

Hydrographer

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NAVAL BASES

The expanding strength of the navy made correspondingly heavy demands on Canadian naval bases. In September, 1939, there were only two naval bases in Canada, one at Halifax on the east coast and the other at Esquimalt on the west coast. Today these two bases have been greatly expanded and improved, and in addition 12 new bases have been developed on the east and west coasts, in Newfoundland and in Bermuda. H.M.C.S. Somers' Isles, commissioned on August 1, 1944, in Bermuda is used for "working up programs" for ships which are newly constructed or have undergone a long period of refitting after service at sea. Because of the year-around warm climate, it is possible at all times to give instruction in sheltered waters in such essentials as abandoning ship, sending away boarding parties and boat pulling. Instruction in swimming, life-saving and physical training will also be carried on to a considerable degree.

At one of these bases the R.C.N. has put in operation a great floating dock capable of accommodating ships of 25,000 tons. Three marine railways have been constructed at various points capable of carrying for repairs the largest destroyer, and another similar marine railway is being built. The R.C.N. has built also three smaller marine railways that can carry corvettes and minesweepers. Other marine railways have been built for lighter craft.

COMMUNICATIONS

Modern operations lay tremendous significance on the communication of a fleet. From the time a ship is dispatched to sea, it is directed, advised and guarded by means of signals. Ships at sea must keep in touch with land bases, and with other ships. Communication must be swift.

There are three principal naval shore wireless stations in Canada. These stations are equipped with the most up-to-date apparatus and are the equal of any naval station in the world. They are in operation 24 hours a day. The signal school at H.M.C.S. St. Hyacinthe is believed to be the largest training centre of its kind in the British Empire, and, quite possibly, in the world. Currently, the school is accommodating 3,200 sailors and Wrens, and instructing this personnel in an amazing range of subjects relative to the signals branch of the Navy.

From signal flags and semaphore and the Morse code transmitted by the early wireless sets, the signals branch has progressed to Aldis lamps, radio telephone and radar. But this branch consists of much more than men who flash the signals. There are radio artificers who look after repair and maintenance, and coders, whose job it is to code and decode messages, for every message must be cyphered. Since the outbreak of the war a certain naval wireless telegraphy station has handled an average of 180,000 cypher groups each month, or 6,000 groups every 24 hours. In order to handle the work, this particular station employs over 50 specially trained civil service clerks working day and night in eight-hour shifts.

In April, 1945, seven Canadian naval officers completed the longest and most difficult naval communications course ever given in Canada. This eight-month course, given at St. Hyacinthe, was the first of its kind to be offered by British Commonwealth naval services outside the United Kingdom. It included the theoretical and practical aspects of wireless telegraphy, visual signalling, radar, coding cyphering, fleet manoeuvres and other complicated related subjects.