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# WHEELHOUSE LOG

Our Mandate: *To Preserve, Honour and Educate.*  
Our Motto: *A Look to the Past with a View to the Future.*

SPRING 2025

## Canada's 29th and 65th Motor Torpedo Boat (MTB) Flotillas

### The Royal Canadian Navy's "Spitfires of the Sea"

Adapted from the article:  
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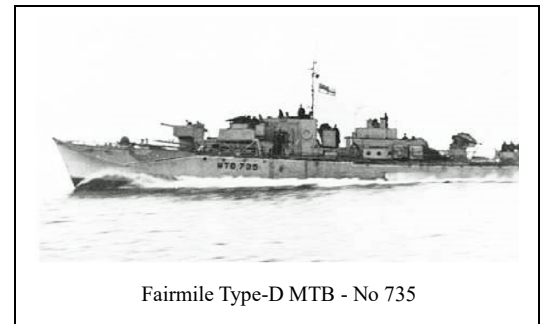
#### In Memory of CPO1 Borthwick A Founding Volunteer with the NMM

Motor Torpedo Boat (MTB) was the terminology used by the Royal Navy, and latterly by the RCN, for those classes of vessels employed for the same type of fast hit-and-run raids associated with the United States' more familiar Patrol Torpedo or "PT Boat" popularized by Hollywood war movies such as that of President Jack Kennedy's *PT 109* and the TV comedy *McHale's Navy*.

In 1942, the British asked that the Royal Canadian Navy form a British-based flotilla of MTBs, but this was not acted upon due to the lack of such vessels in the RCN inventory. A year later, the Admiralty offered to supply and maintain such boats if the RCN would man them. This offer was accepted, and two Canadian-manned MTB flotillas of the Royal Navy were formed - the 29th and the 65th.

Notwithstanding the fact that they were manned entirely by RCN officers and men, since these flotillas were part of the Royal Navy, they have been largely overlooked in historical overviews of the RCN, and have thus remained fairly unknown to the majority of Canadians.

The 29th Canadian MTB Flotilla was formed in March 1944, and was equipped



Fairmile Type-D MTB - No 735

with 71.5 ft., "hard-chine" craft (angular hull components as opposed to smooth or moulded), built by British Power Boats at Hythe on Southampton Water. Originally designed as Motor Gun Boats (MGBs), they were modified and re-designed as Motor Torpedo Boats. Driven by three Rolls Royce or Packard V-12 Supercharged 1250 H.P. engines, each with a 2,500-gallon capacity of 100 octane gas, these vessels had an operational radius of about 140 miles while cruising at 25 knots, and a top speed of some 40 knots.

The 29th Flotilla originally consisted of eight boats (MTBs 459-466), and was later augmented by three more (MTBs 485, 486, and 491) from the Royal Navy, although the latter were also manned entirely by Canadians.

The first mission of the 29th Flotilla on March 16, 1944 assigned to boat 460, 462, 464, and 465, was to escort a mine gathering expedition to the coast of

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## Canada's 29th and 65th MTB Flotillas (Continued)

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France. They proceeded to the designated D-Day beaches in company with two British MTBs, and protected them while volunteers were landed to lift sample mines from the beach defences. They completed their mission undetected, and returned with the German mines. What was learned from the dismantling of these mines prevented many casualties when D-Day finally came.

Most of the rest of May 1944 was spent in company with the 65th Canadian MTB Flotilla and the Canadian *Tribal Class* destroyers marauding up and down the English Channel, intercepting enemy coastal convoys, duelling with German E-boats, luring German destroyers within gun range of the *Tribals*, shooting up escort ships, and torpedoing merchant vessels.

From December 1942 onward, she served with EG C-4, helping defend the hard-pressed convoy HX.224 in February 1943, and in the following month escorting convoys to and from Gibraltar. In August 1943 she began a three-month refit at Grimsby, England, including fo'c'sle extension. She left Londonderry 2 September 1944 to join her last transatlantic convoy, ONS.251, and after a two-month refit at Liverpool, Nova Scotia, worked up in Bermuda.

On D-Day, the primary duty of the 29th Flotilla, from the afternoon onwards, was the close-in protection of the eastern side of the assault lines and the anchorages. During the early hours of June 7, the MTBs clashed with German E-boats that were out in strength. There were no less than seven encounters during the night, in which the Royal Navy 55th Flotilla, under LCdr D.G. Bradford, DSC, RNR, and the Canadian 29th Flotilla, under LCdr. C.A. Law, DSC, bore the brunt of the fighting.

