Part 10A will be for diving on the West Coast, while Part 10B will be for diving stories of Halifax based Diving during WW II.

Albert J. "Ab" Hanley. When one reads about medals being awarded in World War Two, one is inclined to think of heroic actions in the shock and hell of battle. Decorations call up pictures of valiant deeds in the face of enemy fire, but there are a great many which we never hear about, which nonetheless call for raw courage in the performance of routine day-to-day duties. Such a one was the British Empire Medal (BEM) awarded to Able Seaman Albert J. "Ab" Hanley of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN). Perhaps few people outside of Hanley's parents and friends in Saint John, New Brunswick know the story behind Hanley's decoration, because there wasn't much mention of it in the Press, but the fact remains that he performed an act of valour which saved an important war harbour from a serious accident. So in St. John's, Newfoundland they went to bed one night, little realizing the heroism that had been displayed in their harbour that day, and Ab was just as glad – because he is an excessively quiet, modest young sailor who is content with his lot as an Able Seaman, and doesn't ask any accolade for what he considers the routine performance of his duty. The odd part of this story, is that it all came about by chance. You see, Hanley is a Naval Diver, and Divers are a sort of clan unto themselves, unlike any other branch of the Service. They work in rotation, like the batting order of a baseball team, each man doing his job as his turn came up. No one can force them to dive against their will, but in the Newfoundland Command at least, no man has been known to refuse a dive. Well, about the day of which I'm speaking, a difficult job came up, and it seems that it is Ab's turn to go down. When the Diving Officer for the Base, Commissioned Boatswain (Bos'n) Lawrence "Lon" Chaney thumbed through his list, and saw that Hanley was in line for the next task, he felt a certain sense of relief. "Just the man" he mused, "He's got to be steady as a rock, as this is going to be a tough job." It was an extremely risky operation. A depth charge, laden with 350 lbs of TNT and two loaded depth charge pistols had been lost off the stern of a warship tied up alongside, and had to be recovered from the harbour bottom. As long as they remained on the ocean bed, they were a dire hazard – not only to the valuable warships lining the jetties, but to the buildings, and the street front beyond. An explosion might cause a major catastrophe. It was not known whether or not the depth charge was set to "safe." Up to a certain depth it would be impotent. But it was known that the two pistols were loaded with a highly explosive chemical, and that they needed only a slight jar to be detonated. This, then, was the highly ticklish job that Hanley faced; to don his diving gear, go down to the harbour bottom, grope around in the murky fastness of the submarine world, and return to the surface with the depth charge and pistols intact. Visibility on the bottom was approximately seven feet at the best, but Ab showed a cheerful grin as they screwed his metal headpiece on, waved goodbye in a lumbering, top-heavy salute as he backed down the ladder, and the bubbles closed in over his head. Thirty feet down he touched bottom, and commenced his eerie underwater search, with the visibility becoming near zero as he moved around on the bottom. What went on in his mind throughout his dive, only he knows. His shipmates on the boat up top, crossed their fingers and kept pumping air. At the end of an hour, Hanley's lifeline jerked twice, and they hauled it up breathlessly. There, dangling from the line in a precise sailor's knot was a dull, metallic object, not unlike a grease gun, which they identified as one of the depth charge pistols. The crew heaved a sigh of relief – that was one third of the lost equipment located. They didn't have long to wait for the second signal as another 15 minutes passed, the line jerked, and the topside crew began to cautiously pull up the salvage. This time the hoisting job was much harder, and as the line grew shorter they saw the grey,

cylindrical outline of the depth charge breaking the surface. Warrant Officer Lon Chaney immediately examined it as to its safe, or not, condition. It was found to be primed to explode – but at a depth greater than that at which the young Diver was working. Just 20 feet separated Ab Hanley from a blast that would have rocked the whole of St. John's harbour!! The men on the Diving Tender all breathed a bit easier, and hauled Hanley up for a hot cup of tea, after which he returned to the harbour bottom to continue the search for the second pistol, with renewed vigour. To look at him, you'd think he was simply looking for lost lobster traps. Not a line in his face betrayed the tension and anxiety of the moment. Another 20 minutes passed – half an hour – 45 minutes – another hour, this one was being elusive. But then, all of a sudden, came the signal Lon Chaney and his men had been hoping for. Two sudden sharp jerks on the line meant that Hanley was calling for them to hoist it up. They hoisted – and up through the dirty grey wastes of that wartime harbour came the second depth pistol, intact – his job was done. He was hauled to the surface, had his helmet taken off, and said "now boys, how about some lunch?" The people of St. John's walked the street a few scant yards away, heedless of the undersea drama which had just saved the harbour from a disaster! That's the story of Able Seaman Albert "Ab" Hanley, for which he was later awarded the British Empire Medal. It is typical of the dozens of untold acts of heroism which these gallant young Canadian Navy lads dismiss as "routine duty."

