

# PETTY OFFICER FIRST CLASS E. LESLIE GOODWIN: A ROYAL NAVAL CANADIAN VOLUNTEER IN WORLD WAR I

**David Pierce Beatty**

A well known Canadian yachtsman and member of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club, Aemilius Jarvis of Toronto, suggested our unit. His objective was to recruit youngsters with yachting and fishing experience. He expected them to serve in small craft like motor boats and sweepers with a short training period, only three months training duty. However, we were recruited from all over Canada.

Former Petty Officer First Class E. Leslie Goodwin,  
RNCVR, Wareham, Massachusetts, 4 May 1991.

Petty Officer First Class E. Leslie Goodwin's unit was the Royal Naval Canadian Volunteer Reserve (RNCVR). A native of Baie Verte, New Brunswick, he remembers travelling to Saint John, some seventy-five years ago in December, 1916, and joining the Overseas Division of the RNCVR. He was seventeen years old at the time. The RNCVR is all but forgotten today. Yet Leslie Goodwin was one of 8000 Canadians who joined the RNCVR and one of 1700 volunteer reservists who served overseas. In Leslie's words, "theirs was a tale of endurance, perseverance, courage and adventure."

In 1986 Leslie Goodwin decided that his part in that tale should be told. He recalled his navy days in letters and in a May 1991 interview at his home in Marion, Massachusetts. He returned "home" in July 1992 to visit his sister, Phyllis Anderson, at the Goodwin family residence in Baie Verte. Twenty years had passed since Leslie last visited Baie Verte relatives, such as his cousin and World War I army veteran Vincent Goodwin. One of them accompanied him on a boat ride down the Baie Verte creek to explore some of Leslie's favourite boyhood haunts along the shore, a trip that again set him to reminisce about his navy days.

For anyone interested in Canadian history, Leslie Goodwin's recollections of World War I naval life are worth relating. They remind us of a Canadian volunteer naval force in World War I, and of the challenges and opportunities an earlier generation faced. They tell the story of how a young seaman from a tiny New Brunswick village viewed the conflict. They offer insight into the way he and others contended with a wartime emergency that compelled them to spend—or lose—their youth in the service of their country.

Leslie began his account by recalling his childhood. "About 1910 my father, Ernest Goodwin, gave ManseL my older brother, a sail boat. He did not take to sailing. The following year when the boat had to be painted, I painted her. So I inherited that boat and spent all my

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spare time sailing up and down the Baie Verte creek. The summer of 1912 my mother chartered a nice little power launch about fifteen feet long, powered with a single cylinder, 'make or break' engine. Major Ernest Wood, a Baie Verte sawmill operator, and World War I veteran to be, built that boat. Therefore, at an early age of my life I served my time in both sail and power."

"In a class prophecy written by Wendell Scott, a fellow student a few years my senior, he said I would 'spend my life tangled in a boat rigging.' With that background and a contrary nature, it now seems no wonder that I wanted to be different from my older friends who had joined the army. They included my cousins, Vincent Goodwin, Wallace and Norman Sutherland [from Amherst, Nova Scotia], many Baie Verte friends including Wendell Scott, George Prescott and older men with military training such as Ernest Wood and Tom Prescott." Thus, Leslie Goodwin chose the navy.

Admittedly, he was underage when he signed up in Saint John, New Brunswick, in December 1916. "They asked me how old I was, and I said eighteen. Then the Lord put his hand on my shoulder, and when they asked me when I was born, I said, May 2, 1899. If the recruiting officer noticed that the two statements did not add up, he made no comment. That record followed me through the war and earned me the right to a year at business school at Stanstead College in Québec, all expenses paid, at war's end. I joined the RNCVRs. They were recruited in Canada and loaned to the British Royal Navy. To avoid friction between Canadian and British seamen, we drew 30 cents per day that was paid to us by the paymaster on each ship we were on. An additional 80 cents per day, which was the difference between British and Canadian pay for the ordinary seamen, the Canadian Government paid and deposited in a Postal Savings Account credited to us."

Leslie's service certificate described him as five feet, seven and one-half inches in stature, of medium complexion, with dark hair and blue eyes. He declared his religious denomination as Methodist, and in answer to the question "Can he Swim," the recruiter wrote "Yes." Under the heading, "Civil Employment," the recruiter wrote "Engineer." Leslie's official number was V. R. 3286. He managed to talk the recruiter into granting him a Christmas leave and free transportation home to Baie Verte and, after the holidays, to Halifax.

"After arriving in Halifax on 10 January 1917, I boarded the depot ship, HMCS *Niobe*." The *Niobe* was a cruiser that had been laid up at Halifax as a depot ship in September 1915 because she required more-than-economical repair to continue to be seagoing, and the Royal Canadian navy (RCN) desperately needed additional accommodation at Halifax because the old Royal Navy (RN) dockyard was so small. There was a long RN tradition of laying up old warships to serve as floating barracks (or prisons) to save on the costs of expensive barracks ashore, especially during wartime emergencies.

