



# MERCHANT NAVY COMMEMORATIVE THEME PROJECT (MNCTP)



## NEWS RELEASE

**MERCHANT NAVY VETERANS DAY OF OBSERVANCE  
80TH ANNIVERSARY OF MN WWII COMMEMORATIONS  
S.S. KEEWATIN  
PORT MCNICOLL, ONTARIO, CANADA**

**8 SEPTEMBER 2019**

**Today** – Mr. Stéphane Ouellette, President and CEO, Merchant Navy Commemorative Theme Project (MNCTP), joined Mrs. Wanita Stapleton, Guest of Honour, Mr. Eric Conroy, President and CEO, Friends of Keewatin, Mr. Phil DeBruyne, on behalf of the Hon. Bruce Stanton, MP Simcoe North, the Hon. Jill Dunlop, MPP Simcoe North, Mr. Ted Walker, Mayor of Tay Township, Legion Members, the general public, and more in remembering the sacrifices and contributions made by the Canadian Merchant Navy during WWI, WWII, Korea, and Vietnam.

During WWII more than 12,000 Seamen served in Canada's Merchant Navy, which was popularly referred to as the unofficial fourth arm of the Allied Forces. Yet, inexplicably, veterans were denied a pension and recognition of service by successive federal governments for more than half a century. Canadian Merchant Navy Veterans were not officially recognized as veterans until 1992. They finally received compensation in 2000.

The Merchant Navy Veterans Day Act (S.C. 2003, c. 17), which received Royal Assent on 19 June 2003, established the third day of September each year as "Merchant Navy Veterans Day." This victory was the result of efforts of veterans such as Merchant Navy Seamen Jack Stapleton and his wife Wanita (from Wasaga Beach, Ontario), in addition to the people from the Town of Collingwood. MN Veteran Jack Stapleton sadly passed away in 2013.

Friends of Keewatin was the host of this observance, working in conjunction with the MNCTP, and in collaboration with the Royal Canadian Legion – Branch 80 – Midland, Midland Pipes and Drums, and Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps (286) Trillium – Midland. [Select pictures of the event have been provided at the end of this document.]

### **Quotes**

*"Approaching the day of the commemoration of the sacrifices of the Canadian Merchant Navy, in the name of the Holy Father, I wish to assure you and all the present members, of 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 during the Second World War.*

*"Commemorating the 70th anniversary of [World War II], Pope Francis expressed the wish and the hope that the entire human family, learning from the tragedies of the past and faced with the current conflicts around the world "may persevere in the search for the common good and in promotion of a culture of peace" (General Audience - May 6, 2015)."*

*– Monseigneur Maurizio Bravi, Chargé d'Affaires, Apostolic Nunciature in Canada, in the Name of His Holiness Pope Francis (1 September 2015)*

*"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 (21 July 2017)

*"The Merchant Navy played a vital role in the Second World War, stepping up to deliver troops, ammunition, goods, tanks, airplanes, fuel, boots, and more to the Allied forces in Europe. Their contributions to the war effort came at a tremendously high cost; one in seven mariners serving aboard merchant ships died in the line of duty. We owe them a debt of gratitude and must never forget their heroism and their sacrifices."*

– Hon. Senator Joseph A. Day (Saint John–Kennebecasis, New Brunswick)

*"Several thousand New Zealand civilians proudly served in the Merchant Navy during the Second World War. These volunteers played a vital role in the Allied war effort. It was a tough and dangerous job. We will not forget their service and their sacrifice."*

– H.E. Daniel Mellsoy, High Commissioner of New Zealand

*"The men and women of the Canadian Merchant Navy showed tremendous bravery as they faced life-threatening conditions in support of the Allied forces in Europe. As we mark Merchant Navy Veterans Day we thank them, and encourage all Canadians to never forget the critical role the Merchant Navy played during the First and Second World Wars."*

– W.J. Natynczyk, General (Retired), Deputy Minister, Veterans Affairs Canada

### **Quick Facts**

- Built in Glasgow, Scotland, the S.S. Keewatin is an Edwardian passenger liner that began her service in 1907 with the Canadian Pacific Railroad Great Lakes Steamship fleet. She was designed and constructed in the same tradition as the RMS Titanic. The S.S. Keewatin transported passengers and freight on a two-and-a-half day journey across the Great Lakes between railheads, from Port McNicoll on Georgian Bay, to Fort William and Port Arthur (now Thunder Bay), on Lake Superior.
- The S.S. Keewatin is the last Great Lakes passenger steamship, and the last Edwardian passenger liner in the world.

### **Associate Links**

- [Jack Stapleton Wartime Story](#)
- [Jack Stapleton: So long sailor \(21 Nov. 2013\)](#)
- [Merchant Navy Day 2019 – New Zealand](#)
- [Fly the Red Ensign for Merchant Navy Day – HRH The Earl of Wessex KG, GCMG \(3 Sept. 2019\)](#)
- [Royal dedication a highlight of UK Merchant Navy Day 2019 \(5 Sept. 2019\)](#)
- [Statement - The Ministers of Veterans Affairs and National Defence mark Merchant Navy Veterans Day and the anniversary of the Beginning of the Battle of the Atlantic \(3 Sept. 2018\)](#)
- [S.S. Keewatin Website](#)

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# S.S. KEEWATIN: 80<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY MN WWII COMMEMORATIONS

8 SEPTEMBER 2019



**March of Colours**



**The Last Post Played from the  
Mizzenmast of the S.S. Keewatin**





**Hon. Jill Dunlop, MPP Simcoe North,  
Speaks to Those Assembled**



**Mrs. Wanita Stapleton, widow of Merchant Navy  
Veteran Jack Stapleton, and Mr. Don Ward,  
Armed Forces Veteran, Prepare to Lay the  
Wreath from the Bow of the S.S. Keewatin**



**Amazing Grace played from the Top Deck  
of the S.S. Keewatin**



**Retiring of Colours**