RCN Warrant Officer Lawrence "Lon" Chaney & RCNVR Albert J. "Ab" Hanley. At an Atlantic Port, One of the most hazardous jobs ever undertaken by Divers from this Royal Canadian Navy Base has been successfully completed by a courageous young Able Seaman from Saint John, New Brunswick. His name is Albert "Ab" Hanley. He went down to the ocean bed in ice-cold water to recover a depth charge laden with high explosive, and two armed depth charge pistols, which could have blown him to bits had he stepped on them with his 30 lb Diver's boots. The depth charge and pistols were accidentally lost off the stern of a docked Destroyer, and it was not known whether the depth charge was primed or set to "safe". Divers under the command of Warrant Boatswain(Bos'n) Lawrence "Lon" Chaney, RCN of Vernon, British Columbia and Victoria were summoned. The diving crew works on a rotational basis, and it was Able Seaman Hanley's turn to dive. Although Hanley had been diving for only 18 months of his three and a half years in the RCNVR, he is rated by Chaney as "one of the best in the business." "He was an ideal man for the Job," Chaney said, "steady as a rock. He started at 09:30 in the morning and had recovered everything by Noon." The chief danger was that Hanley might step on one of the pistols in the murky underwater light. They were charged with a highly potent chemical, and Warrant Bos'n Chaney feared that his man might stub his toe on one with his heavy brass-capped diving boots. Although he could see less than ten feet, Hanley worked coolly and carefully, and in an hour he had recovered one pistol, then the depth charge came up approximately 5 minutes later. It was found primed to explode at a deeper depth than the harbour bottom, so it was fortunate the Diver was working in only 30 ft of water. Ab Hanley took about another hour to search and locate the second pistol, and a small steel bar which was part of the depth charge equipment. The bar was the most difficult to find, but with the two pistols and the depth charge safely on the surface, he regarded the mopping up operation as "a cinch." Ab Hanley said there was nothing heroic about his actions, but at the same time, he confessed to having a "few underwater gurgles of relief".

Lawrence "Lon" Chaney, originally from Vernon, BC joined the RCN at HMCS NADEN in Victoria BC in 1929 as a Torpedo Rating, and in 1934 he was drafted as a Leading Seaman to the Royal Navy establishment HMS EXCELLENT (Whale Island) in Portsmouth, England where he qualified as a Navy Diver(DV). In his training for DV, he used the Seibe Gorman hard hat suit, and a smoke apparatus, most likely Salvus Gear, that could be used for diving provided the Diver did not bend over – if he did, the Diver promptly drowned! Lon served at both the East and West Coast Diving Units, and was involved with repairs to Convoy ships and their Escort vessels, which encompassed damage from storms at sea, enemy action damage and normal diving husbandry requirements, as well as sunken aircraft recovery

dives in the waters of Newfoundland. Lon still remembers his landlord in St. John's met him one morning, while he was walking down to the dockyard to go to work, and the landlord started waving the local newspaper and shouting "Lon, Lon, you got your picture in the paper this morning By, but they got the wrong face on he!" In checking out the offending picture, Lon noted it was one of the other CPO's that the paper had transposed for Lon Chaney. His landlord also had a blacksmiths ship just outside the Dockyard gates. During this period, Lon was promoted to Warrant rank and, as such, was entitled to be called "Mister", a signal event in the Lower Deck at that time. As for friends in the diving world, he considers all of these great Divers to be his friend. He has always felt that the people in the Diving branch are the cream of the Navy, for whom he has the highest respect and admiration. To have served and worked alongside these Divers has been a real privilege. He remembers Howard Smedley in Victoria, Frank Law in Thunder Bay, Ab Hanley in Saint John, George Stagg on Vancouver Island, and thinks often of Bert Drake and John Brown. He knows of at least two of his friends who have "slipped the cable" a number of years ago, those being Robert Swederski from Winnipeg and the other being one of the old timers – Charlie Wilmot, both of whom he has been privileged to serve with on the East Coast and in Newfoundland. Before World War Two had ended, the RCN was lucky to have obtained some new enemy diving equipment that was captured in Italy and sent over to the RCN to be tried out for the first time ever in our Northern climate in the middle of Winter. You guessed it, that meant putting it on trial in Newfoundland waters – *I believe there must be a moral behind this story somewhere!!!* Mister Chaney goes on to say "Now however, this is not anything special.

LCdr Lawrence Chaney, MBE CD RCN of Vernon, BC joined RCN as a Boy Seaman March 1, 1929, promoted to Warrant rank August 21, 1942 served in *NADEN, ARMENTIERES, THIEPVAL, VANCOUVER, HMS VICTORY, HMS WARSPITE, HMS VERNON, HMS EXCELLENT, HMS NELSON, HMS IRON DUKE and Canadian ships HMCS SKEENA, NOOTKA, FRASER, ASSINIBOINE, STADACONA, HAMILTON, OTTAWA, PRESERVER, AVALON, ROCKLIFFE, ONTARIO & CARIBOU*. Last appointment, Diving Officer West Coast and Officer-in-Charge of Operational Diving Unit. Commenced leave June 13, 1961. Retires 28 February 1962.

