

## Profile of Naval Service



Lewis Herbert Matthews – Able Seaman (Radar)

Date Enlisted: October 29, 1942

R.C.N.V.R. Division: Saint John, NB

Training Headquarters: Halifax, NS

Official Number: V50265

Date of Discharge: August 21, 1945



**Basic Training Saint John, NB**

**Fall of 1942**

**The following is a firsthand description of the living conditions and experiences of sailors who served onboard corvettes and frigate ships in the North Atlantic during the Second World War. This account was written in his own words by able seaman Lewis Herbert Matthews of L'Etete, NB who enrolled in the service at eighteen years of age.**

First ship I was on “**HMCS Buctouche**” (K179):

The news and papers are full of stories of stress and living conditions that our service people encounter on foreign tours of duty; some as short as thirty days.

I would like to make known some of the conditions that sailors on old short forecastle corvette's had to contend with in the early 1940's, for periods of years at a time. There was not room for everyone to sling their hammock, some had to sleep on the lockers and deck in the seaman's mess.

The hatches were not closed at sea as they could jamb if the ship was damaged; heavy canvas curtains covered the hatches & doors. In rough weather sea would break into the well deck and sometimes leave several inches of water that would soak the people sleeping on the mess deck floor with two duffle coats under them and one over top.

We were not allowed to take our clothes off at sea and after twelve to sixteen days everyone was getting quite ripe. Most suffered with boils on shoulders and neck due to not washing and dirty clothes.

The condenser's would only produce enough water for the ship's boilers and there was only enough to wash our face and hands with.

When in port with a water supply, we washed our cloths in a scrub bucket and used a plunger for the agitator.

We could not hang our clothes on the upper deck to dry, (To un - navy looking). They were dried over the engine room through a small hatch on the fiddley deck and were dirtier when they dried than when they were put there.

There were not enough plates, bowls and cups for everyone as they got broken in rough weather and only replaced every three months, the cutlery was thrown over - board in the dish water so that was another problem.

A kind hearted waitress at The Green Lantern restaurant in Halifax, NS gave me a knife, fork and spoon, so I was quite popular as I would lend them after I ate.

After about five or six days the bread would have a half inch of blue mould all over the outside and we would cut all this off and toast it. The bread was kept in a wire mesh locker and was supplied at port of call and sometimes a trip could be sixteen days or longer. (No sliced bread in those days).

The short forecastle corvette I was on was infested with cock roaches and they would get inside the bread and it looked as if a load of buck shot went through it, you could eat it or go without. (Everyone ate it).

Our kit bags and clothes were full of roaches and an empty Coke bottle would fill full of them over night.

There were only enough duffel coats for the ship's look out's and a few spare ones to dry out, so with everyone using the same coats the arms were smooth from the elbow to the cuff where they wiped their nose in cold weather.

Many meals were lost crossing the well deck from the galley to the forecastle in rough weather.

This corvette (HMCS Buctouche) went for a refit in 1943 at Saint John, NB and had an extended forecastle added and was a much better ship. Corvettes would generally go for a refit in about two years as they were in steady use and got worn out quite fast. (So did corvette sailors)

### Second ship **HMCS Rivere Du Loup (K357)**

This was a new ship and I was part of the commissioning crew at Quebec City in late fall 1943. This was an extended forecastle corvette and living conditions much better, everyone had room to sling a hammock and did not have to go outside to the gallery for food.

Being a new ship, we had to go to Bermuda for work ups, to get the crew used to working as a team. A lot of the crew had never been on a ship before so I found myself an old hand "AB" at

18 yrs. old. We were very busy for two weeks, night and day and did quite well working together through this learning exercise.

This ship had a washing machine donated by the town of Rivere Du Loup but only one leading seaman was allowed to run it and charged .50 cents to wash our clothes, this was about one quarter of a seaman's day's pay, so we still washed our cloths in a bucket.

There was only one shower for the stokers, seamen and commission people and about an hour before entering port the water was turned on, and everyone not on duty would rush to get cleaned up like a flock of ducks under a drain pipe.

The good thing about work up in Bermuda in the winter time was the warm weather and rum at .60 cents an imperial quart.

On this ship we received "Gulf of St. Lawrence Battle Honors", along with 74 other escort ships that had served in that area at different times. Many people are not aware that ships and lives were lost so close to home.

