

Part 10A of this RCN Diving Branch History commemorates those Navy Divers who served at the West Coast Diving Unit in the early years, and up to the 1950's.

Edgar J. "Bill" Cryderman writes that he joined the Royal Canadian Navy on the 6 June 1924 as an OSS (Ordinary Seaman Standard) in the Seaman Branch, with Official Number 2115, and took his Basic Naval Training at HMCS NADEN. He served on various RCN and Royal Navy ships and shore establishments, including HMCS PATRICIAN, HMCS NADEN, HMCS VANCOUVER, HMCS SKEENA and HMCS ST. LAURENT, and on RN ships HMS TIGER, HMS WARSPITE, HMS REVENGE, HMS VERNON, HMS EXCELLENT and HMS VICTORY. He was at the commissioning of HMCS VANCOUVER on 5 February 1928, after which they sailed from Portsmouth, England on Saturday 17 March 1928 for Esquimalt, British Columbia. He remembers that during the transit of the Bay of Biscay, a vicious storm arose that caused them to lose the foretop mast, and it also stove in their whaler. She and HMCS CHAMPLAIN were two of the WW I era Destroyers which the Royal Navy loaned to the RCN at that time. Bill also stood by HMCS SKEENA (the original one!) whilst it was being constructed in the British Thornycroft Yards, and commissioned her on 23 June 1931. She was one of a pair of Canadian designed and built for Canada Destroyers, the other being HMCS SAGUENAY. He served the Summer of 1927 onboard HMS TIGER, which was the last of the coal-fired RN Battle Cruisers, where she was stationed at Portland Breakwater, i.e. at Weymouth, England. Bill says they went to sea about once a month for Gunnery School full calibre firing, after which the target was towed back to be checked for damage below the waterline. Bill then qualified as a Diver 2nd Class on 30 April 1926 at Whale Island, located in the upper reaches of Portsmouth harbour, and which held both the School for Gunners and the School for Divers as part of the Portsmouth Naval Base, known as HMS EXCELLENT. He later went on to obtain his Diver(DV) 1st Class in 1930. The diving equipment in use at that time was the Seibe Gorman Standard Dress with hard hat, and the Davis Submarine Escape Lung, all of which he trained in. He went on to become a Chief Gunners Mate(T) and then was commissioned as an Acting Gunner(T)x (RCN Officers # 17270) in April 1941, returning to Esquimalt in 1942 In Charge of Diving on the West Coast until his retirement from the RCN at the end of 1945. He recalls that near the end of 1943, he accepted the newly built Diving Tender # 2 from the builders in Vancouver, BC. George Luscombe was an RCNVR Motor Mechanic/Diver(DV) as his Engineer on board, and between them they designed the air cooling and purifying filters, as well as the control valves for the Divers air. Bill also remembers drafting up and passing the plans for the decompression chamber to the DOCKYARD Engineer Officer, following which it was constructed for the Diving Unit in Esquimalt. A couple of years ago, a CPO Diver from FDU(P) visited him (this was back in the 1980's) and took most of the artifacts and memorabilia from Bill back to that Diving Unit, where they should be located to this day. Bill related the tale when they were at Coal Harbour on the Northwest Coast of Vancouver Island to lay big slabs of concrete, which formed a ramp for seaplanes to be brought ashore on, from the shore into the ocean waters, and that one of the seaplanes did not drop the cat line used to ease it into the water. Instead it trailed behind him, until the Pilot found that he was unable to takeoff with it still attached! In this embarrassing situation, the Pilot did not wait for someone to come out and remove the cable, rather he tripped the release (it immediately sank to the bottom) and took off. The Divers then had to locate and recover this cat cable, and take it back to the seaplane Hangar. Of course the Pilot took quite a ribbing from all concerned for his faux pas, stated Bill, with a grin on his face. Bill Cryderman retired to pension from the RCN as the Diving Officer in charge of the West Coast Diving Unit on 6 December 1945. He moved his family of two sons and two daughters to Saanich, BC for a number of years of farming, then moved to various mainland locales, all south of Prince George to get into the logging and bulldozing industry, operated a dairy farm, ran a sawmill and even dabbled with ranching and the cattle business – *that is quite a diversified career after being a sailor and Diver!!!* In