NO MORE MISTERS, In 1950 the old and honorable title of "Mister", used in the Navy for many years to designate Warrant Officers, Commissioned Officers from Warrant Rank and Midshipmen, when referring to them in correspondence, has been discontinued. In future, a Warrant Officer, Commissioned Officer from Warrant Rank or a Midshipman will be referred to in correspondence in the same manner as other Officers, i.e. his rank will precede his name, which will be followed by the component of the Naval Forces to which he belongs. Example:

Commissioned Gunner J.L. Jones, RCN
Midshipman (E) R.J. Engine, RCN

A Newfoundland Port it was reported in March 1944 that a team of 10 Royal Canadian Navy Divers have been commended by the Flag Officer, Newfoundland, Commodore C.R.H. Taylor, RCN for cutting its way through four feet of ice to effect underwater repairs to a damaged Corvette. The crew worked for two days in 27 degree F temperature water, and got the ship out to sea in time to overtake its convoy. In charge of the exacting operation was Warrant Boatswain Lawrence "Lon" Chaney of Vernon and Victoria BC. He had the satisfaction of completing the job 30 minutes ahead of the promised time. Chaney was called at 10:00 PM on a recent Thursday night for a "rush job". An important piece of gear had been damaged, and the Corvette could not sail until it was repaired. After assessing it, Chaney said he hoped to have the job done by 5:00 PM of the following Saturday. Ice made it impossible to work that night. The following morning the ship was shifted and the diving crew, armed with axes, chopped holes in the slob ice and went underwater to tackle the job. Water was so cold that inlet valves on their breathing apparatus were in danger of freezing, and the men had to work on half hour shifts. At each interval they had to chip ice off their gear. Hot tea was kept handy on the Diving Tender and the nine Divers took

turns in going below, working at a level of about 20 feet. *"The first day everything went wrong,"* Warrant Bos'n Chaney said, *"We quit at 8:30 pm, unable to do any more."* On Saturday everything went right. The Divers started in at 8.00 AM and we completed the job at 4:30 PM, a half an hour ahead of schedule. The ship sailed in time to overtake her convoy. Peacetime regulations are that Divers must not work in water less than 37 degrees F – this rule has gone by the boards in wartime! *"If we adhered to the old rules, we wouldn't get much work done in this Port,"* Chaney smiled. The men who earned Commodore Taylor's commendation for "Excellent service during most adverse climactic and working conditions" in addition to Warrant Officer Chaney were: Petty Officer John Brown, Ingersoll, Ontario;; Stoker Petty Officer Burpee Dodsworth, Lantz Siding, NS; Shipwright Carl Cooke, Trenton, NS; Petty Officer A. Minhinnick, Yorkton, Sask; Petty Officer Albert Hanley, Saint John, NB; Leading Seaman Allan Whitehead, Vancouver, BC; Able Seaman Hunter, Windsor; Stoker Robert Swederski ,Winnipeg , Manitoba and Port Arthur, Ontario; and Stoker Frank Law of Port Arthur, Ontario.

CPO(DV) BERT DRAKE writes that during WW II he, Lt. Arthur H. Baker and LS Harry Bowen were called upon one afternoon to go to the North West River near Goose Bay, Labrador to recover a crashed RCAF PBY Canso Flying Boat, which had attempted to land there. The windswept waves on the river had flooded it while landing, causing it to sink in 147 ft of water. The three member diving team then reported to RCAF STATION DARTMOUTH in Eastern Passage, NS where they were to be flown over to the crash site. Bert succinctly remembers the flight, since the aircraft heater was not working and they had not been issued any flying gear, such as a flight suit, fur lined boots or flight helmets, and the aircraft was really frigid inside throughout the flight. It wasn't until they arrived at the RCAF Post in Labrador that they were issued with cold weather gear. At that time, the site consisted of a Hudson Bay Trading Post, the Grenville Mission with a small Hospital, the RCAF Wireless Station and the native village. The diving team was made to feel at home and billeted in the Wireless building. There they awaited the arrival of their diving gear, which was being transported by the RCAF vessel known as the OK SERVICE II, one of the two OK SERVICE boats operated by the RCAF at that time. The next day we were transported to the crash area by the one RCAF Sergeant on the Base named Art. He was one busy person, since anything that moved on the water was his baby. He told us that he had watched the aircraft come in for a landing on the quite high waves, which had somehow flooded the aircraft. He had quickly rescued all of the crew but for one Officer, who was never recovered. As the aircraft was about to sink, the Sergeant could only find a cod fishing line in the crash boat, which he tied one end to one of his oars, with the other end being speedily attached to the fast disappearing aircraft. When the aircraft came to rest on the bottom, the oar utilized as a buoy could not be seen, as the cod line was much too short, and the oar was quite a distance below the water's surface. Thankfully, the Sergeant was a fairly astute sailor, since he also took some quick land bearings before the aircraft sank, therefore we were fairly certain of locating it later. It is noteworthy that the Sergeant was awarded the BEM(British Empire Medal(BEM) for his work in saving the aircrew and locating the aircraft. We finally received our diving equipment when the overdue vessel OK SERVICE II eventually arrived. Its Skipper said they were delayed due to foul weather, foul language and a foul Island which was well known to him, called St. Pierre, or something like that! In any case we got our gear, plus two more Naval Ratings who spun some tall stories about the deep sea "blue", very interesting, but we are now ready to work. Thanks to the quick bearings the Sergeant took(unfortunately the cod line and oar buoy did not help us), and the oil slick rising down current, we had an excellent idea of exactly where the aircraft could be located underwater. With the 6 to 8 knot current running, it was not easy to grapple it, but we did eventually. We then dropped and buoyed a shot line and commenced to moor the OK SERVICE II over the spot. A float had been built from the oil drums and lumber, with boarding ladder affixed by the local Air Force personnel, which was made fast alongside the vessel, and we dove from this platform. The first dive was by Harry Bowden(he was ex Royal Navy who came to the Halifax Diving Depot from the Naval

