

CHARLIE V FOR VICTORY

"Charlie V for Victory" is the familiar way in which sailors at an East Coast naval base refer to one of the veterans of the North Sea minesweeping fleet.

The ship's real name is the CHARLES VAILLANT, which once was as familiar to French fishermen as she is today to the men of the minesweeping service.

The CHARLES VAILLANT was one of the units of the French Navy which escaped after the capitulation of France, to continue the fight. She was brought over by her French crew in 1940. They joined the Free French Navy. Their ship, converted into a minesweeper, changed the tri-colour for the White Ensign. She went on her North Sea patrols during the peak of enemy mine-laying. With each mine she exploded the crew kept score with a chevron painted on her funnel. They discontinued the practice when there was no space left on the funnel.

Proud of her achievements are the students of the Berridge House College of Domestic Science, formerly of Hampstead and now at Bournemouth. It was they who designed and painted the ship's crest now in the minesweeper's wardroom. Their college crest, two saucepans crossed over a cooking stove, was their inspiration. For the ship's crest they replaced the saucepans with sweeping brooms and a mine took the place of the stove. Underneath there is a Latin motto which means "We sweep that they may sail".

In exchange for the crest, the ship's company sent the school a photograph of themselves, which has been given a place of honour in the students' common room.

Not only do the students keep the ship well supplied with literature, but very often their parcels include tasty samples of applied domestic science.

The CHARLES VAILLANT's fine service was recognised when her commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander E.J.S. Smith, R.N.V.R., who has served in her since she was commissioned as a minesweeper, was awarded the D.S.C. He was an accountant in peacetime, and his home is at Sidcup.

The ship's officers are proud of the fact that their crew, with three exceptions, joined the Navy as hostilities only ratings from civilian occupations far removed from seafaring.

"When you see this crew doing a grand job of work at sea," said Lieutenant Commander Smith, "you'd never suspect that they include a medical student, a baker's roundsman, a cotton factory worker, a chip shop proprietor and a lorry driver. They perform as though they'd been at sea all their lives."

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