HMCS COBOURG
AT HOME AND AT SEA

The anti-submarine cabin of the corvette HMCS Cobourg, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, 13 July 1944.
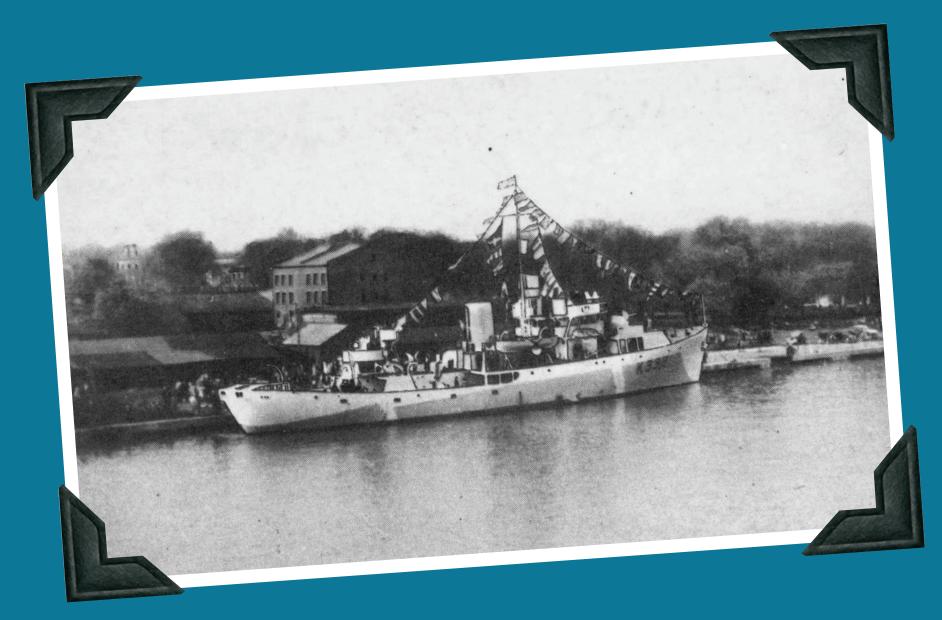*Credit: PO Walter S. Leggett / Canada. Dept. of National Defence / Library and Archives*

HMCS Cobourg visiting Cobourg - May 1944

Wednesday, May 24, 1944 was a perfect spring day made particularly memorable when HMCS Cobourg sailed majestically into Cobourg harbour on her official visit. She was in transit to the Atlantic to join the convoys during WW II, but this was to be a special celebration before all that!

With the Cobourg Kiltie band playing stirring airs and hundreds of admiring citizens on hand, the Cobourg berthed that morning in the Inner Harbour, the scene throughout the day of ceremonies and inspection tours. Mayor Burnet and members of the Town Council were part of the welcoming committee. Veteran Captain Daniel Rooney and Lieutenant Don McKinnon, RCNVR, from Cobourg accompanied the vessel from Toronto.

The officers and men were entertained royally and rumour has it that the ladies auxiliary brought a piano down to the pier to serenade the crew. The citizens supplied the ship with many items such as radios, sports equipment, victorolas, books, washing machines, electric irons, toasters, hot plates, linens, musical instruments, windbreakers and ditty bags.

The next day the Cobourg quietly slipped her berth and proceeded with the daunting prospect of joining the Battle of the Atlantic.

BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

Gordon Johnson, the Commanding Officer, was a lean and serious man with an oval, boyish face topping his six-foot-six-inch frame. He was not a war-like man but he knew how to play the deadly game. He had the precise mind of the chartered accountant that he was, a fact he concealed from his seniors lest they assign him to some pay-branch job ashore. He formally joined the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve in the first days of the war when he was 23. His rise to command of the Cobourg, was rapid after serving on Atlantic convoy duty aboard HMCS Caribou, HMCS Vegreville and HMCS Spikenard.

Kenneth Christmas of Montreal, was the second in command or Executive Officer. He was 32 with a lot of sea experience. The navigating officer was John Green of Victoria BC having previous experience on HMCS Esquimalt. Donald Colyer was the senior acoustic sonar operator who later became a resident of the Town of Cobourg.

HMCS Cobourg served with distinction as a patrol escort for North Atlantic convoys that assembled off Halifax and then crossed the Atlantic, which was a perilous voyage challenging the gauntlet of German U Boats waiting in their path. The Cobourg's home port was St. John's, Newfoundland with Londonderry on the other side. Often, repairs to the ship and equipment were necessary

St. John's harbour offered a safe refuge and provided the officers and crew a brief respite from the fury of the North Atlantic. Shore leave was granted and the crew enjoyed the hospitality of Newfoundlanders. Officers would often visit the wardroom known as the Crow's Nest. Many a tall tale was swapped over drinks at the bar.

May 8, 1945 was the last day of the Battle of the Atlantic as a result of the German surrender. HMCS Cobourg entered Halifax harbour on May 9. After off loading her ammunition at the Ammunition Jetty on May 27 she sailed for Sidney, N.S. on Friday, June 1. She later sailed to Sorel, Quebec and was decommissioned on Friday, June 15, 1945. The crew said their good byes and left the ship with many memories.

Having served faithfully, the Cobourg was sold into mercantile service in 1947 and finally, in 1971, was burned and sunk as the Puerto del Sol under Panamanian registry.

REFERENCE: 'Corvette Cobourg' by Tom Blakely, published by the Royal Canadian Legion, Cobourg Branch.

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