Leslie donned a sailor's uniform, hat and hat band with RNCVR printed on it, and started to learn the ship's routine. "My fellow recruits and I envied the ship's company who sported *Niobe* on their cap tallies. I found the naval uniform comfortable and the same for the naval hammock that I slept in, instead of a bed." On 24 January 1917 the small group of RNCVRs boarded a large ocean liner bound for Liverpool, England.

"Troops jammed the transport from stem to stern. We worried about submarines all the way, but we landed safely. A British naval petty officer mustered us into the Royal Navy. Guides escorted us to the railroad station and thence to London. For a seventeen-year-old country boy the experience proved very impressive." They spent the night at a place for servicemen known as 'Aggie Weston's'—a clean bed in a wire cage and all the necessities. "I later spent many nights there at, I think, a shilling a night [about 30 cents], and I still bless Miss Weston for her kindness to servicemen."

"The next morning, 25 January 1917, naval officers took us to the train for Portsmouth (nicknamed 'Pompeii' by sailors) and delivered us as raw recruits to the Royal Naval Barracks there. We underwent three months naval training consisting of gunnery military drill, rope work, knots and splices. Retired naval petty officers with at least twenty years naval service, who the Admiralty called up when the war broke out, served as our instructors. They were the finest, and I can't say enough good about those three months."

When the men finished training, they received a week's leave. Leslie spent the time in London. Naval officials then assigned him to a minesweeper, the *Strathlocky*, his first sea-going boat. British minesweepers at the time consisted of converted steam-powered fishing trawlers, crewed by a captain, mate, chief and second engineer, coal passer, three to twelve deck hands, and a cook. "We started to sweep at the crack of dawn before traffic began; then at dark we escorted troop ships to France, and returned at daylight to sweep the War Channel.' We escorted at night, of course, so the enemy would not see our ships. Since we only swept for mines during daylight, the crew worked a long day—not the usual four hours on and four hours off. We would do six days sea duty and then have two days in port."

The Service fed pretty well. I don't remember being hungry, but, on leave, things were rationed, and we had meal tickets. Few people today know how the English people starved toward the end of the war. There was no sugar, few eggs, very little meat, and no coffee. The navy gave us cocoa for the most part. Aboard the depot ship, HMS *Victory*, where we lived when not at sea, the cook's crew kept a fire going in the galley range all night." *Victory* was the eighteenth-century "ship-of-the-line" in which English Admiral Horatio Nelson had sailed at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, and, like many old ships, had been laid up as a "hulk" to serve, like *Niobe*, as accommodation. "The minesweepers were clean; the navy kept them in constant use and hygienic conditions well regulated. However, cockroaches lived on the depot ships. *Victory* had a great coffee maker and steam cauldron, though we never had any coffee in the navy."

"When I was living on the *Victory*, I worked as caterer on the mess one time. I had to take the big billycan, that had a large round top and a big handle on it, to the galley boiler room for cocoa in the morning. The ceiling in that boiler room was low. Naturally the cockroaches liked to gather near heat; during the night that ceiling would be covered solid with them. In the early morning when the cook removed the huge cauldron cover to add the cocoa, the steam billowed up toward the ceiling, and cockroaches pelted down like a rain shower. The cook just poured in the cocoa and stirred it in along with any occasional cockroaches. Then the caterers from each mess lined up with their billycans. The cook set the cans or kettles on the floor under the spigot. When the spigot got clogged with cockroaches, he rammed in a long stick like a yard stick (which he always carried) and cleared the spigot. Somehow or other you got used to it, and it didn't spoil your appetite. The cocoa was good and the crew did not seem to mind much, even after they had taken their turn with the mess kettle."

Leslie's teenage work experience in Baie Verte worked in his favour when at sea. "Back in the summer of 1916 I had worked for my father on his highway building gang. At the start I had charge of the gasoline water pump that supplied water for our two steam boilers, one on a 12-ton roller and one on a stone crusher. The engineer, Tweed McGlashin, a former locomotive engineer from Tidnish, Nova Scotia, and I became very friendly, and he taught me steam engineering. I hopped out in the morning, got the steam up on the boiler, opened the cocks on the cylinder to drain off the water and idled the engine to warm it up and have it ready for McGlashin when he arrived at 7:00 a.m. When he had sickness in his family and had to leave, I got the roller job. That work ended in November, 1916 for the winter."

Understanding the intricacies of the steam engine paid Leslie big dividends. When he signed up, he listed his last job as steam engineer. "After basic training and we were off to sea,

I got assigned to the 'Black Gang' Engineer Crew. I didn't like it! Happily, after I finished my first trip to sea, an emergency arose. I volunteered to go aboard and handle the stoking and engine job on a regular size—eighty to eighty-five foot-minesweeper. The skipper seemed surprised that I would volunteer, but anyway, I was out two or three days on that boat that carried special sweeping equipment. I managed the engine room, did the stoking and kept the steam up—all at the bright age of seventeen!" That episode opened the door to more opportunity.