Armament Depot in Dartmouth NS) who found the cod line and oar by tangling in it. After a struggle getting clear, we brought him up. The shot line was then moved a short distance, and when I went down, I found it to be caught nice and solid in the aileron. I landed dead centre on the wings bullseye(the Roundel), then walked over to the cockpit and side blisters windows looking for the one missing Officer, unsuccessfully, after which I was asked if I could fit the lifting bracket to the aircraft. I thought I could fit it, providing they lowered it far enough upstream, as there was quite a current running. Everything went well, and it was accomplished. Then topside queried if I could shackle on the line for towing the aircraft into shallower water, I called for them to lower the towing cable, and when it arrived on the bottom, I hooked it on the nose towing fitting, went back to the wing to cut the lashing from the shot line that the cable had come down on, after which topside hauled up on the towing cable and buoyed it. I did my stops on the way up, and that was my day. The aircraft was facing down river(down tide), so when the decision was made to tow the plane into shallower water, they had to turn it around, which was quite a tricky evolution in fast water. In any event, it was turned around without flipping it over and dragged upstream into 75 ft of water, where the stores were removed, generally preparing it for beaching, which was accomplished a short time later. There was slight damage to the aircraft hull, however the tail was found to be partially shorn off when hauled ashore. The diving team then returned to Halifax, NS.

Allan C. Whitehead joined the RCNVR for Hostilities Only(HO)in Vancouver BC in August 1940 as an OSS(Ordinary Seaman Standard) and qualified as a Navy Diver(DV) under Commissioned Gunner “T” on the West Coast in May 1942. After serving two years on the West Coast, he was drafted to HMCS STADACONA, and then on to HMCS AVALON 1 in St. John’s, Newfoundland ,the main Barracks there. Some of the tasks they were involved with in Newfie-John included; underwater welding, mines, setting buoys near Bell Island, servicing the marine railway in Bay Bulls, recover a Liberator aircraft near Gander, search for a sunken aircraft near Botwood and ship damage repairs, which many times required them to work 24 hours a day, especially on Minesweepers. Allan recalls that he had his air and lifelines cut by a boat while he was working on an Asdic Dome job underwater, and he simply closed his air valve and had another Diver working with him take him up to the surface – *now that’s one more way to get grey hair!* The Seibe Gorman Standard Dress was the gear they used, until they were provided with the American gear in 1944. His Dive Log shows that he completed 136 dips in the 27 months he was in Newfoundland. He went to Diving Tender # 4, then back to AVALON 1 again before the end of the War came. He hoped that everyone will be happily reminded of the Newfoundland Diving Crew, as taken from his Diving Log:-

Warrant Bos’n Lawrence “Lon” Chaney was the Diving Officer(from Vernon, BC)
 Stoker PO William Burpee Dodsworth(from Lantz Siding, NS)
 PO Shipwright Carl “Cookie” Cooke(from Trenton, NS) ? Jack Daley(from Vancouver, BC)
 PO John Brown(from Ingersoll, Ont RCN Regular Force PO Tom Murphy(from Halifax, NS)
 LS Carl Vaniderstine(RCN Regular Force) PO Jim Coultis(from ?)
 AB Albert “Ab” Hanley(from Saint John, NB) ? ? “Hap” Porteous(from ?)
 AB A. Minhinnick(from Yorkton, Sask) ? Jim Patterson(from ?)
 PO Shipwright Howard Smedley(from Victoria, BC) ? ? Gillis(from ?)
 PO Shipwright Clarence Slugget(from BC) Stoker Frank Law(from Port Arthur, ON)
 LS Allan “Whitey” Whitehead(from Vancouver BC) ? F.G. “Moose” Mousseau(from Coquitlam BC)
 Stoker Robert “Bob” Swiderski(from Winnipeg, Man.) – now deceased.

Allan Whitehead spent 27 months at HMCS AVALON 1 in St. John's, Nfld, and was promoted to the rank of Petty Officer just before he was released from the RCNVR in HMCS DISCOVERY, Vancouver, BC on the 2nd day of December 1945.