1970 Bill retired for good, and does a bit of woodworking now to keep himself busy. Bill has passed away.

LCdr Lawrence “Lon” Chaney RCN from 1929 to 1962, was drafted from the East Coast(Newfoundland) to the West Coast Diving Unit at the end of WW II. He relates to a long forgotten event that was brought home to him quite unexpectedly. The Fraser River had extensively flooded the Lower Mainland in either 1948 or 1949, and the Naval Diving Tender had been sent upriver to evacuate those people in danger, and to provide relief supplies to those stranded at Harrison Lake. The Diving Tender was the largest vessel to penetrate that far up the Fraser, which was a one day return trip from Mission up to the Lake and back. During any spare time they had, they were tasked with salvaging household goods, etc. wherever it was feasible. Many, many years later, Lon was at a social gathering, when a man came up to him and said *“I knew you would be here tonight, so I brought a photograph I would like to show you,”* whereupon he produce said photograph of a train halted on a bridge that was just awash, with an Army Dukw boat at the bridge. It also showed a house that had been flipped upside down by the raging current, and there were the Navy Divers(Lon and his crew) diving on this house! As it happened, the owner of the house demanded that the Diving Team retrieve a set of expensive silverware that was supposed to still be in his many time tumbled house. Because the owner was so adamant and excited, and rather than create a public incident, the Divers did try to find the silverware set. Lon did not think it would be located after what the house underwent in the river and, after much dangerous internal searching, this proved to be the case, as it was never found. The thing that struck Lon as peculiar, is that a stranger on the stranded train had taken photographs of this unique salvage mission, had recognized Lon Chaney, then approached him with the photographic proof, a good many years later. LCdr Lawrence Chaney retired from his position as Officer-in –Charge of the RCN’s West Coast Operational Diving Unit on the 28 February 1962. Lon has “crossed over the bar”.

Allan C. Whitehead was born in Calgary, Alberta and raised in Vancouver, British Columbia where he joined the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve(RCNVR) at HMCS DISCOVERY in August 1940 for HO – Hostilities Only as an Ordinary Seaman Standard(OSS)in the Seamanship Branch. In April 1941 he was drafted to HMCS NADEN where he completed his New Entry Training, followed by becoming a qualified Seaman Torpedoman. Allan then was part of the Commissioning Crew of HMCS EDMUNDSTON in October 1941. He volunteered and was accepted for a Divers Course at HMCS NADEN, after successfully passing his Diving Medical. He qualified in May 1942 as a Diver(DV) 2nd Class under Gunner “T” Bill Cryderman, ably assisted by that venerable “Old Salt” from the Royal Navy, “Jumper” Collins – he of the beautiful singing voice! Allan recalls that he was Duty Diver on Sunday, 21 June 1942 when word was flashed that a ship had been torpedoed 70 miles SSW of Cape Flattery, near the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and was being shelled by the surfaced Japanese Submarine I-25. The Corvette HMCS QUESNEL was dispatched to the scene, but did not sink the submarine. The torpedoed ship SS FORT CAMOSUN , newly built out of Victoria BC, was the only ship in WW II to be attacked off the Canadian West Coast, was taken under tow to a safe port. The Diving Crew that Allan was part of, was quickly called out and left the next day, as crew of the old Tugboat Salvage Queen to sail to the site. Most of the task was done by “Jumper” Collins, and such was his expertise that the patch up job was speedily completed and the SS FORT SAMOSUN was back in Esquimalt Dry Dock by the 25th June 1942 – only four days after being fished! It is interesting to note that two of the Tugs to tow her back were KYOQUOT(Canadian Pacific) and C.N. #2(Canadian National), both ex Royal Salvage Tugs from WW I vintage. Also utilized on this salvage/rescue operation were: HMCS EDMUNDSTON, HMCS DAWSON, the Tug HENRY FOSS out of Seattle, and “F.R. EKOLIA”. On 12 November 2042 Allan was drafted aboard

the armed merchant cruiser HMCS PRINCE HENRY as a Seaman Torpedoman, however the powers that be ensured he would continue as a Diver, by shipping aboard her some diving equipment and gear. He states that one fabulous and interesting thing that he experienced on the West Coast, was that when rising to the surface from this one dive just off HMCS ROYAL ROADS, he was "stopped" by a vast school of salmon passing by. Some of the West Coast Divers he remembers are: Gunner "T" Bill Cryderman, PO "Jumper" Collins, AB Frank O. Meal, Geoff Pitt, "Snick" Pitt, Hap Porteous and Jack Daley to name a few. He was drafted to HMCS STADACONA on the East Coast in April 1943, and then on to the Diving Crew aboard AVALON 1, the main barracks at St. John's, Newfoundland one month later. He noted that the rates of pay in 1943 were as follows:

<u>DIVING</u>	<u>1ST HOUR</u>	<u>ADDNL ½ HOUR</u>	<u>TENDING</u>
1 to 6 Fathoms	\$ 1.00	\$.25	\$.15
6 to 12 Fathoms	\$ 1.10	\$.35	
12 to 20 Fathoms	\$ 1.25	\$.50	
20 to 25 Fathoms	\$ 1.50	\$.60	
Over 25 Fathoms	\$ 3.00	\$ 1.00	

As he had signed for HO(Hostilities Only), and the War had now finished, Allan was finally granted his discharge, after returning from Newfoundland, from the RCNVR at HMCS DISCOVERY on 2 December 1945 – just as he was promoted to Petty Officer. He worked for 35 years thereafter driving a truck, and had his final retirement from work in October 1980. Allan was 70 years young in March 1990 and still enjoyed an active life, and the sea, by taking passage on ships that ply the world's trade routes. He also states that "Jumper" Collins was the representative Diver for Lloyds of London on the West Coast after the War, but believes he has gone to his higher rewards by now. Allan has also crossed over the bar.

Ordnance LCdr Edward L. Borradaile, RCN. On Wednesday, June 11, 1952, on Bonilla Island, 90 miles from Prince Rupert, a Naval Officer died violently while in the service of his country. "Ted" Borradaile was fatally injured when a beached mine which he was endeavouring to destroy, exploded. This tragedy deprived us not only of an expert, famous for his work in the field of explosive demolition(P Party), but of a man admired and esteemed by all who knew him. The regard in which he was held, was well demonstrated by the numbers who attended his funeral. LCDR Borradaile was escorted to his rest by 400 Officers and Men of the Navy. We will not soon forget that occasion, its sadness and the feeling of deep loss by all. This death was not in vain. In the way of his dying, LCdr Borradaile set us an excellent example. Calmly, precisely and carefully he faced great danger, as he had faced many times before. None knew better than he the risk he ran, but he did his full duty in spite of it. May his example of calmness and fortitude inspire and strengthen us all.

LCdr Ted Borradaile was born 30 October 1908 at Ganges Harbour, Salt Spring Island, BC. and entered the RCNVR in September 1940 as an Acting Lieutenant, training in the United Kingdom for the next two years on mine disposal duties(P Parties). He returned to HMCS NADEN in 1942 as a bomb disposal Officer. Later that year he went to Chilliwack BC for duty with the Bomb Disposal School. He served at Naval Service Headquarters from 1943 to the end of World War Two, and was demobilized in 1945. He maintained his connections with the Navy after the war, training annually at HMCS NADEN. He transferred to the RCN in June 1951, and was appointed to the Ordnance School at HMCS NADEN. He leaves his wife, Mrs. Doris Borradaile in Victoria, British Columbia.