"I was born lucky. Naval officials allowed me to sit for an engineering exam on 18 May 1917. A key question asked on the exam was: How do you clear a water glass on a steam boiler? I said, you open the cock and if nothing comes out from the bottom of the glass, you push a wire up and clear the blockage. The next question was: What kind of a wire? The proper answer to that was a crooked wire. If you were foolish enough to send a straight wire up the glass, you would get scalded and lose a hand! I passed easily and became Petty Officer First Class the following day. They put me in charge of the watch in the engine room. Petty Officers in the British Navy wore crossed anchors on their sleeves and one or two hash marks showing from 3 to 15 years service. They often disparagingly addressed the RNCVRs who passed the exam as 'You-So-Called POs.' The war didn't last long enough to give me a hash mark."

"It took two non-magnetic minesweepers to handle minesweeping in my day. Most of my experience was on Canadian drifters, and a drifter was the same as a trawler...The drifters were newly-built for minesweeping and, since magnetic mines had come into use, were of wooden non-magnetic construction. Drifters, to a fisherman, were boats slightly smaller than a trawler. The name came from drifting with a dozen or so gill nets, but the builder equipped these boats with special minesweeping equipment to negotiate minesweeping cables. Drifters did the same job as the larger trawlers with about half the crew. Drifting for mines would definitely be a misnomer as you positively had to be under power for minesweeping."

"The first boats I had experience on ran eighty-five feet or more in length, and were regular North Sea fishing trawlers like the *Strathlocky* commissioned in wartime for minesweeping work." Canadian drifters measured eighty-four feet in length, weighed ninety-nine tons, and were built in Canada for the Royal Navy. Canadian shipbuilders constructed them to the same general design as British built drifters. The Admiralty ordered 100 of them in January 1917, and all were launched that year. Production of fifty hulls built by Davie SB&R, of Levis, Québec, and twenty-six more by Canadian Vickers, in Montréal contributed to this remarkable shipbuilding achievement. Fifteen manufacturers produced boilers and engines, including four American companies who contributed forty-seven-and-one-half sets. Goldie & McCulloch of Gait, Ontario, led the engineering group, supplying thirty-eight units.

"Canadian drifters had Canadian crews on them when they arrived overseas. I developed a low opinion of the civilian crews who sailed those drifters to Gibraltar. When we took over those boats, they weren't liveable; after a night or two I found we had bedbugs. It was my first experience with bedbugs and I did not like it."

"We swept using two boats. The sweep cable ran from the gallows on one sweeper down to the block pulley on the paravane—towed by a second wire across parallel to the water's surface to the paravane of the other sweeper—and up to the gallows of that boat and to her winch. The steel frame that reached out over the boat's side we dubbed the gallows. The sweep wire was a serrated cable that consisted of one layer of wire put on the wrong way. The crew found it difficult to handle by hand."

"In sweeping, when we caught a mine, we dragged it a little distance. The serrated cable ran through the chain or cable holding the mine eventually cutting it; the mine would then bob to the surface. We had to keep a constant look out for floating mines. We kept a few

military rifles on board that we used to shoot the mine's glass horns and explode the mines. Often in shooting them I put the bullet right through the mine causing it to sink. When it hit bottom and the horns broke-look out! We swept crossways of the Channel from deep into shoal water. Thus, when we slipped the cable, the mine's anchor cable would be long enough to allow the mine to float to the surface. So even if the mine remained anchored, we could sink it or shoot the horns with rifle fire."

If Leslie Goodwin joined the navy to have a little excitement, he got it abruptly. "In our naval training, they instructed all hands to use the lesser guns that were permanently mounted on deck. On a minesweeper, they were mounted about amidships. One man could operate them when they were loaded, as they were at all times. One day, early in my sweeping career, a gunner and three or four deck hands had been assigned gun duty. Suddenly those of us in the engine room felt a tremendous shock that broke the water gauge on the steam boiler, filling the room with steam. Then we felt another shock, a concussion from our three-pounder. An enemy sub had surfaced, and thinking we were harmless, had torpedoed the ship we were escorting. As I recall, she was a British ship (an oiler weighing 7,338 tons), the *Limeleaf*. One of the engine room gang, a RNCVR from Ontario, jumped to our gun and got off one shot before the sub went down. The torpedoing left us with the crew of the freighter on our hands. I can't remember that our captain attempted to depth charge the sub. My pal claimed a direct hit on the sub, although it seems doubtful."

Leslie and his shipmates narrowly escaped disaster, though, a few days later. "One day we arrived in shoal waters off England's Isle of Wight where the Allies had lost a ship and part of a crew the previous day. We slipped the cable. It was customary in such cases to stand watch. It was extremely important that we always kept a watch after we slipped the cable and started winding it in to begin a new run, so that a mine didn't foul and drag up into the gallows."

