

HISTORY OF THE TRAINING ESTABLISHMENTS UNDER THE
ADMINISTRATION OF CAPTAIN (D) HALIFAX

From the commencement of hostilities until 1st May 1942 there was very little organized harbour and sea training at Halifax. However, with the arrival of new construction Corvettes and Bangor class minesweepers in 1941, a certain amount of sea training was given under the direction of H.M.C.S. "SAMBRO". This entailed not more than a few days actual sea work-up at Pictou, Nova Scotia. Equipment was lacking, and there was a shortage of Officers to carry out a satisfactory training program. A Staff Officer Training was on the staff of Captain (D), and through the co-operation of the gunnery, asdic, signals and torpedo schools a certain amount of harbour work-ups was given.

It became evident that a more comprehensive training program was required in order that the ships could be brought up to a state of efficiency whereby they could meet the enemy on at least an equal footing. A Training Commander, Commander J. C. Hibbard, D.S.C., R.C.N., was appointed on 1st May, 1942; a training staff of Specialist Officers was organized, and regular harbour work-ups in gunnery, asdic, torpedo, signals and radar were held in Halifax. Sea training was extended and sea work-ups were held off Halifax at St. Margaret's Bay and Pictou.

The first organized work-up began on 5th May, 1942, when H.M.C.S. "SACKVILLE", H.M.C.S. "GALT", and H.M.C.S. "MEDICINE HAT" were given training. This work-up lasted six days and was carried out at St. Margaret's Bay. It consisted of evolutions, exercises, A/S sweeps and A.S.P.'s. During the month twenty ships were handled, for a total of 118 days, of which 15 days were for adjustments (calibrations, etc.), 42 for harbour exercises, 47 for sea exercises, and 14 for repairs.

During June 1942 activities of the training establishment were increased and expanded. Introduction of night sea exercises and tactical manoeuvres was made, and during the first of these 14 ships participated, with 11 ships participating in the second. The construction of an Action Room, originally known as the night escort teacher, was commenced.

Trial runs were carried out in the Action Room during August 1942, and preliminary plans were made for the establishment of a Tactical Unit similar to those operated by the Western Approaches Command. The Action Room was in full operation in September, and 53 ships, with 1034 persons, participated. Full night action procedure was carried out, exercising each ship's Commanding Officer, Officer of the Watch, Gunnery Officer, A/S Control Officer and teams, Signal Officer, Signalmen, Telegraphists, Plotting Officer and plotting personnel, Coders and Lookouts.

Due to the heavy demand on the Action Room, it was found necessary to construct a second Action Room, which was designated Action Room 11. This construction was commenced in January 1943 and completed in July 1943. Lieutenant Commander Mervyn S. Woods, RCNVR, was appointed in charge of the Action Room in February 1943, and subsequently both Action Rooms, and much credit for the valuable training must be given this officer. The Action Rooms became well known, and much interest was shown in them by British and American authorities, who sent their representatives to inspect them. These representatives indicated the desirability of setting up similar training devices in the United Kingdom and the United States, but it is not known to what extent they were

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developed. The American authorities did state, however, that it was their intention to build a number of Action Rooms throughout the United States.

From their inception until the cessation of hostilities with Japan, the Action Rooms in Halifax were used by 370 different ships with a total of 1,746 runs. Approximately 133,000 Officers and men received training, which when analyzed in relation to the number of runs, shows that about 30,000 different Officers and men passed through the Action Rooms, or almost all personnel serving afloat. Captain "D" Halifax letter D. 1-36 of 4th October, 1945, to Commanding Officer Atlantic Coast refers.

Minesweeping exercises commenced during the month of October 1942, and covered a three day period.

A Tactical Unit was completed in H.M. C. Dockyard in February 1943, and Lieutenant Commander W.E.S. Briggs, RCNR, was appointed as Director. The purpose of the Tactical Unit was primarily for training of escort groups, with emphasis placed on the latest anti-submarine tactics. Each escort group during its lay-over in Halifax was required to make at least one run on the Tactical Unit.

In addition to the escort groups, many Senior Officers took advantage of the facilities of the Tactical Unit. In many cases special courses were arranged for them. Special courses were also arranged for Officers taking the Command Course and for Officers in the various other commands who wished to be kept up to date in modern tactics. In order to keep abreast of new developments, arrangements were made for the Director of the Tactical Unit to make quarterly trips to the United Kingdom to visit the Tactical Unit of the Commander-in-Chief Western Approaches at Liverpool, England.

The part played by the Air Force in anti-submarine warfare was recognized, and arrangements were made for Air Force personnel to attend the Unit and participate in the runs.

In January 1944 it became obvious that a larger and more comprehensive Tactical Unit was required, and plans were laid for a joint R.C.N.-R.C.A.F. Unit. By February 1945, this new Unit was in operation and was placed under the administration of the Commander-in-Chief Canadian Northwest Atlantic.

