

**Robert Arthur Wigmore,  
Died March 31, 2003 in Digby General Hospital**

**In Memory of Wiggy by Alan Sagar**

Grace United – Digby Apr 2/2003

I knew Wiggy when we were members of the Fleet Diving Unit in Dartmouth. Robert was a Chief Petty Officer – a Chief. CPO's are a force to be reckoned with. In the Navy we know that the CPO's were the backbone of the service. They are the source of all knowledge, expertise, skill, and leadership. We worship leadership in the Navy and Chief Wigmore had an easy – quiet authority that got things done.

To be a CPO is great but to be a Chief Diver is a very splendid thing – a rare animal. Commanding Officers listen carefully when the Chief Diver speaks. Chief Divers don't grow on trees – they are strong individuals, real characters about whom legends grow.

The ancient Mariner puts it well: He prayeth best whom loveth best – all things great and small. For the dear God who loveth us, He made and loveth all. Robert brought his gifts and enthusiasm to whatever he was part of.

I like the words a man said to his son, one day when I rode down the elevator with them. The boy was going off to school – "Stand Tall Today Son" he said. Wiggy stood tall – he was always on parade. I have a photograph he gave me of him – fairly recently standing tall in Greece, in Athens before the Parthenon – a moment of history!

Robert is asking us to stand tall today. Wiggy was always well-dressed – chipper, knife creased trousers. You might say he was debonair! Great. Just now I can hear him say "Sagar – Haircut"

Whenever I talked with Robert, I always felt that he had respect for me! I'm sure all of us here today felt that when you were with him – it made you feel special. There was always a sparkle in his eyes, and before he spoke you heard that trademark – Wiggy's Chuckle. Wiggy would treat a stranger the same way. It's not something we find today and often we get a fishy eye. Wiggy had good manners, an inbred politeness. He is a model for all of us!

Divers give signals on their safety rope or line – one pull to get attention. Sometimes a quick pull is given. We call it a Bell. Wiggy has given 4 pulls and 4 bells meaning, pull me up I need help. God has pulled Wiggy up and needs him to solve a few knotty problems no one else can do.

It is said, when you find an angel without wings, it means you've found a friend.  
We are all fortunate that Wiggy was our friend.

Let me conclude with a favourite short verse of mine:

They told me Hericlitus; they told me you were dead

They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to shed,

I cried as I remembered how often you and I

Had tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky.

But now that thou art lying me dear old carrion guest:

A handful of grey ashes, long long ago at rest.

Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales awake

For death he taketh all away

But these he cannot take!

God bless you Wiggy

### **Obituary**

WIGMORE, Robert Arthur -Digby, passed away March 31,2003, in Digby General Hospital. Born in Victoria, B.C., he was a son of the late George and Grace (Frac) Wigmore. He was a veteran of the Second World War and served aboard His Majesty's Canadian ships Restigouche and Prince Robert. His naval career continued after the war as a diver and diving instructor, retiring from the R.C.N. in 1963. In 1963, he began a career in research at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal and was one of three researchers credited with creating a portable hyperbaric perfusion chamber, which was used to preserve organs for transplantation. He was a member of the Royal Western Nova Scotia Yacht Club, Chief and PO's Association, Victoria, B.C; Canadian Naval Divers Association, and Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 20, Digby. He was a lifelong learner, avid traveller, woodworker, model,' ship builder, a gracious host and gentleman. He is survived by his wife, Lee (Hazelton), Digby; brother, Edward (Gwenda), Surrey, B.C.; sons, Robert, Alberta; Paul (Kathy), Victoria, B.C.; five grandchildren; several nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by sister, Grace. There will be no visitation. Memorial service will be held 2 p.m. Wednesday in Grace United Church, Digby. No flowers by request. Donations in memory may be made to Canadian Cancer Society. E- mail condolences to: jaynes@funeralscanada.com

## **Robert "Wiggy" Wigmore from Dipper's Digest, edition #10 June 1992**

Bob "Wiggy" Wigmore was born in Victoria, BC and raised at various places in the Prairie Provinces. He joined the Royal Canadian Navy on 1 July 1939, joining with many other new recruits who got on the train starting from Port Arthur, Ont. and all other points West, to take the one day train ride from where he got on at Meeting Creek, Alberta to Victoria, B.C. Recruited in the Seaman Branch, he later trained to be a Seaman Torpedo man. There were 60 recruits who comprised the 6-month New Entry training course at HMCS NADEN, which, in fact, was the last peacetime class of New Entries before the War.