We escorted a British submarine that was damaged and could not dive to Philadelphia, U.S.A. for repairs and while there saw a flotilla of small wooden mine sweepers with Russian crews, they had to carry their deck loaded with fuel and barrels. When we got to St. John's, Newfoundland they were there, they left in a heavy gale of wind and we never expected they would survive the storm, but when we got to Londonderry, Ireland there they were, getting ready to go to Russia, tough breed of men.

We were also with the largest convoy that crossed the ocean during the war, Convoy HXS left New York, July 17, 1944. There were 167 merchant ships and none were lost.

### Third ship **HMCS Ribble (K525)**

This ship was transferred to the Royal Canadian Navy in 1944 and returned to the Royal Navy in 1945.

This was a frigate that worked out of Londonderry, Ireland and channel ports also Western Approaches.

This was a change from corvettes as they were larger, 301 ft. long. (Corvettes were 205 ft. long & 33 ft. wide)

People that would get sick in bad weather on corvettes did not get sea sick on frigates as they were much steadier.

This ship did not have a shower for the crew, only a tin bath tub and the day the war ended we were off the coast of France and after splicing the main brace, Ron Lynch from West Saint John, NB used the bath tub for a drum and beat the bottom out of it, so back to washing up in the scrub bucket.

We did not get ashore for five days after the war ended as we were escorting German sub's to different ports in England. On the clear nights we could see the cities in England all lit up like a Christmas tree, what a sight after all of those years of black out.

When we did get to shore the celebration was over the booze all drunk and the girls too tired to party. (Sailors luck)

On this ship we picked up 23 survivors out of a German sub (U1209) that was sunk off Land's End, England. Several ships were having a go at this sub, I remember HMCS Montreal was one of them.

We had these prisoners aboard for a few days and one of them spoke English and asked me what part of Canada I was from and told me that he was familiar with this part of Canada as just before the war in the summer of 1939 he was on a German ship that was loading pulp wood out of booms at Lepreau and the mouth of the Magaguadavic River in Charlotte Co., NB, right in my door yard as I was brought up about three miles from the mouth of the river.

I had part of a German sea uniform (Leather) and Weldon Haines from Saint John, NB who was on torpedo boats had part of a uniform (Pants) and we gave them to the Naval archives at Stadacona Barricks at Halifax and they are in a glass case and our names are on a brass plaque.

I came home on the Ile De France and arrived July 14, 1945. I was lucky to have enough sea time to have the points to get home so soon, as a lot of people were almost a year getting back. (11,500 service people including Gen. Creaser). On the Ile De France, I met Ben Leland who lived about four miles from me, he was a navigator with a bomber squadron, also Byron Nodding and Ed Justason from Beaver Harbour, NB. They were both serving on English ships when the war ended.

Foreign countries I visited are Newfoundland (Not part of Canada at that time), England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Iceland, Gibraltar and Bermuda.



