

**MERCHANT NAVY COMMEMORATIVE  
THEME PROJECT (MNCTP)**



# NEWS RELEASE

**77<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF ACTION  
IN THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC**

**MAY 1, 2022**

**OTTAWA, TODAY –**

Mr. Stéphane Ouellette, President and Chief Executive Officer, Merchant Navy Commemorative Theme Project (MNCTP), observed the 77<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the End of Action in The Battle of the Atlantic.

The Battle of the Atlantic was the longest continuous battle of the Second World War that was fought at sea from 1939 to 1945 (2,075 days). Canada entered the battle with six destroyers and 3,500 sailors, one third of which were reservists, and less than 40 merchant vessels. A massive ship building effort resulted in Canada fielding the third largest navy in the world. This included over 400 warships, 400 merchant vessels, 95,000 sailors, including 6,000 members of the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service, and employing 12,600 civilians in industry by the end of the war.



It was on that fateful day of September 3, 1939, when the United Kingdom and France declared war on Germany, the passenger ship the 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 crew members were killed. Fifty-four were Canadian, 28 were American, including Canadian Stewardess Hannah Baird. 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 WWI and WWII. Moreover, more than 250,000 American Merchant Marine sailed the treacherous oceans of the globe. 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 an Island Nation, we in the United Kingdom still depend heavily on the great trade routes of the sea...During the Second World War, that vital lifeline came very near to being severed. The stark courage of the sailors of the Merchant Navy should never be forgotten, and I write to assure you of my prayers of thankfulness for all that our forebears and elders achieved, despite their great suffering."*

– The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury (July 21, 2017)

*"Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. The statesman who yields to war fever must realize that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of the policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events."*

– Sir Winston Churchill, Prime Minister, United Kingdom (1940-45, 1951-55)

## Associated Links

- [The Battle of the Atlantic | Royal Canadian Navy](#)
- [The Battle of the Atlantic Historical Sheet | Veterans Affairs Canada](#)

## Contact Information

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