Three of his classmates who later went on to become Divers were; Cotton Peters (from Vancouver); Carl Van Iderstine (from P.E.I.) and Ab Minhinnick (from Yorktown, Sask.) The whole group were then moved to the East Coast via Leave, and Bob noted that it took him 5 days with Sleeper Berths for the entire trip to Halifax. He recalls that they changed trains only once, in Montreal at the Windsor Station, arriving in Halifax, N.S. on 4 Jan 40. Bob was drafted immediately to HMCS RESTIGOUCHE, pendant numbers HOO of course everyone knows of the witty message flashed from "Rusty Guts" to HMS HARTLAND (pendant number YOO) when joining up at sea, From HOO to YOO "YOO-HOO!" Also aboard the Guts at that time were Albert "Ab" Hanley (from Saint John, N.B.), Ted C. Bingham (from Halifax) and Pat Patterson (from Assiniboia Sask.), all of whom qualified as Divers 2nd Class on the same Divers Course in September 1942. HMCS RESTIGOUCHE had two Divers on board then -Petty Officer LR (Layer Rate) Charles Wilmott (the Buffer) and Petty Officer TGM (Torpedo Gunners Mate) Charles Smedley, who later on became a Diving Officer. Bob still has a photograph of them on the Foc'sle, plus one of Cotton Peters riding a bicycle outside a little stone Pub they happened to be visiting in Sullom Voe, Shetlands Isles during WWII, showing Ted Bingham (now living in Halifax, N.S.) in the background uttering his famous cry, "Save your old French Safes – rubber tires for Spitfires!" Bob also served aboard HMCS ASSINIBOINE, in 1944 went aboard HMCS PRINCE ROBERT on the West Coast for her last commission, and was on the Cruiser HMCS ONTARIO during the Korean War era.

Bob remembers that in the summer of 1940 they tied up at Rosyth, Scotland, near the Firth of Forth Bridge, which was very well protected from the Luftwaffe by barrage balloons. During this time some Dutch matelots came over to visit the Guts, and in the process of looking over the new 3 in. AA gun, the trigger was pulled, as they figured it was unloaded. Yup - you guessed it; there was a round in the barrel! It went streaking up, almost taking out one of the barrage balloons when it exploded in close proximity to it. The ensuing panic was certainly something to behold. The Old Man, all the Officers and half the Ships Company rushed pell mell out on deck (they were on Make and Mend) craning their heads

skyward. Numerous signal lights commenced flashing, and many Officers and officials were tearing around and about the Jetty. Needless to say, the Old Man was quickly invited for a consultation with the Senior Officer, Rosyth!

The following day Bob was Duty Bos'n's Mate and Art Hannaford was the Duty Quartermaster during the Middle Watch. As always, they were maintaining a steadfast watch. They did not believe there was much to be concerned about during their time on watch as they were tied up outside a Tanker, which had just completed bunkering them, and she in turn was secured to the Dockyard Jetty. Along towards 0200 Art said, "Wiggy, go up to the Galley and make the kye (that famous hot drink that sustains everyone during late night/early morning watches, which is made from solid bricks of cocoa). As he was going forward to the galley, Bob noticed the Guts seemed to have a Starboard list they were Port side too but he reckoned it was only caused by the Chief ERA shifting the fuel in the tanks. In any case, he continued with the task of preparing the kye taking his time by searching the Galley for other goodies (much as we all have done at some point in our service career). Bob finally noticed the Galley stove had taken a most decided list to Starboard and somewhat belatedly, realized that something was not right! As he quickly reached out to keep the kye pot from sliding down the tilted stove, there was a terribly ominous rending sound, followed by a dull bang, coupled with the whistling sound of a broken wire, flailing around. All of this was followed immediately by the ship lurching first upright, and then to Port after which there occurred a strange 30 seconds silence before Art and Bob were pounced upon by numerous personages, who all showed up at once. They included the OOD and the Jimmy (Lt. Piers), both clad in pyjamas, and the Buffer in Duffle Coat and bare feet! What had happened was that as the tide went out, the Tanker, drawing perhaps 20 ft. (and the Guts about 10 ft.), dropped down to sit on the bottom, whereas the Guts continued down with the falling tide, finally hanging by the wires, whereupon the Quarterdeck breast let go. The weight then came on one of the springs, which immediately jumped out of its fairlead, ripping out two of the Portside guardrails. Both Art and Bob were deep in the rattle, however neither of them was incarcerated in Cells. Art took more of the strain from the episode, being the Duty Quartermaster, than did Bob, who stated this was the one time he was glad he was the junior hand.

