



CANADA REMEMBERS

THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

CANADA REMEMBERS

Since the end of the First World War, Canadians have taken time to remember the sacrifices and achievements of the men and women who served their country in times of war and peace. The Battle of the Atlantic was the longest running battle of the Second World War and one that represents the outstanding contribution of Canadians to the war effort.

THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

The Battle of the Atlantic officially began in September 1939 with the sinking of a passenger ship called the *Athenia*, and fighting continued in the North Atlantic until Germany was defeated in May 1945. During this period German submarines, often called U-boats and surface raiders, tried to cut Allied supply routes across the Atlantic. This threatened the transportation of vital goods and personnel from North America to Britain. Along with the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), the Merchant Navy played a key role in Canada's efforts to clear the North Atlantic of U-boats.

The Battle of the Atlantic was the only Second World War conflict that took place close to North American shores.

- September 16, 1939, the first Canadian transatlantic convoy left from Halifax, Nova Scotia.
- Convoys also left from Sydney, Nova Scotia and St. John's, Newfoundland.

Early in the war, many merchant ships were sunk as a result of a lack of protection from aircraft.

- Fuel tanks of aircraft were too small to hold enough fuel to complete a journey across the Atlantic.
- In June 1941, 454,000 tonnes of shipping were lost to German U-boats.
- From January to July 1942, nearly 400 Allied ships were sunk, but only 7 U-boats were destroyed.
- From 1939 to 1942, the number of German U-boats had increased from 30 to 300.

Technology advanced during the Second World War. For instance, Germany developed torpedoes that were attracted to the noise made by a ship's propellers. Allied scientists responded by creating a noise-making device that was towed behind a ship to fool the torpedo, directing it away from the ship.

Technology also played a large role in the success story of the Royal Canadian Navy.

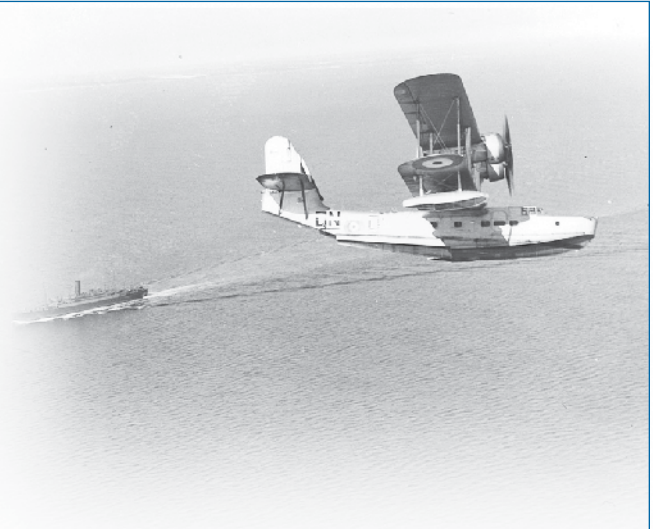
- In 1939, the RCN consisted of 13 vessels and 13,000 personnel.
- In 1945, Canada had the third largest Allied navy with 375 ships and 110,000 personnel.
- From 1941 to 1945, Canadian shipyards produced 403 merchant ships, 281 fighting ships, 206 minesweepers, 254 tugs, and 3,302 landing craft.



The casualty rate during the Battle of the Atlantic was the highest suffered by any of Canada's fighting services during the Second World War—for every seven people who served, one was killed or wounded.

- A large majority of the 2,000 members of the RCN who died during the war were killed during the Battle of the Atlantic, as were 752 members of the RCAF.
- 1,600 Merchant Navy seamen from Canada and Newfoundland were killed.
- There were also civilian casualties. On October 14, 1942, 125 people died when the ferry named the *Caribou* was sunk as it headed from Nova Scotia to Newfoundland.

The Canadians who served during the Battle of the Atlantic will forever be remembered for their valiant service and remarkable bravery. Flight-Lieutenant David Hornell successfully destroyed a German U-boat while his aircraft was under heavy fire. After being shot down, Hornell spent 21 hours in the sea before he and his crew were rescued, only to die shortly after. Hornell won the Victoria Cross, the highest award for gallantry in the British Empire. His citation read, in part: "By pressing home a skillful and successful attack against fierce opposition, with his aircraft in a precarious position, and by fortifying and encouraging his comrades in the subsequent ordeal, this officer displayed valour and devotion to duty of the highest order."



To learn more about Canada's role in the Battle of the Atlantic, please visit the Veterans Affairs Canada Web site at www.vac-acc.gc.ca.

The Web site contains detailed information including:

- historical account of the Battle of the Atlantic
- actual archival war footage
- period maps of the conflict
- Merchant Navy War Dead Database
- Halifax Memorial

For the Battle of the Atlantic booklet with more interesting facts and stories call 1-877-604-8489.

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

The Canada Remembers Program of Veterans Affairs Canada encourages the Canadian public to become involved in activities and events which commemorate Canadian men and women who have served Canada in times of war and peace.

The collective experiences and stories of Canadian Veterans make a legacy for all Canadians, for all time. Remembering and reflecting on the significance of the contribution they made, and continue to make, strengthens our commitment to preserve the values that they fought and died for—truth, justice, peace, freedom and knowledge.