



MERCHANT NAVY COMMEMORATIVE THEME PROJECT (MNCTP)



NEWS RELEASE

MERCHANT NAVY DAY IN CANADA,
THE UNITED KINGDOM, AUSTRALIA, AND NEW ZEALAND

SEPTEMBER 4, 2023

OTTAWA, YESTERDAY –

Mr. Stéphane Ouellette, President and Chief Executive Officer, Merchant Navy Commemorative Theme Project (MNCTP), was joined by veterans and members of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) in remembering the sacrifices and contributions made by the Allied Merchant Navy and American Merchant Marine Veterans during the First and Second World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam. We also pay tribute to the modern day shipping industry as paramount to international security and defence, and to the global economy.



(From Left): Lieutenant-Commander Don Mitchell, RCN; Claude Aubin, Senator, Métis Nation Québec and Honorary Governor of the MNCTP; Major (ret'd) Wayne Mac Culloch, President, Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping; Stéphane Ouellette, President and CEO, MNCTP; Vice-Admiral Angus Topshee Commander, RCN; and, Chief Petty Officer 1st Class Tim Tyson, RCN. Also in attendance was Commander Derek Merlo, RCN.

On September 3, 1939, on the day that the United Kingdom and France declared war on Germany, the passenger ship S.S. Athenia was torpedoed by U-30, while on patrol in the northwestern sector of Ireland. The ship was carrying 1,103 passengers, including approximately 500 Jewish refugees, 469 Canadians, 311 Americans, 72 British, along with 315 of her crew. However, 98 passengers and 19 of her crew were killed. Fifty-four were Canadian, 28 were American, including Canadian Stewardess Hannah Baird. Incidentally, the first casualties of the Second World War were Canadian and American civilians.

During the Second World War, a total of 25,343 merchant ships, with 164,783,921 tons of cargo on board, sailed from North America to Britain. The Royal Canadian Navy gave to the struggle over 2,000 dead and 24 warships. More than 900 RCAF and Canadian

Army personnel were also lost. Over 2,199 Canadian Merchant Navy Seaman were killed in both World Wars. Moreover, more than 250,000 American Merchant Marine sailed the treacherous oceans of the world. Over 6,835 American Merchant Marine were killed and over 11,000 wounded. In addition, 604 Merchant Mariners were taken prisoners of war, resulting in 61 casualties within POW camps.

2023 marks the 20th Anniversary of The Senate of Canada proclaiming September 3 as the Official Day of Remembrance for Merchant Navy Veterans, and The Royal Canadian Navy establishing an historical precedent by ushering in a new era of co-operation with the Allied Merchant Navy and American Merchant Marine.

Quotes

“Today, we honour the more than 12,000 Canadians who served in Canada’s Merchant Navy during the Second World War’s Battle of the Atlantic. With courage and bravery they completed 25,000 passages of vital supplies in often treacherous conditions across the Atlantic Ocean. Their efforts were vital to the Allied victory. We remember all those who served and those who did not make it home.”

– *The Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor, Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence*

“Canadian Merchant Navy sailors faced the same hardships and costs of war as the military personnel who escorted them. Victory could not have come without their courage and resilience in transporting vital supplies and ammunition across the perilous and contested seas. Today we remember the 2199 merchant sailors who gave their lives in answering Canada’s call. Lest we forget.”

– *Vice-Admiral Angus Topshee, Commander, Royal Canadian Navy*

“We gather here today to remember the sacrifices of our veterans that were made for our individual and collective rights and freedoms. We are also further reminded of our duty to stand-up and enforce the virtues and principles for which they fought and died to uphold.

– *Stéphane Ouellette, President & CEO, MNCTP*

Associated Links

- [Minister MacAulay and Minister Anand mark Merchant Navy Veterans Day | Department of National Defence | September 3, 2022](#)
- [Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of National Defence mark Merchant Navy Veterans Day and the 81st anniversary of the beginning of the Battle of the Atlantic | News Release | Veterans Affairs Canada | September 3, 2020](#)
- [Ministers MacAulay and Sajjan recognize Merchant Navy Day and the 81st anniversary of the beginning of the Battle of the Atlantic | Video Message | Government of Canada | Facebook | September 3, 2020](#)
- [Vice-Admiral Ron Buck, RCN \(Ret’d\) Historic Letter Ushering in New Era of Co-operation with the Allied Merchant Navy and American Merchant Marine](#)
- [Merchant Navy Historical Sheet | Veterans Affairs Canada](#)
- [Valour at Sea – Canada’s Merchant Navy | Veterans Affairs Canada](#)
- [The Battle of the St. Lawrence | Veterans Affairs Canada](#)

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