The Tactical Unit played an important part in the development of new anti-submarine tactics, and many tactical problems were referred to it and practical solutions were given. As an example, when the enemy introduced the "Gnat" a radical change in tactics was required with the least possible delay, and by training escort groups in these new tactics the Unit contributed much towards the safety of both convoys and escorts.

In June 1943 the A/S School came under the administration of Captain (D) Halifax, and an organization was created to give the Liverpool A/S tests. A Commanding Officers' refresher course of two weeks' duration was commenced.

As an indication of the growth of training 25 ships and 2 M/L flotillas went through work-ups during July 1943. In addition, training was carried out with 7 Western Escort Force groups. Commander J. C. Hibbard, D.S.C., R.C.N., was appointed to H.M.C.S. "IROQUOIS" in command on 30th July, 1943 and was relieved by Acting Lieutenant Commander D. W. Piers, R.C.N.

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A three-day A/S plotting course was commenced in the A/S Training Centre and the lectures given to Plotting Officers and Plotters' Mates included manipulation of the "Gladstone Scale", keeping a narrative, use of the plot, search plans, etc.

In November 1943, H.M.C.S. "ACADIA" was allocated to Captain (D) Halifax for use as a training ship for sea work-ups. Acting Commander J. Waterhouse, R.N., was appointed training Commander. The base for sea training was moved from Pictou to St. Margaret's Bay, but harbour training continued in Halifax.

It became apparent that the maximum benefit was not being obtained from sea work-ups during the winter months, due to the inclemency of the weather, and as an experiment five ships were sailed to Bermuda for 14 days' sea training. This proved very successful and as a result negotiations were made for the use of training facilities in Bermuda. Approval was given by Admiralty for the R.N. training staff at Bermuda to train Canadian ships, and this staff was assisted by a senior Canadian training officer and a number of training officers who had previously been on the training staff at St. Margaret's Bay and Pictou. Training programs at Halifax and Bermuda were closely correlated. For new construction ships and ships ex refit this involved intensive harbour training at Halifax prior to departure for Bermuda for sea work-ups. With the extensive building program of 1943-1944 in full swing, facilities at Halifax were taxed to the utmost, as it was imperative that no delays in training should occur.

H.M.C.S. "SOMERS ISLES" was commissioned in July 1944, and the result was a still closer correlation of harbour and sea work-ups.

The working-up sequence for a ship on arrival in Halifax was as follows: (a) First two days blank in order that personnel and material problems could be dealt with. (b) Ten day harbour working up program commenced on third day, the last two days of which were spent in the Action Room and the Tactical Unit. A three and one-half day A/S course was included in the program for ships fitted with Type 144 or more modern A/S sets. (c) Sail for sea working-up program on the 14th day.

In order to give those ships in operation sea work-ups H.M.C.S. "ROSTHERN" was allocated as a training ship under the administration of Captain (D) Halifax. It was then possible to exercise escorts after they had detached from their convoys and were en route to Halifax. Similarly, escort groups sailing to escort convoys were exercised at sea prior to joining. These group exercises, however, were only carried out during the summer months when the weather was favorable.

In order to reduce the time taken by new construction ships for harbour work-ups, a scheme of pre-commissioning training of A/S teams was introduced. A/S teams of ships about to commission were sent to H.M.C.S. "CORNWALLIS" for a short A/S course. It was thus possible to reduce harbour work-ups in Halifax by two days.

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In July 1944 training of boarding parties by use of the newly constructed "GRAPH" Mock Up commenced, with an R.N. instructor in charge. This Mock Up was designed on plans received from Admiralty and was housed in the Gymnasium in H.M.C. Dockyard. With the cessation of hostilities with Germany, instruction in submarine boarding parties was intensified, as it was anticipated that some German submarines would be surrendering to Canadian escort vessels.

During June and July 1945, the organization of the various training establishments was altered to conform with training for ships proceeding to the Pacific theatre, but up to the time of the surrender of Japan no ship, with the exception of H.M.C.S. "ALGONQUIN" had received this training to any extent, as the majority of personnel were on Pacific and accumulated leave.

After the cessation of hostilities the closing and transfer of the various training establishments gradually took place, and within one and one-half months all training under Captain (D) Halifax had ceased, and the appointment of the Training Commander lapsed.

COMMAND COURSES

The first Command Course began on 22nd February, 1943, with 16 candidates. There have been 13 courses, the last of which completed on 1st September, 1945.

The first course was of eight weeks' duration, the next three of nine, and the remainder ten weeks. The extension in length of courses was found necessary as developments in A/S and Radar equipment progressed.

A total of 209 Officers took the Command Course, and of these eleven failed to complete the course.

FIRST LIEUTENANTS' COURSES

First Lieutenants' Courses commenced on 3rd January, 1944, with eleven Officers attending. Lieutenant F. J. Boyer, R.N. was appointed as instructor. The syllabus of the course was designed to impart the maximum amount of essential knowledge possible to the Officers available to take the course with the instructional facilities which were also available at the time. In all, five courses of two weeks' duration were given, with a total of 43 Officers taking the course.