A Newfoundland Port The wreck of the four engine Liberator aircraft, swayed and twisted, a looming, cavernous mass upon the blind sea floor. She had roared out from the airport, climbed to almost 400 ft altitude, then plunged unexpectedly with a writhing loop into the sea. Now, her engines immobile and forced back into the fuselage, she lay crumpled on a treacherous steep slope in 30 fathoms of dark waters. Already the slime oozed cautiously about her frame, the surge of the North Atlantic, spiralling downward through the darkness, sent her wreckage gnashing in uneasy movement. Invisible, unheard, haunted with the bodies of her dead, she was settling restlessly into the oblivion of the sea. Across the bottom, a faint restless glow wavered uncertainly toward her, it lightened the gloom for perhaps a yard about a grotesque, helmeted, groping figure. It neared the aircraft, as the form revealed in its murky halo plodded forward, cautiously avoiding the broken spears of the wreckage. Eerily, the figure and the light circled the entire mass, then vanished. Time passed, then directly above the wreckage, the light appeared again. The helmeted figure eased downward, paused, steadied itself with the large leaden soled feet on the top of the mangled cabin. A four day underwater search by "Lon" Chaney, Warrant Officer, Royal Canadian Naval Diving Unit, and his crew of Navy Divers was ended. It had been a mean operation from the beginning. A rough, choppy October sea had been running throughout the search. Before they had anchored on the first day, a swell had come twisting in on them, overturned their working barge, pitching the whole crew into the water. They had righted the barge, checked their lashed down gear, and sent the shot rope, with its lead weight spinning to the bottom. It had been impossible to estimate the position of the wreck very accurately, and the rough sea gave no surface indication of the aircraft's presence – they knew they were in for a long search! Diver Allan Whitehead of Vancouver had been the first to screw on his helmet, dip his 60 lb feet into the water and descend carefully down the shot line to search the bottom. Man after man, in half hour tricks, his crewmates had taken their turns, combing out in an ever widening series of circles measured out by the knots on the distance rope attached to the bottom of the shot line. They needed all the skills laboriously acquired since their first days at their Diving School, where they had first gone out blindfolded on a lawn a hundred yards square, then tried and failed to locate a small chestbox. Before their course was over, they were able to locate a watch on the same lawn! Now, segment by segment, with the precision of long experience, they had covered some three square miles of the sea floor to locate the crashed Liberator aircraft. Their troubles had just begun, the wreck must be thoroughly explored, as there might be precious salvageable parts. Every discoverable detail of her condition must be obtained for an official report. Above all, if any bodies were found in her crushed interior, they must be recovered, if it was humanly possible. Underwater work about the plane was dangerous. The jaws of its broken sections were huge traps, gaping in the darkness. Tentacles of wreckage extended threateningly in every direction. The sea bottom sloped dangerously down, and the movement of the water tended to send the wreckage grinding downhill into the depths. A Diver descending in the dark black water might miss his footing, slip into one of the cave like openings, get his lifelines tangled or cut..... "Burpee" Dodsworth, Petty Officer from Lantz Siding N.S. was below as his mates on the barge talked over the situation. He was doing a nasty job prowling among the wreckage, searching for the bodies of the plane's crew. Even as they were speaking, a shout came up through their underwater communication telephone "Easy on the rope! The aircraft's moving. I think I'm caught – I . . ." The air pumps on the barge went grinding on, sending the air down through an air-line that might already be tangled or cut. The men looked at each other, and looked at Lon Chaney, the Diving Officer, as there was no more they could do. They could not put another Diver down to that depth – a Diver working at 30 fathoms was on his own. Twenty minutes went by, with the topside men gingerly manipulating the lifeline in response

to cool but urgent instructions from below. Then came the good word, Dodsworth had worked himself free. They brought him up in stages, carefully refraining from any demonstration or relief. Warrant Chaney nominated himself for the next trip. As his feet neared the depth of the wreckage, he felt around carefully for a standing space on the plane, found it, and signalled for more slack. Just as the rope began to play out, the wreckage lurched downward. Chaney's foothold left him; he was falling into one of the jagged, gaping sections. The twisted vault of the interior closed about him, moved downward, pushing him further inside. Stumbling blindly in the crushed moving shell of the fuselage, with knife-like edges of aluminum slicing at his air-hose, he fought for a purchase, tried to keep his lines from kinking, and tried to follow the lines toward the outside. He worked coolly, reporting coolly over the phone. He has ten years of diving experience behind him, and he knows the tricks as well as the hazards of his trade. But it was a full half hour of desperate, skillful groping in inky blackness before he was sure that he would see the surface again. Those were the only two close shaves on this job. The wreck in this case was too mangled for salvage. The Divers obtained the evidence for the official report on this tragedy, and recovered one body. The operation, covered by about ten lines in a crowded Divers Log Book, gives some idea of the way in which "Lon" Chaney's Divers earn their extra "ten cents a day and a dollar a dip" wages. Every routine job is a mean and risky operation. Diving in Newfoundland waters under winter conditions is work that simply was not considered before the War. Valves in the diving helmets would freeze up the experts said, cutting off the exhaust for used air. That was quite true, said Chaney & Johnny Brown and the others, but they had to dive in freezing water – often they had to dive literally among the ice floes – so they devised a gadget for getting rid of the ice. Every job they do presents some new difficulty; constant improvisation is called for. Expediency is the order of the day – unorthodox and sometimes unauthorized – but necessary when you're doing "impossible" work! Officially, Chaney's men, like all Naval Divers, are ratings with another Trade qualification, such as Stokers, Shipwrights, Torpedomen, etc. Before they receive their Divers Badge, they have mastered the specialized tools for underwater welding, cutting and many other sub surface jobs. They must be able to work blind, using their hands for eyes, drive a chisel or a spike without seeing it, use their hammers with the short, sharp Divers' stroke. The scope of their work is nearly as broad as the field of maritime mishap. They pass some of their duller days as sea floor scroungers, bringing up a toolbox dropped overboard by a Shipwright, recovering a rifle, an axe, a stray shell. They may have to go down to repair a ship's plates, free a vessel caught in a mooring cable, cut off a bilge keel, disentangle a twisted, rusty labyrinthine coil of wire from a ship's propeller, or recover drowned personnel. There are still nastier jobs. Chaney's Divers recently undertook the recovery of a stray torpedo, embedded in the mud of an Eastern harbour – a constant menace to shipping, a source of imminent peril to the Diver who locates it, and to the whole topside crew assisting him. Depth charges have a way of falling off the stern of a ship, or of falling into the harbour from a jetty when a vessel is taking on ammunition – the Diver gets them back. As he flips over the pages of the Log Book recording the various jobs, Chaney is inclined to depreciate their story of daily risk and difficulty. Yet he has the solid pride of the competent workman. Quiet, studious and pleasant-spoken, he speaks interestingly of the history, as well as the mechanics of his trade. The famous Royal Navy Diving School at Portsmouth, England where he and Johnny Brown were trained, was established, Chaney says, **after the Navy decided that the old system of employing civilian Diver was, to say the least, unsatisfactory.** The early Divers had been something of a close-knit corporation, their art had been handed down from Father to son. So too, frequently with disastrous results, had been the crude, much-mended suits. Physically frail youngsters, often with no qualifications but the will to practise their Father's trade, would go down holding an arm tightly to one side, or adopting some equally haphazard method of covering rents and tears in their suits. The RCN took over, standardized the training, and provided efficient equipment, but it has not changed the nature of the men who "dip". The guild outlook flavours the character of Warrant Chaney's dive crew, much as it does all diving teams. The men's absolute dependence on each other knits them together. They know

