



VALOUR AT SEA

CANADA'S MERCHANT NAVY IN WORLD WAR 2 THE FOURTH ARM OF THE FIGHTING SERVICES



In 1939 Canada's Merchant Navy consisted of four fleets: Fishing, Great Lakes, Coastal, and Ocean-Going. This paper addresses the Coastal and Ocean-Going fleets that operated in dangerous wartime waters. Many Great Lakes ships were sent to Great Britain to replace coastal tonnage lost by enemy action and many more were operated under the Canadian flag in the dangerous North American coastal trade as far south as South America.

Prior to and in the early years of the war, the Canadian Merchant Navy operated under similar conditions to the British Merchant Navy. This included similar pay, benefits, manning structure and conditions of service. As the war progressed, a certain amount of Canadianization crept in, particularly with regard to the safety of ships, seafarers and cargo, and the licensing of officers and conditions of service. Canadian merchant shipping operations, however, were always closely integrated with those of Great Britain. The British Ministry of War Transportation had a strong presence at all major Canadian ports.

The Canadian fleet developed quickly during the war going from about **39** ocean and coastal ships and **1,450** seafarers, to about **210** ships and **12,000** seafarers at the end of the war. By 1942, Canada was building its own ships and by the end of the war **403** ships had been built — **183** for the Canadian flag, and **220** for the British flag. The ownership of the Canadian ships rested with the Park Steamship Company, a Crown corporation

under the Department of Munitions and Supply.

The operation of these ships was contracted to private shipping companies and agents, who then assumed responsibility for the care and upkeep of the ships, ensuring the ships were properly manned, payment of all expenses and the collection of revenues. The powerful wartime Canadian and British economic administrations determined how the ships were to be used and where they would trade.

At the beginning of the war few merchant ships were armed but, when it became obvious that these ships were the dedicated targets of the enemy, the government fitted weapons which were primarily manned by naval gunners from the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve (RCNR). Merchant seafarers were required to take gunnery training and supplemented these naval crews.

As a part of Canada's massive war effort, fourteen Canadian shipyards and seven engine manufacturers built the following ships: **403** ocean-going merchant ships, about **100** Coastal and Great Lakes ships, and **21** Maintenance and Repair ships. In addition, Canadian shipyards repaired over **5,000** merchant ships, and built **487** warships and more than **3,500** support ships such as tugs and landing craft.

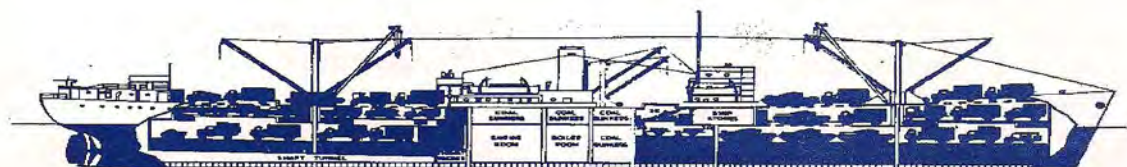
Of these, there were **188** British-operated "Fort" and **181** Canadian-operated "Park" merchant ships.

Researched by: Max Reid, D. Jenkins and T. Brooks Edited by: Dr. Sarty/Jenkins/Brooks
Published by: The Friends of the Canadian War Museum

Deadweight (tons of fuel and cargo that could be carried).....	10,000
Length (feet).....	441
Beam (feet).....	57
Speed (knots).....	11
Crew	45-50
Naval Gunners	7

The Book of Remembrance for the war dead of the Merchant Navy lists by name **1,629** seafarers. This figure includes the **461** known Canadian and Newfoundlanders that were lost on Allied or neutral ships, the Allied seafarers who were lost on Canadian and Newfoundland ships, and the **8** Canadians

"A Great Fleet of Ships," HEAL, S.C. Vanwell, 1999.



The Canadian built "Fort Halkett" loaded in February 43 at Swansea Wales with military cargo for Bône, North Africa. This ship was later lost in the South Atlantic on 6 August 43