

THE MINESWEEPERS

In addition to the warships already described, there operated on this Coast a number of smaller vessels, some entirely under the White Ensign, some principally in other capacities, but all leaving a memorial of themselves in well-remembered names.

In 1918 five ships were constructed on the Great Lakes after the style of the North Sea trawlers which had been used extensively by the Admiralty to sweep mines. These ships displaced 486 tons; their dimensions were 136 feet by 29 feet by 15 feet 7 inches; they carried one 12-pounder Quick Firing gun; developed about 10 knots; had a complement of 1 officer and 18 men with additional accommodation for 3 officers and 15 men. When filled with 130 tons of coal and 20 tons of fresh water, they were very deep aft, 15 feet 6 inches; compared to the forward draft of 8 feet.

These ships were named ARLEUX, ARRAS, ARMENTIERES, THIEPVAL and GIVENCHY after localities in Europe where Canadian armed forces had been particularly engaged during the war. The first two were allocated to Halifax; ARMENTIERES, which was built by Canadian Vickers, was commissioned June, 1919; THIEPVAL November, 1919; and both were allocated to the Pacific Coast. Armentieres is in the Ypres salient where in 1915 Canadian troops were the first Empire soldiers to be subjected to a poison gas attempt. The first Canadian Division achieved undying fame by holding out for three days and saving the situation. Thiepval is a little town between Amiens and Arras. In this area, the Battles of the Somme were fought from July to November, 1916. These battles, while very costly in casualties and resulting in comparatively small territorial gain, nevertheless had an important effect in the preparation for future victories. Givenchy is another little town north-west of Arras (taken by Canadian forces 12 April, 1917) where Canadian troops were severely engaged in June, 1915. GIVENCHY did not become a naval vessel but was sent on fisheries patrol.

The schooner NADEN has already been mentioned and the schooner STADACONA, while she visited Esquimalt Harbour, must really be considered

an East Coast ship. There are, however, the MALASPINA, COMOX and the NOOTKA. The MALASPINA was a specially constructed Fisheries patrol vessel which was turned over to the naval service at the beginning of the First World War. She was named after the famous Captain Malaspina who, though Italian by birth, sailed for Spain and after whom Malaspina Inlet and Malaspina Strait were named. COMOX and NOOTKA were two minesweepers built in the late thirties and named after two localities on Vancouver Island.

On 26 September, 1938, NOOTKA, a minesweeper especially built in Canada for the RCN, was launched at the Yarrows Esquimalt Harbour. Two months later, on 23 November, a sister ship, HMCS COMOX, was commissioned. She had been built in North Vancouver by the Burrard Shipbuilding Company. Her first Captain was Lieutenant-Commander H. W. S. Soulsby, RCN.

COMOX must have been one of the first Canadian ships to take steps directly connected with the Second World War. On 27 August, 1939, she went to the ammunition depot which was then in Esquimalt Harbour across from the DOCKYARD. She picked up 20 tons of 6-inch ammunition for the battery located in Stanley Park, Vancouver, and then sailed for York Island (Johnstone Straits) with a detachment of 4 officers and 53 other ranks to set up a coast artillery point. COMOX then remained off York Island to commence examination duties.

In March, 1940, COMOX and NOOTKA sailed for Halifax. As the U.S. was still neutral, they had to take the maximum amount of coal in their bunders and store 20 tons in bags on the upper deck. It took them 21 days from Esquimalt to the Canal and they arrived with only 2 days' coal left.