In April 1942 the Merchant Ship SS TRONGATE caught fire in Halifax Harbour and the Bangor Minesweeper HMCS CHEDABUCTO was ordered to sink her immediately as she was carrying 600 tons of highly volatile toluol (toluene) and small arms ammunition in her holds. CHEDABUCTO trained her 4-inch guns on the Engine Room and fired non-explosive shells at the waterline quickly sinking the TRONGATE in 11 fathoms of water near the Nova Scotia (Mental) Hospital on the Dartmouth side. The first thing next morning the "Edith", together with Lt. Baker and most of his 40 thieves, and an RCAF barge (complete with boom and hand winch) from RCAF STATION DARTMOUTH (which is now CFB SHEARWATER) moored over the wreck, which was a very simple operation then since both of the TRONGATE's masts had their tops showing above the surface.

Petty Officer Joe Scoville was the first to do a survey and he found her sitting almost upright on the bottom in about 60 ft. of water. Joe first landed on one of the hatch covers and quickly noted that, among other things the deck cargo consisted of two large wooden crates one on each side of the ship. They were unaware at the time what the crates contained however, upon checking the ship's manifest next day, the crates were identified as two huge lathes big enough to turn ship's shafts. The crates were approximately 5 ft square by 30 ft long. Joe then was lowered to the bottom and as he surveyed along one side from stem to stern he suddenly came upon quite a prize, a large Lincoln welder. It was the four-wheeled type with large white letters on its side reading HALIFAX SHIPYARDS. The hand winch wire was immediately sent down (it was only just long enough) and they quickly brought it to the surface. Upon landing it on the barge's deck an old tarp was draped over it and the Edith then towed the barge to camber #5, which was alongside the old Diving Shed in HMC Dockyard. The fresh water hose was turned on the welder thoroughly washed down, and the order was given to apply a good coat of Pussers gray paint, which "Chippy" Galloway had already mixed for the task. The order was rescinded however, before the deed was done, and the welder was returned to the Halifax Shipyards. This large "rabbit" had escaped the net, due probably to a little soul searching and a genuine feeling that the war effort had to be upheld! No such soul searching reared its ugly head when the Divers later got into the hold to recover the famous keg, as related in Chippy Galloway's celebrated tale of how they sequestered and concealed this so-called keg of rum, only to find they had a keg of fermented orange juice for all their trouble, when they were about to enjoy the fruits of their labours. The following day it was decided that the very valuable lathes would be brought up next therefore a large crane barge was dispatched from the Halifax Shipyards, together with two wire strops. Joe Scoville went down with the larger of the strops, and he struggled for quite some time to get it in position under the crate (which was sitting on 2x4 spacers) so long in fact that Lt. Baker who did not want Joe to get into too much decompression time, said "Wiggy, get dressed and pass the other strop". Bob didn't have as much trouble positioning his strop as Joe did, mainly because it was a smaller diameter wire. After positioning the strops the hook was sent down, over which Bob passed the four eyes, had the slack taken up by the crane, and then came up himself. The whole evolution wasn't as easy as it sounds since there were shrouds and rigging wire, booms and jackstays from the wreck lying all over the place, however the visibility was very good. The crane then took the strain, and after bumping over the ship's rail the crate came clear. The crane operator then hoisted until the crate was just visible, about ten feet from the surface where he could see that the heavier strop was shorter than the other, with the result being that one end of the crate was higher than the other; a very unsafe position for hoisting. The operator then decided to move the crane to shallower water before the final lift, so the tug towed the barge, Edith and all, over near the Dartmouth shore just below the Mental Hospital. As he commenced the final lift (it weighed many tons), and the extra weight came on just as it cleared the water, the longer lower and lighter strop that Bob had passed parted and as the entire weight came on the larger