On July 2, 1944, the 29th Flotilla lost its first boat when MTB 460 struck a mine and was lost, along with 10 members of its crew. Then, during an intense action off Trouville on July 4, 1944, three boats of the 29th Flotilla engaged a number of E-boats and damaged two of them before a second flotilla of E-boats joined the fray. In the confusion of the battle, the German newcomers wound up engaging the first flotilla of German vessels, causing further German casualties. Three, and possibly four E-boats were sunk in this action. All three Canadian boats were damaged but managed to return safely home to

Portsmouth. MTB 463 was sunk by mines on July 8; four wounded crew were taken off with the rest of the ship's company by MTB 466.

Through the rest of July, and until January 1945, saw the Canadian Flotilla in almost continuous action, inflicting damage on enemy convoys and their escorts. During this period, MTB 459 was struck by shells from a shore battery, and suffered two killed and one wounded. The damage to the boat necessitated that she be beached and abandoned in the area of Le Havre. Recovered later, she was repaired and put back into service. In a separate action, MTB 464 was holed by gunfire and in imminent danger of sinking, but was saved by the quick thinking of Petty Officer F. Walden who patched the hole with a large piece of wood and a turtleneck sweater, which allowed the stricken vessel to be pumped out and kept afloat.

In January 1945, the 29th Flotilla was transferred to Ostend, Belgium. Shortly after, on February 14, disaster struck when an accidental fire spread rapidly to engulf the boats tied up alongside. Five Canadian and seven British MTBs were lost, and many more damaged; 28 Canadians and 35 British sailors were killed. The disaster signalled the end of the 29th Canadian MTB Flotilla. The remaining boats were turned over to strengthen other Royal Navy flotillas.

On May 8, 2003, a memorial to commemorate this tragedy was dedicated in the city of Ostend by the Canadian Minister of Veterans Affairs.

### **The 65th Canadian MTB Flotilla:**

While the 29th Canadian MTB Flotilla used G-Type MTBs, the 65th Canadian MTB Flotilla was equipped with the Fairmile Type "D", 115 ft., hard-chine, prefabricated double mahogany hull vessel, whose hull was sub-divided into nine watertight compartments. Driven by four Packard 12-cylinder, 1250 horsepower supercharged patrol engines, the boat carried 5200 gallons of 100 octane gas for a range 506 nautical miles at maximum continuous speed. Two Ford V-8 auxiliary engines provided electric power. The 65th Flotilla consisted of 11 vessels: MTBs 726, 727, 735, 736, 743-748, and 797. These boats operated mostly at night, intercepting German convoys, and fighting their German counterpart, the E-boats.

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# When the Present Echoes the Past

## and Canada's 29th and 65th MTB Flotillas (Continued)

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On the night of May 22-23, 1944, the 65th went into action for the first time. Four boats engaged a German convoy protected by E-boats in the English Channel. Two E-boats were sunk, but the 65th lost two killed and several injured in the action. On July 3, 1944, three MTBs of the 65th attacked a convoy off St. Malo, sinking two ships and possibly a third, despite receiving considerable damage to themselves.

On D-Day, the 29th and 65th Flotillas protected the flanks of the landing beaches and attempted to block enemy harbours. Half a year later, on February 14, 1945, the 29th experienced its disastrous fate. Nevertheless, after more than a year of almost constant action with German E-boats, R-boats and armed trawlers up and down the English Channel before and after the invasion of France, the Canadian 65th Motor Torpedo Boat Flotilla, commanded by LCdr. J.R.H. Kirkpatrick, DSC, RCNVR, of Kitchener, Ontario, survived to be decommissioned at the end of the war.

In the course of 464 actions in British home waters (North Sea and English Channel), British light coastal forces, including Canadian, were responsible for the destruction of 40 merchant ships of some 59,650 tons. However, after the war, Coastal Forces suffered much the same fate as they had in 1918. The boats that had given such strenuous service were either broken up or sold off; the MTBs had been built for fighting, and had no discernable peacetime function, although a Fairmile "B-Class" Motor Launch served for many years as a cadet and naval reserve training vessel at HMCS *Carleton* in Ottawa.

### Personalities:

Among the daring band of Canadians who answered the call by serving in Canadian Coastal Forces during WWII were many heroic figures. Canadian MTB/MGB aces, such as "Corny" Burke, Douglas Maitland, and Thomas Ladner, known as the "Three Musketeers" from Vancouver, were joined by others such as James Kirkpatrick, Tony Law, Charles Burk, Tom Fuller, and Cornelius Burke.