Frank O. Meal was born and raised in Vancouver BC and joined the RCNVR there on 15 October 1940 as an Ordinary Seaman in the Seaman Branch. He went for New Entry training at HMCS DISCOVERY, then over to HMCS NADEN in Victoria in April 1941, where he worked as a writer in the Gunnery Office. Frank was then drafted to HMCS GIVENCHY before going to HMCS WOLFE from August 1941 to January 1942 to round up the Japanese owned fishing boats on the Fraser River. These fishing boats had been seized by the Federal Government shortly after Japan had become a belligerent and attacked Pearl Harbour. In January 1942 he went back to HMCS NADEN and signed up for a Diver's course, which he successfully passed in July 1942 and was qualified as a Diver Second Class. He later qualified as a Diver First Class in July 1944 did all his diving on the West Coast, until he was discharged from the RCN, at the end of World War Two, in November 1945. He trained in, and worked entirely with the Seibe Gorman gear throughout his Navy career, and was also qualified in the use of Davis S.E.A. equipment. After becoming a Navy Diver in 1942, Frank was quickly assigned as a Gunner 3rd aboard HMCS PRINCE DAVID for a patrol run to Alaska, following the Japanese landings at ADAK, Alaska. However the enemy had vanished by the time they arrived and, with no sightings of submarines anywhere along the entire West Coast, they returned to HMCS NADEN, following which he became a permanent member of the diving crew. At that time, their working platform whilst diving was an old barge, until the RCN commissioned a new Diving Tender # 2, which was considered to be the ultimate in diving luxury at that time. Frank states that he has many diving experiences flash through his mind when reading other Diver's experiences, and he succinctly recalls his first memorable one. It was while under training when down around 20 fathoms that he quickly noticed his air supply was quite insufficient for life support, whereupon he frantically commenced signalling for more air. He could hear the air pumps increasing speed, but with Frank being on the verge of unconsciousness and imminent collapse, the Diving Officer, Mister Cryderman, broke telephone silence by ordering him to surface. Upon completion of diving for the day, a pump test was conducted, which indicated there was a 50% leak in the one used to supply Frank that day!! Frank says he still awaits an apology from Mister Cryderman for the blast given him when he arrived on the surface that day. However, he states that no apology was necessary for the time he put a hole the size of a fifty cent piece in his own faceplate while attempting to get some leverage for a pneumatic jackhammer when he kept slipping away from the rock face he was trying to put a hole in. Mister Cryderman's remark for that faux pas was "*You handy-built son-of-a-bitch*"! There were many other uncomfortable tasks, like working with dynamite in total darkness, or retrieving bodies from a Flying Boat which exploded when landing at Comox BC that occasionally makes one have second thoughts. On the latter job, they were informed by the RCAF that they should be very careful of any loose wires they found, as there was an unexploded bomb down there – have you ever crawled on your hands and knees without those 18 lb boots touching the sand! No job was too large or too small, why the Divers even were called upon to search for the dentures of some poor sick matelot who was going on leave the next day. The most monotonous of our varied tasks was changing damaged Asdic domes on ships, while the most welcome were the trips to Vancouver to check the position of the coils on the Degaussing Range off Stanley Park – which meant catching up with family matters during a visit home. Some of Frank's diving mates are: George Luscombe, Jack Daley, Bob "Wiggy" Wigmoie, Don Saunders, A. McLoughlin, Murray "Tug" Wilson, Pete Daboka, Les Steeves, Alf Larsen, Jeff and "Snick" Pitt (both deceased he believes), "Hap" Porteous, Don Sweete, A. Logie, Jim Wilson, Art McLean and Walt Tapley. Frank also remembers the British Divers who were in Esquimalt waiting for ships which they would eventually join for duty in the Orient. Two particular RN Divers that come to mind, were John Hogan from Portsmouth U.K., and "Ginger" Bob Richardson, who passed away in 1963. Having received his discharge from the RCN, Frank tried very hard to break into "civvy" diving in Vancouver, but the few in the business had it all sewn up tight, and were not welcoming any new blood in their closed shop. He then joined the BC Hydro Railway in April 1946, retiring 38 years later, in March 1984.

Robert "Wiggie" Wigmore says that in the Spring of 1944 he was drafted from the East Coast Diving Unit to the West Coast Diving Party as part of Diving Tender # 2. The reason for this move was that he was an LSST(Leading Seaman Torpedoman), while Jeff Pitt on DT # 2 was an LSLTO(Leading Torpedo Operator), and an LTO Rate was in great demand at that time on the East Coast. Bill Cryderman was the Diving Officer on DT # 2, and they had a much smaller group there than down East, but there certainly was plenty of work to do. Some of the Western Divers that Wiggie recalls were; Frank Meal, Jack Daley, Murray "Tug" Wilson, George Luscombe(who used to be a BC Provincial Policeman who know exactly how to blow the door off a safe with little more noise than a pigs grunt), and a chap named Don Saunders. In the Summer of 1944, the RCN and RCAF(No. 11 CMU) at Jericho Beach(Vancouver) combined forces to go up to Coal Harbour, at the North West outer side of Vancouver Island on Quatsimo Sound, where the RCAF had a fleet of PBY(Catalina or Canso flying boats, fondly called pig boats by the Air Force)aircraft. Coal Harbour has a Marine Unit headed up by one Sgt. Gray, whose main charges were two Crash Boats, a big one and a smaller one. Sgt. Gray had distinguished himself one night(after many beers in the Wet Canteen) by selling the smaller Crash Boat to a local Indian for \$75.00 – who promptly took off with it! Sgt Gray and his crew then had to start up the big baby and go chasing after him down Quatsimo Sound. In any case, the RCAF Marine Unit had a barge and crane towed up from Vancouver, which the Divers were to use for laying an underwater beaching ramp of interlocking 12' x 12' x 6" reinforced concrete slabs. The ramp was to go out about 60 ft from the low water line, at an angle, and the hard part of this task was not laying the concrete slabs, but grading down the sand, gravel and rock, to make an even bed for the large slabs of concrete. The RCAF Divers there were, Flight Sergeant Begley, Sergeant Walker and Sergeant "Fish" Crockett(all of whom were from RCAF STATION DARTMOUTH in Nova Scotia originally, and trained in Halifax Harbour by CPO DV Bert Drake and PO DV Joe Scoville), and the Navy Diving Crew consisted of Mister Bill Cryderman, Frank Meal, Don Saunders, Jack Daley and Wiggie Wigmore. Most of the job was plain hard slugging, however one day they had a bit of excitement. The Base had two bulldozers, a huge D12 called "Big Mo", and a smaller one called "Little Joe", used to get the PBYs in and out of the water. Little Joe's job was to ease the aircraft down the ramp with its winch wire, at which time the Leading Aircraftman(LAC) in the PBY, now well afloat, with the engines running, was supposed to cast off the wire, and the plane was free to take off. This one particular morning, Wiggie had just got into his Standard Dress(they walked the aircraft into the water from the beach in Standard rig), and was waiting for a PBY to be eased down the new ramp. Little Joe eased the aircraft down, however, before the LAC in the PBY could unhook the wire from the aircraft, the Pilot revved his engines, taking the Dozer, driver and wire down the ramp and into the water, where the driver bailed out and swam ashore when the water came up to his neck. Little Joe was pulled out into about 40 ft of water before becoming snarled up in the heavy kelp beds, thereby bringing the PBY to a full stop. Wiggie, being fully booted and spurred, was allocated the task of recovering Little Joe from its watery perch in the kelp bed, where it was found to be still sitting upright, albeit blowing oily bubbles to the surface. The wire strop had broken as the full strain came on it, and only then did the Pilot realize what had happened. The Base Commanding Officer said it was good luck for them that the Divers were already there, otherwise the Divers, crane, barge and equipment would all have to be sent up from down South. They all had a most pleasant time up in Coal Harbour, and were very lucky in not having the job quite finished before the first draft of CWAAF's(Canadian Women's Auxilliary Air Force – now called WD's or Women's Division)arrive, and they all arranged a great party for this event. Everyone's liquor permit was collected (including the RCN Diver's), as in those days the ration was in effect, and a stripped down PBY was flown to where the nearest liquor store was located – in this case it was at Zebellos, BC where it was fully loaded for the return journey. This required the removal of the machine guns from the blisters, to make way for storing the cases of spirits. Needless to say, it was a great party for all. Bob Wigmore retired as a C1CD4 in November 1963, a full term of 20 years(in those days).