strop, it too parted, with the whole thing then going back to the bottom. Needless to say they were all somewhat chagrined and returned to the wreck next day slightly crestfallen. They later learned from the Shipyard Divers, who eventually recovered it that the lighter wire had been on the lathe's headstock (very heavy end), and that Joe's heavier wire had been installed on the light tailstock end of the crate. Of course neither Joe nor Bob knew which end was which as they could not see inside the crate, however it was more than a little embarrassing for the Diving Party to have this occur to them. Before they passed the strops while recovering the second lathe (these strops were of the same length and diameter), the Divers ripped a few planks from the crate to see which end was which. Here endeth one simple lesson.

In the spring of 1944 Bob was drafted to the West Coast Diving Party as part of Diving Tender #2. The reason for this move was that he was an LSST (Seaman Torpedo man) 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 Bob recall were Frank Meal, Jack Daley, Murray "Tug" Wilson, George Luscombe (who used to be a BC Provincial Policeman and who knew how to blow the door off a safe with little more noise than a pig's grunt.) and a chap named Saunders. In the summer of 1944 the RCN and the RCAF (No. 11 CMU) at Jericho Beach (Vancouver) combined forces to go up to Coal Harbour up at the N.W. outer side of Vancouver Island on Quatsino Sound where the RCAF had a fleet of PBY (Catalina's, or fondly called pig boats by the Air Force) Flying Boats. Coal Harbour had a Marine Unit headed up by one Sgt. Gray whose main charges were two crash boats a big one and a small one. Sgt. Gray had distinguished himself one night (after many beers in the Canteen) by selling the smaller crash boat to an Indian for \$75.00 who promptly took off in it. Gray and his crew had to start up the big baby and go chasing after him down Quatsino Sound. In any case, the 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'x12'x6" reinforced concrete slabs. The ramp was to go out about 60' 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 slabs. The RCAF Divers there were Flight Sgt Begley, Sgt Walker and Sgt "Fish" Crockett (all trained at RCAF STATION DARTMOUTH incidentally, by Bert Drake and Joe Scoville), while the Navy crew consisted of Cryderman, Me\_\_\_, Saunders, Daly and 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 named "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 cast off the wire and the plane was free to take off. This one particular morning Bob had just finished dressing -they walked into the water from the beach in Standard Rig - and was waiting for a PBV to be eased down the new ramp. Little Joe eased the aircraft down, however before the LAC in the PBV could unhook the wire from the aircraft the Pilot revved the engines taking the

Dozer, driver and wire down the ramp and into the water. The driver gave up and swam ashore when the water came up to his neck. Little Joe was pulled out into 40' of water before becoming snarled up in the heavy kelp beds thereby bringing the aircraft to a full stop. Bob being fully booted and spurred, was allocated the task of recovering Little Joe from the watery perch in the kelp bed, where it was found to be still sitting upright, albeit blowing oily bubbles to the surface. The wire had broken as the 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 there at the time otherwise the Divers, crane, barge and equipment would all have had to be sent for 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 WAAF's arrived and a great party was arranged 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 PBV was flown to where the nearest liquor store was located in this case it was at Zebellos 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.

Bob retired from the RCN as a C1CD4 in Nov 63 after serving his full term. He had served in HMCS NADEN, STADACONA, RESTIGOUCHE, CORNWALLIS, PRINCE ROBERT, GIVENCHY, ONTARIO, NIAGARA, GRANBY, Diving Tender #2 and Auxiliary #5.

Montreal's Royal Victoria Hospital had installed a hyperbaric Chamber for McGill University in 1963, which Bob was hired to operate when he returned to civvy street. He was instrumental in developing a heart lung pump, and with two others invented a machine used to hold living human parts during his 12-year tenure with the Royal Vic. He bought a Niagara 35 sailboat and was proceeding on his way to the Caribbean when they were blown under by a vicious storm, which put an end to their sailing days. He and his wife then purchased property in Digby, N.S. where they have retired at 152 King St, Digby, N.S. BOV 2AO Phone (902) 245-5965. From time to time they take jaunts to sunnier climes in the Southern States.