



# MERCHANT NAVY COMMEMORATIVE THEME PROJECT (MNCTP)



## NEWS RELEASE

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

SEPTEMBER 3, 2021

**Today** – Mr. Stéphane Ouellette, President and Chief Executive Officer, Merchant Navy Commemorative Theme Project (MNCTP), was joined by Vice-Admiral Craig Baines, Commander, Royal Canadian Navy, Mr. Alexander P. (Sandy) Glenn, National President, RCMP Veterans' Association, Mr. Wayne Mac Culloch, Immediate Past National President, Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping (CAVUNP), Canadians, and members of the international community 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.

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.

### Quotes

*“As fellow mariners, we have tremendous respect for the sailors of Canada’s merchant service who contributed so much to Canada in two world wars, and at such high cost. Alongside the Royal Canadian Navy, Royal Canadian Air Force and the Canadian Army, the merchant mariners chose to place themselves in harm’s way, not only in the Atlantic, but around the world’s oceans, in the fight for freedom. Today’s commemoration highlights the invaluable role the sailors of the Merchant Navy played in winning the Battle of the Atlantic and the ultimate sacrifice that thousands gave in that service. We shall remember them.”*

– Vice-Admiral Craig Baines, Commander, Royal Canadian Navy

*“This September 3<sup>rd</sup>, RCMP Veterans join all Canadians in saluting Canada’s Merchant Navy as we remember their heroic service ferrying supplies, munitions, passengers and troops across the sea to sustain our allies during the Battle of the Atlantic of WWII. Without the Merchant Navy’s valiant efforts, the outcome of the war would assuredly have been much different.*

*“As we acknowledge their service and sacrifice, we also remember three members formerly of the RCMP Marine Section who were killed in action or lost at sea as they served in the Royal Canadian Navy during the Battle of the Atlantic; 1<sup>st</sup> Officer Patrick Milthrop #12168 (in HMCS Spikenard), Master John Bonner #12130 (in HMCS Charlottetown and Engineer 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Daniel Gillis #12223, who perished after his ship caught fire and sank (in HMCS Otter). All three are on the RCMP Honour Roll.*

*“We owe the mariners of Canada’s Merchant Navy, and those of our British, Australian & New Zealand allies, a debt we can never repay. The very least we can do is hold their memories close to our heart and express heartfelt gratitude for their courageous contribution. We will remember them.”*

*– Alexander P. (Sandy) Glenn, National President, RCMP Veterans’ Association*

*“Today, we pause to remember those who serve and have served, and especially those who have paid the ultimate price with their lives. Throughout history, maritime shipping has most often been the key to victory, and its denial frequently brought defeat. Those who crew our merchantmen are and were essentially unarmed, facing armed foes who often ignored international maritime law. These sailors are the underlying reason for the eventual victories in the First and Second World Wars and in Korea. They formed the lynchpin for the successes in the Cold War and beyond, because without sealift, high-powered military operations are not possible. In peaceful times, these individuals provide the lifeblood of our societies and enable commerce around the globe. They deserve our admiration and heartfelt thanks every day, but particularly on this day, Merchant Navy Veterans Day.”*

*– Wayne Mac Culloch, CD, B.Eng., M.Sc., P.Eng, Immediate Past National President, Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping (CAVUNP)*

*“On this day, we honour our veterans of the Merchant Navy and remember the crucial role they played in securing victory in Europe. They faced years of relentless attacks from German U-boats trying to cut Allied supply lines. Yet, with an unwavering commitment to the war effort and to ensuring allied forces received necessary supplies, the Merchant Navy made trip after trip with the knowledge that their vessels were key targets for the enemy. We must never forget the many sacrifices they made in the name of freedom, peace, and democracy.”*

*– The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada (from [PM Merchant Navy Day Greetings’ Letter, September 3, 2020](#))*

*“From the outbreak of war until victory was declared, Canada’s Merchant Navy ships played a vital role in transporting supplies across the Atlantic support of the Allied effort in Western Europe. But in the face of enemy U-boats, warplanes and surface vessels, that support came at an awful cost. Thousands of our Merchant Mariners were killed. Countless others were wounded. Today, we remember their sacrifices on the North Atlantic, and the important role they played in bringing an end to the Second World War.”*

*– The Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence (September 3, 2020)*

*“Every year, on September 3, Canadians take a moment to remember the courage and determination of our Merchant Navy. Throughout major world conflicts, Canada’s Merchant Navy transported vital equipment, fuel, goods, and people around the world. During the Second World War alone, more than 25,000 merchant ship voyages were made. But those efforts came at a heavy cost. During the Battle of the Atlantic, approximately 1,500 Merchant mariners lost their lives. Let us always remember the service and sacrifice of our brave women and men in uniform and never forget those we have lost.”*

*– The Hon. Erin O’Toole, Leader of Canada’s Conservatives and of the Official Opposition (September 3, 2020)*

### **Associated Links**

- [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](#)
- [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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