RCN SURGEON COMMANDER(ret) IAN BUCKINGHAM stated that HMCS THIEPVAL was a Battle Class Trawler employed on patrol and training duties at HMCS NADEN in the 1920's & 1930's. On February 27, 1930, she struck an uncharted rock in the Broken Islands group in Barkley Sound. The rumour is that she was chasing a Rum Runner at the time. She sank the following day, and her sister ship HMCS ARMENTIERES was dispatched to assess the possibility of salvage. A surface supplied Diver in Standard Dress, breathing surface supplied air was sent down from the deck of the ARMENTIERES, and he was able to find his way into the Wardroom. Fortuitously, he discovered several bottles full of liquor, and a large trapped air bubble in the corner of the deckhead and bulkhead. By inflating his diving suit, he was able to rise up into the air bubble, and open his faceplate. Thus he was able to consume a considerable amount of spirits. He then resumed his diving work, but the topside Dive Supervisor was puzzled when the Diver began to slur his words so much on the telephone, that he sounded to be dead drunk! Consequently, the Dive Supervisor ordered the Diver up, declaring *'This Diver is narced!'*. *"But Sir"*, the other Divers complained, *"He can't be suffering effects of Nitrogen Narcosis, as he is only at a depth of 45 feet of sea water!"* *"Nonetheless"* declared the Supervisor, *"he is obviously impaired! Bring him up, Now!"* When the Diver was safely on deck, and the Mk V helmet removed, the crew were overwhelmed by the odour of booze, and the Diver correctly diagnosed! Ian notes that *"I once was lucky enough to diver her wreck and retrieve a Rum jug! She is an interesting wreck to dive on, as she is in relatively shallow water. It was an eerie experience, swimming over lines that were coiled before I was even born! I also found a red(Port) lantern glass dated 1916. I should probably donate it and the Rum jug to the NADEN Museum!"*

From the **CROWSNEST – Navy Supervises Exams for Civilian Divers** Some 50 Civilian Diving Instructors, mostly from British Columbia coastal points, but some from the interior, sat for examinations at HMCS ESQUIMALT in mid-May 1965 under the supervision of the Staff of the RCN's Clearance Diving Establishment. The three days of practical, written and oral examinations were based on the regulations recently approved by the B.C. Safety Council for sports Divers. Supervising the examinations were Commander Ward W. Palmer, Officer in Command of the Clearance Diving Establishment, and 15 other Royal Canadian Navy volunteers.