"The gallows had two block pulleys in them; one was for the cable itself to bring that aboard and take it to the winch. The second pulley was for a cable that ran to the paravane. The paravane also had a pulley on it for the sweep wire and it took the cable practically straight down from the side of the boat. Then it crossed over to the paravane on the other sweeper and went up to the winch on its deck. With that we travelled side by side at the same speed and tried to regulate the speed. We worked on steam powered boats so we encountered no problems in regulating speed. The boat's motion kept the paravane down so that the cable swept across, not on the bottom, but near the bottom."

"In this instance a chaplain aboard the other boat started conducting a funeral service for those men lost the previous day. He had called all hands to the service, so the other sweeper posted no look out. Suddenly our winch man saw a glass-spiked mine, hanging upside down, traveling right up into the gallows. He managed to stop the winch. Both ships would have disintegrated if the mine had exploded in that position, but it didn't. Fortunately the day was calm and remained so until mine experts arrived from Portsmouth and removed the detonator. I don't know to this day how they managed that with the mine hanging in mid-air. Someone shot a photo of that mine dangling from the cable and gave copies to all hands. My copy lies somewhere in the attic of my old Baie Verte home."

"Most of the men handling the sweeper were ex-fishermen so naval discipline at sea remained lax. In port at the Portsmouth Naval Yard regulations were more rigid. While we tied up there one day my brother, Mansel visited me. He, a machine gunner with the 26th Canadian Infantry Battalion, wore a lieutenant's uniform. To my surprise, I succeeded in talking the gate guard into letting him in, and I gave him a tour of our minesweeper and the Portsmouth Navy Yard."

This sweeping routine lasted until late August 1917 when naval officials called Leslie and other RNCVRs in and ordered them to ready for transfer to the depot ship HMS *Vivid*, an accommodation "hulk" laid up alongside the wharf in Plymouth, England. Naturally authorities never told them why, but it later turned out that they were bound for Gibraltar. "The long wait on *Vivid* without really knowing what we were waiting for was boring, but a week's leave in London helped."

"Along in the fall my friend, who had shot at the sub, arrived back from thirty days' leave in Scotland with a distressing story. He had gone there intending to help a cousin with the harvest, but arrived too early. It had rained continually, so that farmers had been unable to finish harvest. He wanted friends with farming experience to volunteer to go up and help. Having worked on my grandfather's farm a bit, I applied for harvest leave, and received thirty days and a free rail pass. I took a pal with me."

They arrived at Driney Farm in Dingwall, a small town in northern Scotland, and called on a Mr. Souter. "He ran a book store in town and a farm located two miles straight up the hill—a hill we climbed every day but Sunday. The Souters took us into their home as guests. We worked early to late to harvest the grain that was in short supply in that part of the country. This made the Souters happy, but not their hired help who wanted to quit by the clock with no thought of sticking at it until we housed the grain." Leslie spent some enjoyable moments with the family at day's end. "Mr. Souter had a blind brother who played the violin, and we held a sing-song most evenings."

"Some forty years later when I drove into Souter's yard with my family, I said, 'what does the name Goodwin mean to you?' And he said, 'Leslie Goodwin, from New Brunswick!' He grabbed my hand. The Souters became life-long friends, and I later in January and February 1919 spent a long leave at Driney Farm. Mr. Souter had a brother who was president of Distilleries Co. Ltd., in Stirling, Scotland. The latter taught me about good Scotch whisky and claimed the rum served in the Royal Navy was the best in the world."

Leslie found sitting around the hardest thing to endure in wartime. His visit to Driney Farm helped pass the time. "Back in Portsmouth on 7 April 1918, we drew rations, bully beef, canned junk and sea biscuit, which we had to carry with us for a trip to Gibraltar. We boarded a 150 foot, steam-powered, private yacht, and travelled some distance along the west seacoast of England. Before the government commandeered the yacht, some Near East potentate owned it, so we heard. It was loaded with ammunition. We travelled at a slow speed, about eight knots. The captain hated having us aboard. His temper showed and he kept growling: 'the government will pay for this.' Despite his fuming, he had to accommodate twenty-five or thirty of us, and he assigned us nice staterooms. My good friend C.H.B. Bennett from British Columbia and I shared a handsome stateroom. The yacht sported an enormous dining room where we met at mealtimes to eat and draw hot water to make our cocoa. After a day or two of eating bully beef and hard tack I, in wandering around the boat, stopped in at the galley. The first thing I knew a dish of something glided out in front of me, and I got the idea. I had a shilling or so in my hand and knocked it on the table—gave it to him. That cook made excellent curry and could be bribed for a few pennies. For the next four or five days I lived a life of Riley, and then finally I let Bennett in on it. Eventually, we got so we didn't turn up at the mess in the middle of the day at all. So while we feasted on the fat of the land, the other boys lived on their iron rations till they ran out."

