

RCMP Marine Service – An Abbreviated History

The RCMP Marine Service was formally established on April 1, 1932. Its mission was to eliminate smuggling on the St. Lawrence River, the Great Lakes, East and West Coasts and to enforce the *Excise Act*. The RCMP absorbed the duties of the Department of National Revenue Protection Service and 200 officers and men, and 28 vessels of the Preventive Service were transferred to the RCMP. The RCMP Marine Service headquarters was established in Moncton, NB.

While the Marine Service was first created in 1932, the Force had been using watercraft and patrol vessels since the late 19th century to perform its duties in Canada. The first patrol vessel, *Keewatin*, was purchased by the North West Mounted Police in 1890 to patrol Lake Winnipeg. Later that same year, two NWMP members, Cpl. Harry Morphy, Reg. #2162 and Cst. George deBeaujeu, #2439, drowned when the *Keewatin* struck submerged rocks during a violent storm. Both members are on the RCMP Honour Roll.

Over the following several decades, the NWMP / RNWMP and RCMP continued to acquire patrol vessels, schooners and seagoing vessels to support operations from several launch points including Herschel Island, YT, Hudson Bay and Prince Rupert, BC.

In 1928, the RCMP launched the *St Roch* at Vancouver, BC. *St Roch* was a 104-foot schooner specially built for Arctic waters and was intended to a floating detachment to patrol the Canadian Arctic.

In 1936 Prohibition in the US ended. That year the RCMP had 23 cruisers and patrol vessels operating.

In September 1939, with the outbreak of the Second World War, 155 of a total of 209 officers and men with their ships were transferred to the RCN; 26 were transferred to the RCAF for Air-Sea Rescue, and one joined the army. The remaining 27 were discharged mainly due to age or medical reasons.

The members of the former “Marine” Section served with distinction during the Battle of the Atlantic. Two were lost at sea due to enemy action: 1st Officer Patrick Milthrop #12168 (in HMCS *Spikenard*) and Master John Bonner #12130 (in HMCS *Charlottetown*). A third, Engineer 3rd Class Daniel Gillis #12223, perished after his ship caught fire and sank (in HMCS *Otter*). All three are on the RCMP Honour Roll.

Between 1940 and 1942, the *St Roch*, under the command of Sgt Henry Larsen #10107, traversed the North West Passage from Vancouver, BC to Halifax, NS, spending two winters frozen in the ice. In 1944, the *St Roch* made the return voyage through the North West Passage back to Vancouver in a single season, thus becoming the first ship to traverse the North West Passage in both directions.

In 1946, the “Marine” Section was re-instated. From the RCN the RCMP acquired 8 Bangor-class minesweepers (“Commissioner” class); 4 Fairmile submarine chasers (“Fort” class) and 13 Harbour Defence Craft (“Detachment” class).

By 1954 “Marine” Division headquarters was transferred to Ottawa, ON. There were 3 Sub-Divisions – Halifax, NS (East Coast); Bagotville, QC (Great Lakes) and Esquimalt, BC (West Coast).

In 1962 the Canadian Coast Guard was formed as part of the Department of Transport.

On April 1, 1970, “Marine” Division was terminated and re-organized into RCMP “M” Directorate - Marine Services, controlled by a Director at “HQ” Division. All personnel and vessels reported to the CO of the Division where they were based.

At re-organization, “Marine” Division had 249 members and 41 vessels including one “Commissioner” class, 2 “Fort” class and 38 patrol craft (9 East Coast, 16 Great Lakes, 16 West Coast).

In 1974 “M” Directorate -Marine Services responsibilities were transferred to the new Transport Management Branch of the Supply and Services Directorate. This move ended the policy of assigning “MP” numbers to RCMP vessels.

In 1990 it was decided to replace the numerous coastal vessels with a smaller number of aluminum hulled catamarans, each to be named after former commissioners. These included PV Nadon stationed in Port McNeill, BC; PV Higgitt stationed in Prince Rupert, BC, PV Lindsay stationed at Vancouver, BC; PV Simmonds stationed at Marystown, NL, PV Inkster at Prince Rupert, BC, and PV Murray at Marystown, NL.

RCMP continue to utilize watercraft to support its responsibilities and enforcement under the *Customs and Excise Act, Canada Shipping Act, Immigration Act, Migratory Birds Convention Act, Fisheries Protection Act, Illegal Commercial Fishing Regulations*, border patrol in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River, and Search and Rescue operations.

Excerpted from a more comprehensive history prepared by Mark Gaillard, RCMP Historian – 2021-04-29.