



MERCHANT NAVY COMMEMORATIVE THEME PROJECT (MNCTP)



NEWS RELEASE

THE BATTLE OF THE GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE: 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SINKING OF THE SS *NICOYA* AND THE SS *LETO*

MAY 11-12, 2022

OTTAWA, TODAY –

Mr. Stéphane Ouellette, President and Chief Executive Officer, Merchant Navy Commemorative Theme Project (MNCTP), remembered the sinking of the SS *Nicoya* and the SS *Leto* that launched the Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence 80 years ago.

The Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, which saw German U-boats penetrate the Cabot Strait and the Strait of Belle Isle to sink 23 ships between 1942 and 1944, marked the only time since the War of 1812 that enemy warships inflicted death within Canada's inland waters. The battle advanced to within 300 kilometres of Québec City. A war that pervaded people's lives but was still somehow remote, had become immediate, threatening, and very real. The Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence was part of a larger conflict called The Battle of the Atlantic which included all of the Atlantic Ocean between North America and Europe, and was fought between 1939 and 1945 ([The Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence: Remembrance Series – Veterans Affairs Canada: Introduction, P.3](#)).

From May to October 1942, over 70,000 tons of shipments were lost in the Gulf of St. Lawrence due to German U-boats. The first attack came during the night of May 11 when an unidentified U-boat torpedoed SS *Nicoya*, a British passenger/cargo steamer carrying war material. She was just 600 kilometers north-east of Quebec City. Within a few hours, on May 12, the Dutch steam merchant ship SS *Leto* was also sunk, leaving a combined total of eighteen people dead.



Quotes

“For many years, and like so many others, I was unaware of how huge the role was that was played by our Merchant Navy during wartime. I am now so proud and grateful for the heroic work of these Canadians. On September 3, I will think not only of the veterans, but also about the loss of so many young people including stewardess Annah Baird, who died on September 3, 1939.”

– The Honourable Senator Diane Griffin (Prince Edward Island) – 2019

“During both World Wars, and the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, many courageous men and women came together in a united front, fought for all of humanity under unthinkable conditions, and against unimaginable odds. Now, we must rise to the challenge and create a new united front to preserve their memories, and the way of life for which so many perished.”

– Stéphane Ouellette, President and CEO, MNCTP

Associated Links

- [The Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence | Valour Canada](#)
- [The Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence – Remembrance Series | Veterans Affairs Canada](#)

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