"It took several days for that small overladen vessel to reach Gibraltar—longer than naval officials had calculated. So we ganged up and appealed to the skipper for help. We told him we had run out of hard tack and bully beef. He said, I don't want you boys to go hungry. But he fumed that 'the navy would pay for this and dearly!' He fed us. When one considers that

he commanded a boat loaded to the gunnels with ammunition and men, it's no wonder he was so prickly. From then on we attended the regular mess, and I didn't have to slip any more shillings over the counter. Other than eating our time was pretty much our own. We stood submarine watch, of course, during the trip."

Finally the tedious trip ended, and the RNCVRs moved into barracks at Gibraltar or HMS *Cormorant*, as the Royal Navy called it. "All this time we had no idea why the navy transferred us. In Gibraltar we could consume all the food we could pay for. We enjoyed plenty of leave for sightseeing trips on the Rock since they assigned us no duties when we first arrived. Gibraltar, in the liveable area opposite its sea coast side, consisted of one main street wide enough for pedestrians. The street ran roughly north and south and contained no vehicle traffic. We quickly learned where to find excitement partway up the mountain-side on the ramps. Streets were narrow with one running above the other like a set of steps. A large residential district in Gibraltar sprawled over streets like this, streets too narrow for vehicles. Sailors soon learned that certain areas on the ramps housed ladies of easy virtue."

"We used to go up and tour those areas, and we took along one young friend, a very handsome boy of about my age. The women used to rush out and grab him, and say, 'come in, come in, we bookey you for love.' It wasn't long before that boy landed on the sick list. That was the ramps! We climbed higher up on the ramps to see the monkeys. They emerged from the brush and vegetation and we fed them." Monkeys enjoyed legal protection in Gibraltar, because after the British captured it early in the eighteenth century, the Spaniards tried to take it back. The latter secretly attempted to move troops over the mountains behind Gibraltar. But the monkeys heard the Spanish soldiers approaching and made such a racket they alerted the residents. So the British defended the Rock and killed the Spanish attackers.<sup>2</sup>

"All servicemen know that war consists mostly of waiting." Eventually a convoy of steam-powered drifters arrived from Canada by way of Bermuda and the Azores. "I cannot recall how many they sent (fourteen were sent to Gibraltar), but the navy assigned me to *Canadian Drifter (CD) 69* as second engineer. The chief engineer, a man named Crawley, had the same rank and pay as I. These were eighty-foot plus wooden boats with cabin fore and aft, and forecastle forward for cook and crew. Our drifters carried two sails, a mainsail and foresail. While we lacked sail area enough to afford us much increase in speed, the canvas provided comfort by steadying the boat, especially when we ran beam to the sea. Having grown up on a sailboat, one can be assured that *CD 69* used her sails. Our skipper hailed from the Midwest, and had never sailed a boat in his life. I cannot recall the exact size of the sails, but would describe the boat as having a short schooner rig."

"In a few days we familiarized ourselves with the boats and the high brass praised us on our ability to dock the drifters. We commenced minesweeping in the Straits of Gibraltar. That went on a while, though we found no mines. Eventually we started towing balloons across the Strait. We sent up a balloon carrying a man in a basket. This lighter than air balloon we controlled with our regular deck steam powered winch that could lower the basket to deck level. The balloon lifted one man up to a height of **100** or so feet where he had an unlimited view all around the compass to help in locating submarines. He then directed the boat over the submarine and the crew dropped depth charges. We also tried out listening devices supposedly designed to pick out submarine propeller beats. Rumours also abounded that we were headed for the opposite end of the Mediterranean to tow oil barges. Later we heard the navy decided that our drifters drew too much water for that task."

While *CD 69* worked the Straits of Gibraltar, a dispute simmered on board between first engineer, Crawley, and the cook. "After months of 'No Eggs for Breakfast' Crawley raised hell with the cook because he couldn't have three eggs for breakfast. In peace time, Crawley

had lived a life deprived of a decent upbringing and education. He survived some time living as a hobo in Canada. He typified a certain group in the navy. Boys in the service, brought up in better homes, rarely complained, whereas, the Crawleys whined when the cook served less than three eggs for breakfast! Anyway, we hardly lived a disadvantaged life on a drifter, and could go ashore when in port as we saw fit."



*Figure T.* Leslie Goodwin at dockside at Gibraltar, spring 1918. *CD 69* is in the background.

*Source:* Courtesy of Leslie Goodwin.





*Figure 2:* Wash day on *CD 69*, summer 1918. Leslie Goodwin is seated at the far left.

*Source:* Courtesy of Leslie Goodwin.

"We were captain of our own ship when off duty you might say." They soon found they could cross the border into Spain and attend the bull fights. "On Saturdays, holidays, off duty days, we slipped over to Spain - whether we were supposed to or not was questionable - but the

lines were pretty well open. Guards manned the border posts there, but they didn't say anything. We went back and forth continually. I got acquainted over in Spain and subsequently took fellows from newly arrived drifter crews over there to show them the ropes. There were two or three contingents of newcomers who visited Spain shortly after the drifters arrived. My gang was the first of the RNCVRs to cross the border and explore Spanish delights."

