

CANADA'S CORVETTE NAVY

WORLD WAR II

Designed along the lines of a whale catcher for coastal duty with the Royal Navy, the corvette was chosen by the Royal Canadian Navy because it was simple and could be built cheaply by Canadian shipyards. Canada put 123 corvettes to sea in WW II, 111 of the original Flower Class designed in the United Kingdom and 12 of the larger Castle Class. In many ways the corvette was Canada's signature ship – greatest in number and total crew, and with community connections across the country, most being named after our cities, towns and villages.

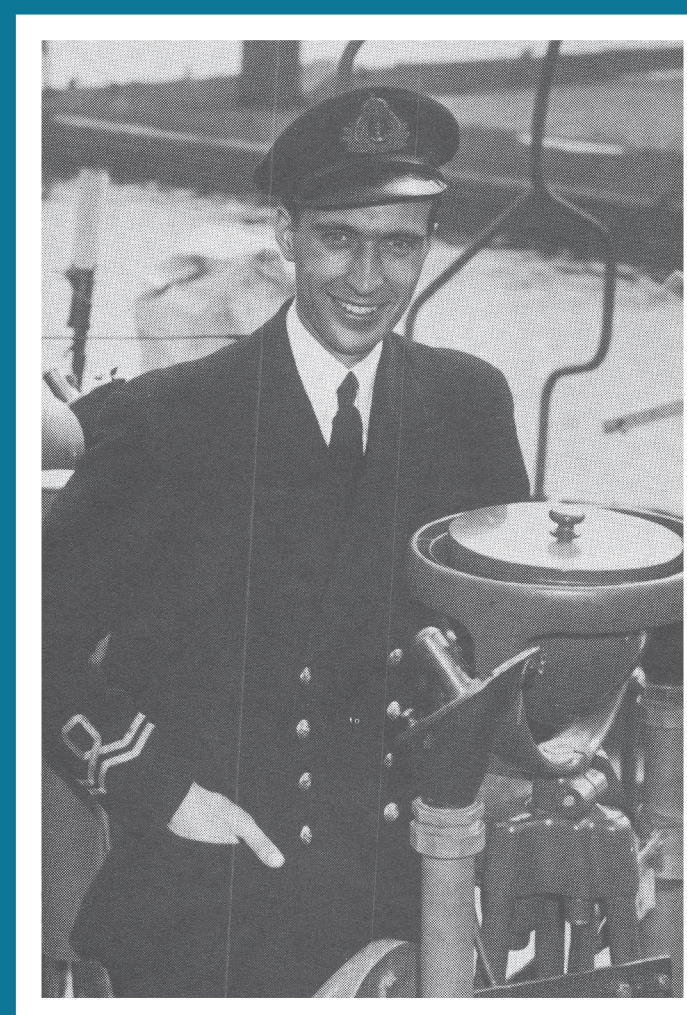


HMCS Cobourg alongside North Pier May 1944



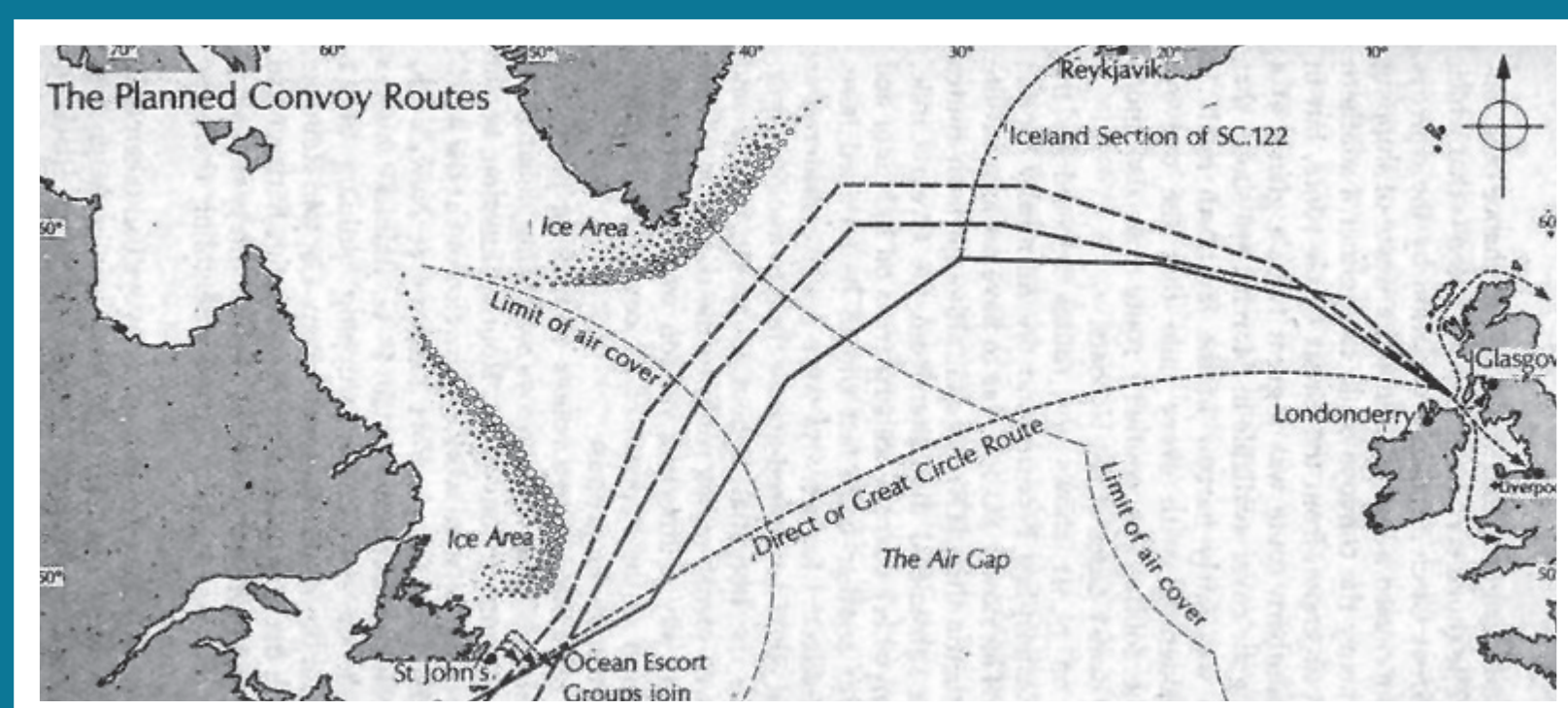
The gunnery officer and the navigation officer who stood 12 to 4 watches noon and night

The North Atlantic was the main theatre of Canadian naval activity and the Newfie-Derry Run, between St. John's Newfoundland and Londonderry in Northern Ireland, was the primary convoy route. Merchant ship losses were heavy particularly early in the war when the navy sailors were green and poorly trained, and escorts were thrown together in groups with inadequate training in tactics and teamwork. Corvettes also served in many other theatres including the English Channel, Gulf of St. Lawrence, Mediterranean, Caribbean and Canada's west coast.



*Cobourg Captain Gordon Johnson
He never let the admiral know
he was a bookkeeper*

Arnold Trask of Digby, N.S. observed that, *"service on board was monotonous and debilitating for long periods, either because of the need for constant vigilance in the face of the twin dangers of the sea and the enemy, or because of the cold in the North Atlantic. When action came, it could be prolonged and brutal with the sight and the aftermath of the sinking of freighters or other warships."*



Typical North Atlantic Convoy Routes



THE COMMISSIONING OF HMCS COBOURG

The Cobourg began to form on the ways of the Midland Shipyard in Midland, Ontario in late 1942. She was a revised Flower Class Corvette, launched on July 14, 1943. It would take another 41 weeks to stuff the shell of the Cobourg with the engine from Port Arthur Shipbuilding Company, the operating machinery from Foster Wheeler, the secret ASDIC and radar devices, the galley, the bulkheads, the gun mounts, the armament stowage and the steering gear mechanism with telemeters and electric cables that were the spinal cord of a fighting ship. The Cobourg was finally commissioned on May 11, 1944. She weighed anchor on Monday, May 15 off the approaches of Midland and headed for Toronto.



HMCS Cobourg