



MERCHANT NAVY COMMEMORATIVE THEME PROJECT (MNCTP)



NEWS RELEASE

CELEBRATING UNSUNG WOMEN OF BOTH WORLD WARS WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH IN CANADA

OCTOBER 26, 2021

OTTAWA, Today – Mr. Stéphane Ouellette, President and Chief Executive Officer, Merchant Navy Commemorative Theme Project (MNCTP), joined the Government of Canada in celebrating *Women's History Month* in Canada.

Throughout time immemorial, countless of women have played an essential role in shaping our world and advancing Canadian society. Indubitably, the First and Second World Wars brought enormous changes to women's lives as Canada was being propelled towards national self-awareness, unity, and ultimate sovereignty. Women were critical to the Canadian war effort and to the success of Canada's Victory Campaign. This includes the almost 7,000 women within the Women's Royal Canadian Navy Service that served their country in a wide variety of crucial roles during the War.

Young Margaret Hayworth and Nursing Sisters Margaret Brooke and Minnie Follette are a few among the many of these unsung women/girls that perished. Here are some facts:



YOUNG MARGARET HAYWORTH



SINKING OF THE SS ATHENIA SEPTEMBER 3, 1939

- On September 3, 1939, just hours after Britain declared war against Germany, the *SS Athenia* became the first UK ship to be sunk during World War II. Margaret Janet Hayworth, a 10-year-old Canadian schoolgirl from Hamilton, Ontario, was among the 117 casualties, many of them women and children.
- Margaret passed away on September 9, 1939, aboard the American freighter *City of Flint*, due to a concussion and pneumonia sustained from the sinking six days prior. A state funeral was held for Margaret, and this tragedy greatly influenced Canada's decision to declare war against Nazi Germany on September 10, 1939.

NURSING SISTER MARGARET BROOKE



SINKING OF THE SS CARIBOU OCTOBER 14, 1942

- On October 14, 1942, the SS Caribou was sunk on her way to Port aux Basques, Newfoundland, and was to become the worst inshore disaster of the naval war. Nursing Sister Margaret Brooke fought courageously to save her friend Sub-Lieutenant Agnes Wilkie, who became the only Canadian nursing sister to die from enemy action during WWII.
- For her heroism, Sub-Lieutenant Brooke was made a military Member of the Order of the British Empire. In April 2015, the Royal Canadian Navy announced that a new offshore patrol ship would be named in her honour (the first RCN ship to be named after a living woman). Dr. Brooke died on January 9, 2016, at the age of 100.

NURSING SISTER MINNIE FOLLETTE



SINKING OF THE LLANDOVERY CASTLE JUNE 27, 1918

- A member of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, Canadian Army Medical Corps, Nursing Sister Minnie Asenath Follett lost her life at sea when His Majesty's Hospital Ship Llandovery Castle was torpedoed, off southern Ireland, by a German U-boat, on June 27, 1918.
- A total of 234 lives were tragically lost by drowning or subsequent machine-gunning of lifeboats. The ship had a crew of 168 men, 80 officers of the Canadian Medical Corps, and 14 nurses – 258 persons in all. The sinking of the Llandovery Castle was one of the worst atrocities committed against Canada during the First World War.

Quote

"The stories of our unsung heroines must no longer remain a missing chapter in our history books. Our children and the world must know who these women were and honour them. It is everyone's patriotic duty to recognize the tradition of freedom for which they fought and died to preserve."

– Stéphane Ouellette, President and CEO, MNCTP

Associated Links

General

- [Statement by the Prime Minister on Women's History Month | News Release | Prime Minister's Office | October 1, 2021](#)
- [Celebrate the amazing women of DND/CAF this Women's History Month | The Maple Leaf | National Defence | October 12, 2021](#)
- [Women's History Month | Backgrounder | Women and Gender Equality Canada](#)
- [Women At War | Historical Sheet | Veterans Affairs Canada](#)
- [World War Women | Canadian War Museum](#)

SS Athenia

- [SS Athenia: Wartime Spirit | The Maritime Executive | October 5, 2017](#)
- [The little girl who died in the big war | Hamilton Spectator | September 15, 2016](#)

SS Caribou

- [U-boat sinks SS Caribou off Newfoundland | CBC Digital Archives](#)
- [Margaret Elizabeth Brooke to be ship's sponsor of HMCS Margaret Brooke | Navy News | Royal Canadian Navy | May 5, 2017](#)

HMHS Llandovery Castle

- [New book on war nurses relevant now more than ever | The Reporter | April 22, 2020](#)
- [The Llandovery Castle, Fully-Staged Production at Wilfrid Laurier University | YouTube | April 6, 2020](#)
- [Opera telling story of HMHS Llandovery Castle premieres in Waterloo | CBC: Kitchener-Waterloo | February 28, 2020](#)
- [New opera tells little-known story of Canadian nurses killed in WWI boat sinking | CBC-Radio Sunday | June 15, 2018](#)
- [The Sinking of HMHS Llandovery Castle 27 June 1918 – 100th Anniversary Commemoration Ceremonies held in Ottawa and Halifax, June 2018 | Royal Canadian Medical Service Association \(RCMSA\)](#)
- [Opera to focus on Great War nurses 100 years after hospital ship sinking | National Post | November 8, 2017](#)
- [The sinking of the Llandovery Castle | Canadian Nurse News | November 2016](#)
- [In Memory of Nursing Sister Minnie Follett | Veterans Affairs Canada](#)

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