"One day in April 1918 right after we arrived I was wandering around in the Gibraltar market and found a guy selling live turkeys. I bought one. The next thing I had to figure out was how to dispose of the feathers. I took it back to the boat, and we had a very belated Christmas dinner with turkey and all the fixings. We lived well on that boat and joked that we just charged everything up to the Allied Nations! Crawley really didn't have a case. In port we had lots of fruit, especially pineapple, and nuts - anything you wanted to buy and at bargain rates."

"When we were just beginning to enjoy our heavenly duty free port, and had learned, partially at least, how to bargain with the local trades people, *CD 69* and two other boats, *CDs 71* and *75*, received orders to leave for the Azores. In August 1918 a large steam powered yacht escorted us. Rumour had it that she had important war prisoners on board. After refuelling at the Royal Navy's station in Ponta Delgada, she left us and we never heard of her again. Navy officials assigned us to a U.S. ship (possibly the *USS Decatur*), an ancient monitor used as a depot ship for command and administration." (The *Decatur*, an old small destroyer, was the senior ship in the little U.S. Patrol Squadron then stationed at Gibraltar. It engaged in patrol and convoy duty in both the Atlantic and Mediterranean and may have gone to the Azores). Officers on the U.S. ship advised the CD officers that small and low-powered vessels were crossing the Atlantic via Bermuda and the Azores. They warned that if German subs mined the entrance to these ports, the war effort would be greatly disrupted.

"If Gibraltar were heaven, Ponta Delgada was double heaven. We had all the food in the world—more to eat than you could imagine, and it was cheaper than at Gibraltar. The finest local grown pineapple cost about 6 pence [fifteen cents] each; wine was 2 shillings [about sixty cents] a quart-and we had time on our hands—a wonderful combination. I didn't drink in those days, so the price of wine didn't worry me much, but the boys who did found good wine a bargain. The value of our money stretched so we could buy all sorts of things. Once we hired a big car to drive us up into the hills to see a hot mineral springs, a spectacular sight. We made the best of the favourable exchange rate."

One drifter reported engine trouble on arrival at Ponta Delgada. The steam engine in *CD 75* ran at full speed from Gibraltar to the Azores and then mysteriously the crew reported it out of commission. "They never turned a wheel until the war ended and we headed back to Gibraltar. So our *CD 69* and her mate *CD 71* swept the narrow harbour entrance at daylight every morning. Due to the volcanic structure of the island the water depth dropped off abruptly, we moved off soundings within a few hundred yards of the breakwater. Our boats swept for about two hours every morning. One deck officer and an engineer did the job, so I had two hours duty every second day. We kept the task done, but we found no mines off the Azores. We never heard any complaints about our work in that area. Since we docked alongside of the breakwater, going ashore proved easy."

"We drew stores from the U.S. ship and quipped that we had charged them to the Americans. We also swept under command of American naval headquarters there. The Americans stationed this depot ship at Ponta Delgada, primarily so they could exchange crews in their fleet. I don't know whether there was any better discipline on that American ship than on Royal Navy ships, but our Canadian group ran pretty freely. We saw movies most nights on the American ship. Sometimes we played bridge or strolled around town. We never did

accustom ourselves to the local 'siesta' habit. All good things end. November 11th, 1918, arrived, and we heard about the Armistice. Yet, we kept on sweeping, thinking that mine layers might not have heard the word."

"One night at the movies, I remember hearing the list of battleships that the German government had to turn over to the Allies. We finally believed the war was over. Presently we received an order to return to Gibraltar. I am sure the navy didn't realize that order's significance. We carried no navigational instruments aboard except a compass (or any men who would have known how to use them) on the three Canadian drifters. We held a meeting and the general opinion opted to request an escort. But I wanted to head home and probably had more navigation experience than the three skippers. I persuaded them to lay a compass course some thirty miles up the coast to Cape St. Vincent, turn south, and follow the coast round the Cape and then to Gibraltar. The latter was familiar water to us, after all. To my delight the skippers agreed. We cleared Ponta Delgada with extra coal on deck." Although *CD 75* had not turned a wheel since it arrived, it miraculously got up steam and joined them.

"I well remember landfall, on a dark and stormy December night. It looked to me as if our compass course had been perfect. We had been carrying our steadying sail to port when we turned south. Then we had to tack, developed trouble, and had a few tough moments, but we got adjusted and arrived at our old base just outside the dockyard *Cormorant*." About the time Leslie and his fellow crew members pulled into port, some of their mates arrived from Sierra Leone, and the RNCVRs held an Old Home Week.

