

FRANK O. MEAL

Frank Meal was born and raised in Vancouver, B.C. and joined the RCNVR as an Ordinary Seaman in the Seaman Branch there on 15 Oct 40. He went for New Entry Training at HMCS DISCOVERY, continuing at HMCS NADEN in April 1941, where he worked as a writer in the Gunnery Office. Frank was then transferred to HMCS GIVENCHY and served aboard HMCS WOLFE from Aug 41 to Jan 42 rounding up Japanese owned fishboats on the Fraser River, that had been seized by the Federal Government. In Jan 42 he went back to Naden and signed up for a Diver's Course, which he successfully passed in July 1942 and was a qualified Diver 2nd Class. He later qualified as a Diver 1st Class in July 1944 and did his diving on the West Coast until his discharge from the RCN came through 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 III aboard HMCS PRINCE DAVID for a patrol run to Alaska, following the Japanese landings at Adak. However, the enemy had vanished when they arrived, and with no sighting of submarines anywhere along the entire 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, that is 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 experience. 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 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 the 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-b-----!" 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, B.C. that occasionally makes one have second thoughts. On the latter job they were informed by the RCAI 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, 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 the diving mates Frank remembers are: George Luscombe, Jack Daley, Bob Wigmore, Don Sanders, A. McLoughlin, Tug Wilson, Pete Daboka, Les Steeves, Alf Larsen, Jeff and "Snick" Pitt (both deceased now he believes), "Hap" Porteous, Don Sweete, A. Logie, Jim Wilson, Art MacLean and Walt Tapley. He is particularly interested in trying to locate Les Steeves, Don Sweete and Pete Daboka (his old cribbage partner!) as he has lost all trace of them and would like to see them again - perhaps at the Reunion in 1991. 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, UK, and "Ginger" Bob Richardson, who passed away in 1963.

Having received his discharge from the RCN in Nov 45, Frank tried desperately to break into the "civvy" diving scene in Vancouver, but the few in the business at the time had it all sewn up tight and were not about to welcome any new blood in their closed shop. He restructured his job expectations and commenced working with the British Columbia Hydro Railway in April 1946, retiring 38 years later in March 1984. Frank enjoys retirement and is in fairly good health, however he is gradually slowing down with rheumatoid arthritis, although he is still adept at reeling in salmon at their Summer retreat on Bowen Island. They have been very fortunate also, to be able to exchange the Winter rains of Vancouver for a month of sunny Maui, Hawaii every November. He and his grand wife, Stella, who have now been married 46½ years, are kept busy with their 4 children's 11 grandchildren. They can be contacted at 2798 Eton St, Vancouver, B.C. V5K 1K3 Phone (604) 253-6570. There were many photographs of WWII West Coast Divers sent along by Frank, which will be incorporated into the Association's "Old Salts Album". Frank is looking forward to the 91 Divers Reunion in Victoria, B.C. and hopes to see many of his buddies.