NOVA SCOTIA DECLARES
SEPTEMBER 3, 2016
MERCHANT NAVY DAY

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Today – Mr. Stéphane Ouellette, President and CEO, MNCTP, thanked the Honourable Stephen McNeil, Premier for the Province of Nova Scotia, for his leadership role in declaring September 3, 2016, as Merchant Navy Day in Nova Scotia for the first time in the province’s history.

“I am very fond of my Atlantic Canadian roots, and very proud to say that this project started over twenty years ago, in Sydney, Cape Breton, to restore a network of World War II fortifications. Given Canada’s pan-national momentum, not only is Premier McNeil helping me realize a childhood dream to highlight Cape Breton/Nova Scotia’s magnificence to our nation, and helping uniting Canada from sea-to-sea, he is also demonstrating our nation’s indomitable spirit to the world entire.”

– Mr. Stéphane Ouellette, President and CEO, MNCTP

It was on June 12, 2003, when the Honourable Paul Bonwick, former Member of Parliament for Simcoe-Grey (Collingwood, Ontario), rose on a Point of Order in the House of Commons, and asked for unanimous consent to have the Private Member’s Bill C-411, An Act to establish Merchant Navy Veterans Day, designating September 3rd as the official day of remembrance for our forgotten heroes.

“The enactment of this bill through Canada’s Parliament only serves to reinforce the importance and responsibility of Canadians to remember the sacrifices made by Merchant Navy Seamen. It is clear that without their sacrifice, people the world over would not enjoy the freedom we experience today.”

– The Honourable Paul Bonwick, Senior Vice President, Operations & Business Development, Clearview Aviation Business Park

Bill C-411 was passed and adopted at all three stages in the House of Commons, and was instantly referred to the Senate of Canada. The Honourable Senator Joseph A. Day offered immediate sponsorship of Bill C-411, passing all three readings, and received Royal Assent on June 19, 2003.

“On this historical day in June 2003, I had the honour of sponsoring Bill C-411, An Act to establish Merchant Navy Veterans Day. As a result of this bill having become the law of the land, September 3rd of each year has been recognized as Merchant Navy Day throughout Canada. And I am very pleased that Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan have passed similar proclamations at the provincial levels.”

On September 3, 1939, on the day that the United Kingdom and France declared war on Germany, the passenger ship the S.S. Athenia was torpedoed by a German U-Boat, while on patrol in the northwestern sector of Ireland. This ship was carrying 1,103 passengers, including about 500 Jewish refugees, 469 Canadians, 311 Americans, 72 British citizens, 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 WWII were Canadian and American civilians.

"Throughout the Second World War, 12,000 merchant mariners courageously supported the Allied war effort by ensuring the steady flow of supplies between North America and Europe. The Canadian Merchant Navy and others played a major role in the Battle of the Atlantic, the longest and one of the most important battles of the Second World War. As a Nova Scotian, I am delighted to know that the Province of Nova Scotia is recognizing this important day, as did Manitoba and Saskatchewan in 2015."

– The Honourable Geoff Regan, Member of Parliament for Halifax West

Initially, September 3 was selected to be the Official Day of Remembrance for the Merchant Navy by the United Kingdom in 2000, Canada in 2003, and Australia in 2008. In January 2015, with the support and brotherhood of our government members, the MNCTP launched The Pan-Canadian and International Recognition of September 3. This was to encourage all provinces and territories and nations of the world to recognize Merchant Navy Day.

Due to this forward momentum, on September 1, 2015, the Apostolic Nunciature in Canada announced that His Holiness Pope Francis would include a special remembrance in his prayers for the souls of the men and women who lost their lives serving their countries in the Allied Merchant Navy. Also, on September 3, 2015, the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba declared Merchant Navy Day for their respective province (they too) for the first time in Canadian history.

"The Merchant Navy’s important achievements in supplying the Allied Forces fighting in Europe were vital to the successful military campaigns against tyranny and dictatorship. This sense of pride also extends to the brave Canadian sailors who today continue to serve in order to protect human rights and engage in peacekeeping missions all over the world."

– The (Late) Honourable Mauril Bélanger, former Member of Parliament for Ottawa-Vanier

One of the main objectives of the MNCTP is to encourage all remaining provinces and territories to follow in the leadership roles of the provinces of Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan to mark the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017.

"In an effort to raise awareness of the 2,199 known Canadian Merchant Seamen and the 91 Canadian vessels lost in enemy action during Canada’s efforts in both World Wars, the province of Nova Scotia declares September 3, 2016 as Merchant Navy Day. This gesture is just a small part in honouring and remembering those men and women who paid the ultimate sacrifice for Canada."

– The Honourable Stephen McNeil, Premier of Nova Scotia
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 Canadian Merchant Navy suffered the highest losses, losing one seafarer in eight of the 12,000 who served in the crews of the Canadian, British, and Allied merchant ships.

Also, out of the more than 250,000 American Merchant Marine that sailed, over 6,835 were killed. This is in addition to over 11,000 being wounded, and the taking of 604 prisoners of war, of whom 61 died in POW camps. These Canadian and American death statistics do not reflect global losses that were experienced by other Merchant Navy and Merchant Marine nations.

The Merchant Navy Commemorative Theme Project (MNCTP) is a "Canadian driven" initiative dedicated to educating Canadians, Americans, and the international community about the sacrifices and contributions made by the Allied Merchant Navies and the American Merchant Marine as the mainstay of the Allied Forces victories in both World War I and World War II.

Through the Global Maritime Promotion Integration and Outreach Strategy (GMPIOS), intended to unify nations of the world under common veterans' and maritime themes, the MNCTP promotes our Merchant Navy and Merchant Marine Veterans as part of Canada's, the United States of America's, and indeed, the world's rich maritime heritage.

To view the letter from Premier McNeil, and/or to obtain additional information on the Allied Merchant Navies and American Merchant Marine, please visit:

- Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island Landing Page
- www.alliedmerchantnavy.com
- www.ammv.us

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