"One day for something to do, I glanced through a copy of *Naval Orders*, a small book delivered to all ships in the service that, evidently, our skipper seldom read. No commissioned officers worked on our boat, and I suspect that some officers on board never bothered to read the *Naval Orders*. My eyes caught the heading: ALL MINE SWEEPING TO BE DONE ON A VOLUNTEER BASIS AFTER WAR'S END. I found this definitely of interest, so I read on. If various officers ashore had a 'blank' number of sweepers under their command, they drew extra pay for every hour of minesweeping - all the way to the top admiral. Now with no record of any mines in the Straits of Gibraltar and the only minesweepers at Gibraltar manned by RNCVRs, I thought that our start for home would be easy. I began to preach from the *Naval Orders*, but to my surprise I received small support from the gang and none from our skipper."

"So at the next a.m. sailing time about fifteen of us 'mutinied' and went ashore when our boats were ready to sweep. Our drifters did not sail. They were laying alongside the dock at Gibraltar—in a dockyard full of big ships. We ordinarily were free to go ashore and back and forth as we wanted to. I suppose our skipper got in touch with the powers in charge in the navy yard, because in due time an officer and thirty or forty armed guards appeared. The guards seemed like young recruits to me, mere boys. They marched us a half mile up to the Naval Barracks and locked us up. We scared the guard boys to death; they shook all over. I told the youngster marching next to me who trembled as we walked, that we carried no arms, were harmless and he had nothing to worry about."

"About 7 bells they unlocked us. We mustered before a kindly elderly officer. I think that he held a lieutenant commander's rank. He said, what is the matter—you don't want to go minesweeping? I stood first in line and carefully chose my nomenclature. I said I understood that minesweeping was now on a volunteer basis and I refused to volunteer. He said, you know there are no mines in the Strait—and think of the extra pay. I answered, yes, we know there are no mines in the Strait. We swept here for months before moving to the Azores and nobody recorded finding a mine here-or in the Azores. I said we concluded that in the Strait of Gibraltar the tide ran too fast and washed them from their moorings. The enemy couldn't

anchor them." No one could accuse Leslie Goodwin of lacking courage. "I added that the war was over, and it's time we went home."



*Figure 3:* After the "mutiny" at Gibraltar, 1 January 1919, the day they left Gibraltar for England and home to Canada. Leslie Goodwin is seated second from right in the first row.

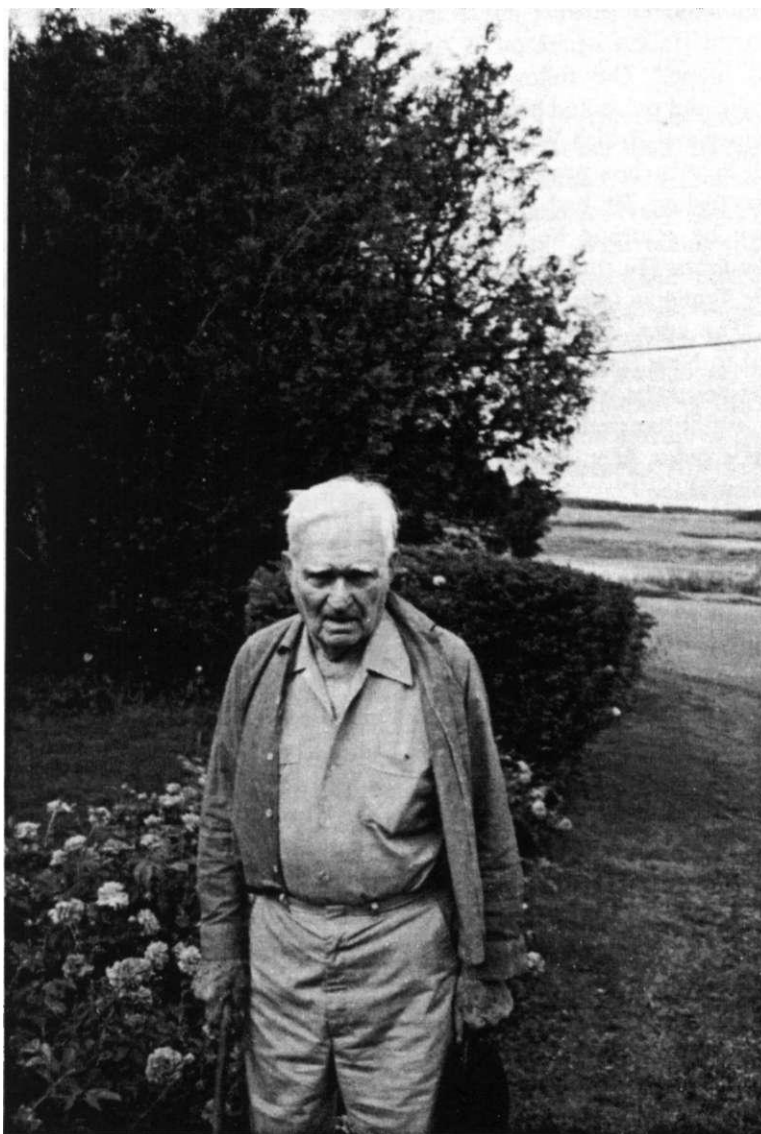
*Source:* Courtesy of Leslie Goodwin.

