



Royal United Services Institute of Nova Scotia

Comments

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Breaking Up Former Canadian Warships

by Colin Darlington

Katherine Dedyne's article in the Victoria 14 January 2016 Times Colonist, "Two CFB Esquimalt ships going on long journey to be demolished,"¹ is an interesting one as it notes the complexity and dangers involved with breaking up paid off Canadian warships *Algonquin* and *Protecteur*. Actually, the term 'breaking up' was not used, at least in the article (it was in the comments) - 'demolishing,' 'scrapping,' 'cutting up,' and 'disposing' were used fairly interchangeably in the article itself. Ship breaking is the term most used in naval and marine circles.² Dismantling and scrapping are occasionally used. Demolishing is not normally a term used for ships. Note that the webpage of R.J. MacIsaac, the shipbreaker in the article, that describes the company's demolition capability refers to piers and wharfs. There are some articles listing terms related to ship breaking on the Internet.³ All to say that using some terms like ship breaking show familiarity with naval and marine affairs, while use of other terms show otherwise (or, to be fair, show an effort to vary wording in an article).

Some other issues arise from the article:

- a. When no longer required for active service, Canadian warships are 'paid off,' not 'decommissioned.' The latter term is in use in the US and some navies (though it is often seen in Canadian media but that is an error); others navies, especially those which took their heritage from the Royal Navy, use the term paid off. Naval officers are commissioned (receive orders) to command (captain) Canadian warships. The ship herself is not commissioned, though with a captain the ship can be thought of as 'in commission.'
- b. Once paid off, Canadian warships are no longer 'HMCS' (Her Majesty's Canadian Ship), nor, legally, warships.⁴ They are hulks. Their names and their numbers on their hulls are painted over and other signs of their former status as a government ship are removed. It is not inappropriate, however, to write 'the former HMCS *Protecteur*.' (A similar change of name applies to *Miner*; well known in Nova Scotia for grounding on a sensitive area. Though often called MV *Miner*, she was not a motor vessel when she broke loose of her tow and grounded.)
- c. After paid off, a ship is transferred to the Material Group of the Department of National Defence and put up for disposal (e.g., sold to be broken up or to be sunk as a reef). A ship can also be used as a target as a method of disposal. Once transferred, the ship is no longer the responsibility of the Royal Canadian Navy.

There are some potentially interesting stories in the long tows of the former warships, now hulks, to the east coast, and of their being broken up at the yard there, one of three in Canada. Hopefully stories and pictures will come out.

Notes:

1. <http://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/two-cfb-esquimalt-ships-going-on-long-journey-to-be-demolished-1.2150742>, accessed 25 January 2016
2. Shipyard Employment eTool – Glossary, <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/shipyard/glossary.html>, accessed 25 January 2016: “Ship breaking means any breaking down of a vessel’s structure for the purpose of scrapping the vessel, including the removal of gear, equipment or any component part of a vessel.”
3. Wikipedia is descriptive: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ship_breaking, accessed 25 January 2016
4. Guidance on writing about HMC Ships is available in RUSI(N) information note "Warship Orthography," http://rusi.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Warship_Orthography.pdf, accessed 25 January 2016

Colin Darlington is a retired naval officer of the Canadian Armed Forces. This work is the sole opinion of the author and does not necessarily represent the views of the Canadian Armed Forces, the Canadian Department of National Defence, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or the Royal United Services Institute of Nova Scotia. The author may be contacted by email at:
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