Picture of Crew on HMCS Ribble

FRONT ROW - LEFT TO RIGHT  
 BILL CURRAN E.R.A.; EARL SULLIVAN E.R.A.; LEONARD ODDY P.O. TEL; ALLAN WIGMORE P.O. HSLDL; AUBREY MORRIS P.O. Q.R.1; JOHN FARRISH YEO, OF SIGS.; RICHARD FATE P.O. L.T.O.; ALBERT CAMPBELL E.R.A.;  
 WALTER PULLAN E.R.A.; NORMAN MORRISON E.R.A.; GEORGE FADEN C.P.O. TC.; THOMAS WEBSTER S/LT. ENG; MR. CREPAULT C.O.; MR. ROBERT WATSON AS.O.; MR. HARRY D. HOLLAND EX.O.; MR.A.A. DYKES C.G.;  
 MR. EDWARD BROCKWELL S.O.; MR. CULLIS LANCASTER NO; MR. HORACE DENYER E.O.; MR. JOSEPH BERTRAND R.O.; ERNEST CLARK CH. STOL; MORTIMER ZWINGER E.R.A.; JIM ASH STO. P.O.; CLARENCE ATKINSON S.P.O.  
 PETER HODGES S.P.O.; JAMES DODDS E.R.A.; RICHARD QUISSEY S.P.O.; ALFRED RICKARD O.A.; TOM BURGESS P.O. COOK; WALTER GOULD SHPT; BERNARD BOYCE S.P.O.  
SECOND ROW - LEFT TO RIGHT  
 TED KENNEDY E.A.; EMIL BALAGUS STO. <sup>1/c</sup>; ROBERT HOWE A.B.; HARRY WILLIAMSON STO. <sup>1/c</sup>; EDWARD RENAUD STO. <sup>1/c</sup>; LEONARD ORTMAN STO. <sup>1/c</sup>; WILLIAM HARGROVE A.B.; CLARENCE CROCKER A.B.;  
 WILLIAM SINCLAIR A.B.; HERBERT LEARMOUTH A.B.; JOSEPH JAMES A.B.; ROBERT GIBBONS A.B.; WILLIAM COUTTS A.B.; EDWARD OLIVER L/SMN.; JOSEPHY SPROSTON L/SNR.; ROBERT MALLOCK A.B.; JAMES DONAHUE A.B.;  
 JOHN SHARP A.B.; BEN BATTRAM L/CODER; ROBERT GRANDISON A.B.; BARRY PIRT TEL.; DOUGLAS SLOAN A.B.; ROBERT MILNER STO. <sup>1/c</sup>; DONALD KENNEDY A.B.; LAWRENCE BANKS L/STO.; JOSEPH DeLUCA STO. <sup>1/c</sup>;  
 KEITH DALE STO. <sup>1/c</sup>; HAROLD HARLOS STO. <sup>1/c</sup>; DONALD CIRIOUX A.B.; ROBERT KAY A.B.; JAMES O'GORMAN P.O. WTR.; MAURICE LADONCEUR E.A.  
THIRD ROW - LEFT TO RIGHT  
 JOHN ANDERSON A.B.; ROBERT DUNCAN A.B.; KENNETH SHORTEAD A.B.; EDWARD HALL A.B.; WILLIAM JOHNSON SIG.; THOMAS GOLDIE TEL; EDWARD PRICE <sup>1/c</sup> STO.; ALBERT ROLLIN STO. <sup>1/c</sup>; ARTHUR MEYER A.B.;  
 JAMES McCOWAN A.B.; GEORGE STYMIEST CODER; LAWRENCE SPENCER TEL.; GEORGE RAKUSEN AB; LEON RINARD A.B.; LEO JOHNS A.B.; JOHN FORAN A.B.; MILFORD HOLLAND A.B.; KEIGHT LIGHTFOOT A.B.;  
 ROY WILSON O/SMN; EDWARD MALO A.B.; HERBERT CONNAR A.B.; RONALD SMITH A.B.; BEN STILLWELL A.B.; DAVID WILKES A.B.; LIONEL LEGER A.B.; PAUL POIRIER CODER; ARNOLD BEDARD A.B.; BILL SHEA L/STO;  
 GEORGE WILLIS A.P.O.; ADELARD HEBERT L/SMN; WILLIAM TARNOW A.B.  
FOURTH ROW - LEFT TO RIGHT  
 CLARENCE TUFFIN COOK; JAMES FERRIE L/S.A.; VERNON HARRIS L/S.A.; LANE MacDONALD L/SMN.; JOHN McKENNA A.B.; JOHN SMYTHI STO. <sup>1/c</sup> LORENZO OGER A.B.; DONALD HOMER SIG.; CHARLES LEMMON TEL.;  
 MITTON ROSSONSON A.B.; ARTHUR DALE SIG.; MURRAY A.B.; GEORGE TENNANT A.B.; JAMES THOMPSON A.B.; FREDRICK CLARK CODER; TERRY GRIMBLE A.B.; DON KEMPTON A.B.; PHILLIP WEIGHILL A.B.;  
 CARL WIKER A.B.; GERALD FINKNEY TEL.; FRANK HYTTENBAUGH L/STO.; MURRAY FARRELL L/STO.; WILLIAM CRAWFORD STO <sup>1/c</sup>; WILLIAM LEWIN L/STO.; LEWIS MATTHEWS A.B.; VERN DAVIS STO. <sup>1/c</sup>; ALFRED WILSON  
 WALTER WILSON L/S.B.A.; LLOYD MacCLENAGHAN STWD.  
FIFTH ROW  
 MARCEL BELLAND STWD; JOHN MOUNTAIN COOK; CASIMIR KAPUSTA A.B.; GEORGE EVANS L/STWD; JACK MERCER COOK

Names of Crew on HMCS Ribble