Famous Canadian WWII MTB Captains  
Tom Fuller, Tom Ladner, Douglas Maitland & Cornelius Burke

### Editorial: When the Present Echoes the Past

Some scholars believe it was Mark Twain who said: "History doesn't repeat itself; it just rhymes." Today, one might even say: "Actually, history **echoes** through the ages." To bring this concept into focus, let's take the phrase "**We stand on guard for thee**" as one important example. Every time we Canadians sing our national anthem, do we just take these words for granted? Every year when we sit down to figure out how much federal, provincial and local taxes we owe, and complain about every apparent tax increase – large or small – that confronts us; do we ever think at such times about national security, especially in these times of geopolitical upheaval? How often are we actually concerned about our nation's safety and security; that is, until Uncle Sam, our neighbour to the south, flippantly but not necessarily facetiously remarks that he'd like to make Canada the USA's fifty-first state with our Prime Minister as Governor, and then launches a totally unwarranted and unjustified trade war against all of its major trading partners in a fit of transactional pique, just so he can impose his will on his closest yet unsuspecting and bewildered neighbours?

Things we Canadians once took for granted are now being obliterated. The very nation that has led the democratic world order for the last eighty years is now adopting the authoritarian ideologies of our onetime adversaries of the 1930s and '40s. Uncle Sam has become almost unrecognizable. It's not only as if he wants to reignite a pseudo war against the former "United Empire Loyalists" of 1776 and 1815, but he wants to revive skeletons and major issues of the unresolved Civil War within his own country, and then extend these issues in a confrontation with all Western Democracies.

How can we ever trust anything Uncle Sam says ever again if everything he does is totally transactional to his morally vapid and predetermined favour? And this from a country which is supposed to be our historically great "relative" and closest neighbour and ally with whom we have the longest unguarded border in the world. But not anymore!

Which leads us back to the original question, but with an ironic twist: "**Where exactly do we stand**" in these troubling times? How really prepared are we to withstand the onslaught from our southern neighbour; one who wants to take over Canada, Greenland and the Panama Canal, expel all remaining Palestinians from the obliterated Gaza Strip, and turn it into a Mediterranean resort - "the Riviera of the Middle East". How exactly are we as Canadians going to deal with all of the mounting concerns we have with unravelling geopolitical conditions around the world, and the mounting avalanche which is rushing toward universal autocracy that will suffocate all freedom? Watch this space.

# Museum Log

Some of what has happened at the Naval Museum of Manitoba in the past six months



For the month of February, the Naval Museum of Manitoba created a new display, on the quarterdeck of HMCS Chippawa, in recognition of Black History Month.

The display consisted of three banners highlighting six outstanding black sailors who have served aboard HMCS Chippawa, from World War II through to the current day. The biographies of PO1 Percy Haynes (WWII), Lt.Cdr. George Atwell (1950s-1960s), PO1 Andre Sheppard (1980s-2010s), MS Troy Messam (1990s), S1 Tamika Reid (current) and S1 Ozana Quesada (current), were on display for all to read their remarkable stories.

A video of PO1 Andre Sheppard talking about PO1 Percy Haynes played above the display. PO1 Haynes, who had the distinction of being one of the very first black sailors to serve in the Royal Canadian Navy, was also a talented musician. He played the piano throughout the war and long after in the various messes.

The piano that Percy played while at HMCS Chippawa was also a part of the display. This piano was donated to HMCS Winnipeg by the citizens of Winnipeg and Manitoba on July 29, 1943, and served aboard the ship until the end of the war (1943-1945). After the ship's

decommissioning, the piano returned to Winnipeg and has remained with HMCS Chippawa ever since.

At the piano was a mannequin, specially made in the likeness of PO1 Percy Haynes, dressed in the Second World War uniform he would have worn.



Also in February, the museum volunteers began to update the helmsman display within the museum. The first step in this update was to retire "soft" Sam. As helmsman, Sam has steered the museum on a true and steady course for many decades now and it was time for Sam to enjoy a well-deserved retirement. A new mannequin, nicknamed George by the museum volunteers, was enlisted to take Sam's place. George assures us he too will keep the museum on a true and steady course for many decades to come.

So, if you find yourselves at, or near, Chippawa during museum hours, please come in and say ahoy to George and the Naval Museum of Manitoba (NMM) volunteers.

Ready Aye Ready,  
NMM Volunteers.



**The Naval Museum of Manitoba located at**  
HMCS Chippawa 1 Navy Way Winnipeg

When is the Museum open?

Wednesday 9:00 am to 3:00 pm  
**School or Group Tours available on request.**  
Contact: Claude Rivard  
Phone (204) 9437745 Ext: 3294  
Contact can also be made through the web site  
<https://naval-museum.mb.ca/>

Was a member of your family in the Royal Canadian Navy during WWII ?

All Donations made to the Naval Museum, whether they are naval artifacts or financial donations, will receive a tax receipt for charitable purposes.

For More information call:  
Claude Rivard, Curator  
Phone: 204-943-7745 Ext: 3294