and provide for each other's habits and twists of temperament. They mould and fit their characters into the body of a team whose innermost workings are hidden from outsiders. They have their own humour and taboo's, and they have some fascinating stories to tell of "the eyeless depths". Chaney was working with a crew off Portsmouth, U.K. some years ago when a gross, barnacled lump, distinguished only by a peculiar handle, was brought to the surface. It took a day's work to chip off the encrusted, nearly-petrified barnacles, but gradually a shape emerged. The object was a curiously formed beer mug with the name of a famous British brewery stamped on its side. The Divers sent it to the brewery. The firm's breathless reply informed them that the mug was nearly four hundred years old – a treasure, perhaps, lost from one of the ships that fought the Armada; and a tribute, incidentally, to the antiquity of brewery advertising. One of the rigid requirements for Chaney's Divers, as for all Naval Divers, is 100% physical fitness. A weekly medical check is obligatory, as no man with a cold, or otherwise below top form, is allowed to dive. *"You go down with a hangover,"* Chaney admits, "but you will come up with a worse one." We're all a bit temperamental he adds, toying with a hammer in his crowded, undersized shed. Bound to be sometimes the work's a bit risky; there's always a certain amount of strain and, besides, I think the pressure of the water has a physical effect on you. We bring a man up after a long hard dive, and he appears perfectly all right, but he's edgy, he's likely to blow up at a moment's notice. I leave him alone, and little by little the dope comes out. He wants to talk about the job – it's bubbling up inside him – but he must give his report in his own way. Never heckle a Diver when he's just up from a deep job. We had a pretty important bit of work once – important enough to bring a four-stripe Navy Captain down to see how we were getting on. When my Diver came up, the Captain went after him with questions – how about this – how about that – constantly hectoring him. Natural enough, when you're anxious about an important job, but it doesn't work with Divers. The lad tightened and tightened, and the blow up came, *"You old fart, why don't you go back to your armchair? Never heard any more about it, though. That Captain was a pretty good sport!"* said Chaney. His men are not generally so outspoken in their relations with Senior Officers, however they are not distinguished for discipline of the normal variety. There is no snapping of orders, and first names are the rule. Their discipline springs rather from the nature of their hard, blindly groping, bone chilling work. Always they have the knowledge that the slightest mishap, a second of inattention, may bring disaster. A fall of five feet underwater would bring an alteration of pressure that would crush a Diver to a shapeless mass before anything could be done. A Diver answers the danger with steady vigilance, with quiet, perfect teamwork. They have pride in the knowledge that the Diver is, in one way, the elite of the Navy. He is the perpetual volunteer. Every risk he undertakes is accepted of his own free will. No man may be compelled to join the Diving Service. A man may leave it at a moment's notice, with absolutely no reflection upon himself. He cannot be ordered to dive. In the midst of any operation, when his turn comes to go down, he is at perfect liberty to lay down his helmet and refuse. No Naval Diver, to Chaney's knowledge, has ever done so.