"The other boys answered much as I did. I do remember one man in his 50s who had probably lied about his age on volunteering, as I did, only in reverse. He said, almost with tears in his eyes, the war is over and my farm in Saskatchewan needs me. Statements had to be definite; he said he refused to volunteer. Another fellow spoke up stating that he had a farm in Montana that needed a mate. He must have been in his sixties. We had men way beyond draft age who volunteered for the navy. A man was a man; the navy took me, after all, before I was eighteen."

"Well, the old commander's questioning lasted for some time. To our surprise he took things calmly and finally he said, I don't know how we will feed all you boys?" Leslie worked out that problem for him. "I said that we had already drawn our rations and the simplest way to feed us would be to send us back to our ships. So he said, 'dismissed. Report to your ships.'" Leslie Goodwin gave that kindly commander credit. "He could have been one of those tough navy officers who wanted to railroad us behind bars or worse." Leslie's discharge papers show no offenses in Gibraltar or any station in which he served during the war. "The Royal Navy gave me a clean bill of health."

"We walked back to our boats and reported to our officers." The RNCVRs sat around on their boats and did nothing for two or three days until 31 December 1918 when they

received orders to report to HMS *Vivid*, in Portsmouth, England. The trip proved uneventful and tedious-lasting from 1 to 19 January 1919. Leslie regrets one incident though. "I recall in the port of Lisbon we lay alongside a fisherman just in from the sea. He searched through his catch and gave us a mess of squid. I didn't know that squid were choice edibles and thought he was getting clear of trash. Over the years since I have wished I could have apologized to that generous fisherman."



*Figure 4:* Leslie Goodwin in the flower garden at his boyhood home in Baie Verte, New Brunswick, July 1992. The Baie Verte River, where he learned to sail in 1910, can be seen in the background.

*Source:* Courtesy of the author.

They reached *Vivid* on 20 January 1919. The navy decommissioned the drifter, and the RNCVRs moved to *Vivid* to await transportation home. "I heard news that particularly interested me when we arrived in England. In places such as the English Channel where sweepers found mines, men had been minesweeping voluntarily since the Armistice. With that reassuring information I received two weeks leave to revisit the Souters in Scotland. At long last on 11 March 1919, orders arrived and I, with crowds of troops, boarded the steamship RMS *Baltic* for the trip to Canada. My rank as Petty Officer First Class allowed me accommodation with the non-commissioned officers—much improvement over the earlier trip east. We arrived back at the *Niobe* in Halifax where on 21 April 1919, I was paid off, discharged and received a free rail pass home." The following November the British government cited him for Meritorious Service and presented him with a Class AA War Badge. On 13 October 1924 Leslie received the Victory and British War Medals.

Wendell Scott's class prophecy proved correct. Leslie Goodwin would spend his life tangled in a boat rigging. He had attended Stanstead College in Québec the year before he enlisted, so when he returned he enrolled in Bugbee Business College at Stanstead and graduated with honours. His certificate dated 10 June 1920 was signed by "two exceptionally fine teachers," George Trueman (later President of Mount Allison University) and the Headmaster, J.D. McFadyen. The latter asked Leslie to stay on and teach math, but he declined. Leslie eventually moved to New England, and in 1939 bought the Cape Cod Shipbuilding Company in Wareham, Massachusetts, a firm that pioneered in constructing fibreglass sailboats. Although semi-retired, he is still "tangled." He serves as treasurer of his company and lives in Marion, Massachusetts. His sister, Mrs. Phyllis Anderson, lives in the Goodwin family home in Baie Verte, New Brunswick.

Enrolment in the RNCVR lasted for the duration of the conflict only. At war's end the reservists demobilized and the Canadian government allowed the organization to expire. In recruiting, as in most other forms of naval activity, the government sought to supplement as far as possible the tasks of the British Admiralty, not to develop a large and uniquely Canadian effort. In fact, Robert Borden's government during the first eighteen months of the war did not attempt to enlist many men in the navy. The Admiralty actually discouraged Canadian naval expansion under wartime conditions, since the Dominion service would require considerable assistance that the Royal Navy could ill afford. Not until February 1916 did Ottawa renew its offer to the Admiralty to recruit Canadian men for service in the Royal Navy. By then the Admiralty welcomed that proposal, and the Canadian Naval Department launched a recruiting campaign—a campaign which caught the eye of seventeen-year-old "steam engineer" E. Leslie Goodwin of Baie Verte, New Brunswick.

## NOTES

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1. This equalled the pay of a private in the Canadian Army of \$1.10 per day.

2. In the 1960s Leslie and his wife stopped at Gibraltar while on a winter European trip, but unfortunately it rained every day of their visit. The monkeys would not venture out in rain to see them.