William "Clem" Racey joined the Royal Canadian Navy on 19 August 1940 for H.O.(Hostilities Only) at HMCS PREVOST, London, Ontario as an Ordinary Seaman Torpedoman, and ended his Naval career as a "Subby" Sub Lieutenant on 3 October 1945. His first ship was HMCS PRINCE DAVID, which he was aboard at her initial commissioning, HMCS IROQUOIS (he recalls her battle actions in the Bay of Biscay), HMS RANPURA and HMCS BRANTFORD. Some of the people he remembers were Eric "Chippy" Galloway from Nova Scotia, LCdr Arthur H. Baker (who was THE East Coast Diving Officer and whose team became known as LCdr Baker and his Forty Thieves), John Brown from St. Catharines, Ontario and Jeff Barrick, who was a Gunner "T" and Diving Officer during Clem's days as an RCN Diver on the East Coast. Clem says that he qualified as a Diver after being made a Messdeck dodger, which he dearly disliked, since he got in the Navy to fight and not to be a bumboy! He received his Diver 2nd Class qualification after a 15 week course in December 1941, and went on to qualify as a Diver 1st Class in

August 1943. Some of the equipment he trained in were the Seibe Gorman, Sladen and an American (name unknown) dress. While in the Diving School he used Smoke Helmets and Oxygen Breathing Apparatus such as the Salvus Gear and MSA equipment. At one time when two loaded depth charge pistols, and a loaded depth charge fell over the side of a 4 stack Destroyer tied up to the Jetty in Dockyard, without exploding miraculously, RCNVR AB (Able Seaman) Albert J. Hanley of Saint John, New Brunswick was able to dive and recover same, for which he was awarded the BEM (British Empire Medal) in 1944. These could have easily blown up at the slightest mistake, taking the Destroyer, the Diving Tender with its crew, and the searching Diver, therefore a well-deserved award for AB Hanley. The Diving Tender used by the Divers in Halifax at that time was HC 41 – “The Edith”. Clem vividly remembers the salvaging of the American Export Airline’s aircraft “EXCALIBER” that had crashed in the water at Botwood, Newfoundland while attempting to take-off. Clem said it was in deep, dark, dirty water on the cold recovery work on this job, which was supervised by Petty Officer Bert Drake. During his diving career, Clem stated he was in on diving operations in both Liverpool and Plymouth, England as well. Some time was spent in St. John’s, Newfoundland, where he was twice drafted to the shore base, HMCS AVALON, to conduct diving repairs to both war and sea ravaged Allied shipping, when they limped, or were towed into St. John’s harbour. Clem succinctly remembers the four large iron ore Merchant Ships torpedoed just off Bell Island (P.L.M. 27 of 5633 tons, SS ROSE CASTLE of 7803 tons, SS SAGANAGA of 5454 tons and the LORD STRATHCONA of 7335 tons), the latter two were sent to the bottom on 5 September 1942 by Submarine U-513, the first two by U-518 on the night of 2 November 1942. Chuck Rolfe discussed with Clem a dive that Chuck had made on the LORD STRATHCONA in 1978, where it was found to be resting perfectly upright on the bottom at 120 ft. with an approximate 30 ft. torpedo hole in her side, with brass shell casings laying all around her DEMS gun on the stern, where she had been shooting at the submarine U-513 as the ship was sinking. Clem showed Chuck a small part of the torpedo that he has as a memento from this sinking. Clem also reminisced about when RCN Officers had a colour between their Rank stripes, such as: Green for Electrical Officers; Red for Medical Officers; White for Pay Officers, etc. etc. He also holds a White Ensign he retains from his time on the HMCS SAGUENAY after returning to Port with its stern blown off!! Clem held many other artifacts he retains, including: his S288 Record of Diving Practices (which was their Log Book then); a scrapbook with a tremendous amount of diving stories therein from WW II; his S124 History Sheet and Trade Certificate for Royal Canadian Divers; a B.R. 155/1936 The Diving Manual (or 1936); Notes taken while doing his Diving Course; a copy of the sign/crest that was in the Diving Shed at HMCS STADACONA during WW II; H.C. #59 Mine Recognition Manual and a book called “Instructions for Operating the Oxy-Hydrogen Underwater Metal Cutting Equipment, by Under-Water Cutters Ltd., Registered Office: Ocean House, 2415 Great Tower Street, London E.C. 3”. Also in Clem’s possession are two great photographs of many old-time Divers aboard their Halifax Diving Tender HC 41 “The Edith”, which will definitely bring back fond memories to all those who served aboard her, and who get to see these photos again. After demobilizing, Clem Racey worked for the Federal Government’s UIC (Unemployment Insurance Commission), followed by attending the Ontario College of Pharmacy, and working for 28 years for the Eli Lilly Pharmaceutical Company thereafter. He and his good wife have lived in such diverse locations as; Sarnia, Kingston, White Lake & Kinburn, Ontario and in Lucerne, Quebec. He served as the Reeve in Darling Township before retiring for good. William D. “Clem” Racey passed away on 9 September 2008 after a long and happy life.

Eugene “Cotton” Peters wrote that he had read the story sent in by one of his erstwhile WW II Diving buddies he knew from the time they spent at the old diving shed on Jetty 5 in Halifax, William D. “Clem” Racey. Clem did not have the story correct about the 4 engined Boeing Clipper airliner which had crashed and sunk in Notre Dame Bay, near Botwood, Newfoundland with passengers and crew aboard. This aircraft had eight cargo hatches filled with overseas mail, but most importantly carried secret

documents for the British Government and for the United States Embassy in London, England, and it was for this reason there were two members of the USA FBI always in attendance during all the diving hours. The person in charge of the salvage operation was a Mr. Chain, who was the Salvage Master for the Chicago Export Lines, the owners of the sunken "Clipper". The first civilian Diver who attempted to salvage the aircraft, was an employee of the E.G. M. Cape Construction Company out of Montreal, Quebec, who at the time were building an Iron Ore Shed and Dock in Botwood from October to November 1942. Unfortunately, this Diver had no experience in salvaging aircraft. He was either a Newfie or a swamp singer from Kreebec, or some other foreign country. He incorrectly slung a wire strop around the aircraft's fuselage just forward of where the main wing was attached, then another wire stop around the fuselage just aft of the rear of this main wing. Consequently, the result was that when they attempted to lift all that weight, the wire cables subsequently sliced through the fuselage, making three pieces of the aircraft out of one! There was a nine knot tide running in Notre Dame Bay, and the aircraft did lift off the bottom just high enough, thus allowing the lifting barge, crane and aircraft to drift out into deeper water, as they had failed to anchor the barge during the lifting procedure. When they saw the mess they were in, they requested assistance of the Canadian Navy Divers. At that time, RCN Divers John Brown, Clem Racey and Jeff Barret were stationed at HMCS AVALON in St. John's, Newfoundland, while I was the Salvage Diver onboard the Base Supply Ship HMCS PRESERVER. The PRESERVER was brought into play because she had a complete machine shop, several types of fuel aboard, a fifty ton Crane and, of course, Me. John Brown and myself were the principal Divers who salvaged the wing with four motors attached, and some of the important mail. John was the first to dive, where it was found the main fuselage and wings had broken clear from the forward and aft fuselage sections. Most of the crew and all of the passengers from the broken fuselage were never recovered. Brown did a second dive, where he installed a strop around the Starboard engine cowling, and secured same. The following day I went down(90 ft)with two sets of weights on, so as not to be swept away by the on-rushing tide. The wing was on an angle, with one end in about 90 odd ft of water, while the other wing was in over 100 ft of water. When I went to put the strop around the cowling of the Port engine, I stood on the nose(main cockpit) of the aircraft and read its name painted on it, which was "**Flying Ace, Excalibur**". I was the one and only one to stand on, and look in their side window, to see the two crew members suspended there – dead of course. I had to drop the strop down between the cowling and the nose of the aircraft, then crawl down the opposite side, get underneath the cowling to grab hold of the stop to bring it up again to shackle to the lifting cable. It was at this time that I found the remains of which turned out to be the Fourth Engineer of the aircraft! He had somehow become secured to the main wing with a loose piece of electrical wire, so his body was retrieved later when the four engines and wings attached to that part of the fuselage was brought to the surface by the PRESERVER. ***Editor's Note, this photo can be seen in our website navydiver.ca by clicking on Divers Scrapbook, scroll down to Vintage Photo Album by Chuck Rolfe and click on photo 40 of 72.*** The wing, etc. were loaded on two barges yoked together. RCNR Captain Barney "Shuffleboard" Johnson(he was called that because he could only wear overshoes on account of his club toes and could not wear proper shoes)was also the owner/operator of the West Coast Towing and Salvage Company out of Vancouver. Well, wouldn't you know it, the old son of a bitch did not drop any kedge anchors when he took the lift. The ship drifted out into the heavy stream, with the salvaged wing of the aircraft secure, but the nose of the aircraft was dragged out into the main stream and it was lost in the nine knot tidal current, never to be seen again!! The nose section held all the answers the FBI and Mr. Chain were intent on recovering! That was the end for Ole Barney, as he got a fast draft somewhere, for that slight error. Jacky Hose, RCN Commander then took command of the HMCS PRESERVER upon her return to Halifax – he was the son of Admiral Hose, the first Canadian Admiral of our great Service. I don't know if John Brown is still alive and kicking, but Bert Drake should know, as they both worked on the Welland Canal as Divers after they retired from the Navy. In 1948 I transferred to the Regulating Branch, and retired as a Master at

Arms(MAA) in August 1961 to work as the City Marshall in and for the City of Halifax, as well as Provincial Constable, by Order in Council. In 1971 I went back to Saskatchewan, bought an old country hotel with a beer parlour, made some money off it, but got tired of fighting with cowboys, Indians and rough-necks off the oil rigs after five years. So I loafed around the country with my young son(he is now a Corporal with Army Intelligence over in Germany) and I am going over there this June to visit him. I went to work for the Attorney Generals Department as the Sheriff, working out of the Court House in Lethbridge and Fort McLeod, Alberta. Yah, you guessed it – more goddam cowboys and Indians!!! I had the Blood Reserve at Standoff, Alberta with 356,755 acres and about 5500 souls; -with the Piegan Indians Reserve with 335,000 acres and about 6500 souls. Now I am living at Gordon's Beach on the Straits of Juan de Fuca, with lots of tremendous salmon fishing right offshore, watching killer whales, sea lions, sea otters, etc swim by my front door. Where else in Canada can you do that, play golf TWELVE MONTHS OF THE YEAR, then jump in my 4 x 4 snf vehicle and three hours later I can be skiing on Mount Washington, or Forbidden Plateau up by Courtenay for five months of the year? As long as we don't become frenchified, things will always be just great here on the West Coast. Take care. Cotton Peters.