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MANITOBA**

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(See also: "A Legacy in
Stone" Brochure - "The
Prairie Sailor Memorial"

WHEELHOUSE LOG

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

SPRING 2026

Canada's "Corvette" Navy: Featuring HMCS SNOWBERRY (K166) A 'Flower Class' Corvette



HMCS Snowberry (K166)

Background: On the eve of World War II, it became critically apparent that there was an urgent need for patrol and escort vessels. The British Admiralty decided to build a number of smaller ships, based on a whaling boat design developed by naval engineer William Reed. The "Patrol Vessel – Whaler Type" could be constructed rapidly and in large numbers. Satisfied with the design but unhappy with the name, Sir Winston Churchill chose a shorter and more 'warlike' name after a sailboat of old: the *corvette*.

With a corvette's shape and equipment being quite similar to that of a merchant ship, the design enhanced Canada's ability to commission existing shipyards to build corvettes on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, and along the St. Lawrence down to the Great Lakes. In 1939-1940, contracts were signed for production of 64 corvettes. In the following years, 43 more were built in Canadian shipyards. They were called *Flower Class* corvettes because the first of these which were supplied to the Royal Navy (RN), were commissioned with the names of "flowers". Later, the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) chose to give the names of Canadian cities, although the term *Flower Class* remained in use.

Corvettes were not ideal to detect and attack U-boats. Equipped with reciprocating piston steam engines because Canadian shipyards did not have the technical expertise to produce the high - performance engines, their speed was limited to 16 knots, making them much slower than U-boats. In addition, their navigation depended on unreliable magnetic compasses, and their detection systems were limited to the ASDIC (anti-submarine detection). Throughout the war, corvettes would have to be modified to extend the fo'c's'le, improve detection systems and armament. The later Canadian-built *Flower Class* corvettes benefited from these upgrades.

One such corvette, *HMCS Snowberry (K166)*, which is currently highlighted in a special model display in the **Naval Museum of Manitoba**, was built for the RN and commissioned at Quebec City on 26 Nov. 1940 as *HMS Snowberry*. She arrived at Halifax on 13 Dec. 1940 for further work and sailed with convoy **HX.108** for the UK on 09 Feb. 1941. There she fitted out at Greenock, completing 03 Apr. 1940, and worked up at Tobermory before joining Western Approaches Command, Greenock, in May. On 15 May 1941 she was transferred to the RCN and was commissioned as *HMCS Snowberry (K166)*. She left Aultbea early in Jan. 1941 to join convoy **OB.332**, arriving at Halifax on 23 Jun. 1941 to join Newfoundland Command. From Jul. to Oct. 1941 she made three round trips to Iceland, and on 08 Dec. 1941 arrived at Charleston, SC, for six weeks' refit. On 12 Feb. 1942, she left St. John's to escort **SC.69** to Londonderry. In Mar. 1942, she joined the newly formed Western Local Escort Force (WLEF), shifting in June to Halifax Tanker

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Canada's "Corvette" Navy (Continued)

Continued from Page 1

Escort Force for one round trip to Trinidad, and two round trips to Aruba with tanker convoys. In Sept. 1942 she was placed under US control, escorting New York-Guantanamo convoys until Mar. 1943, when she arrived in Charleston, SC, for refit, including fo'c's'le extension. On completion in mid-May 1942, and after workups at Pictou, she joined the newly established **EG.5** (later **EG.6**) and returned to UK waters in Aug. 1942. While serving with this support force on 20 Nov. 1943, as escort to a UK-Gibraltar/Freetown convoy, she took part in the sinking of *U-536* north of the Azores. When the group replaced its corvettes with frigates in Mar. 1944, *HMCS Snowberry* proceeded to Baltimore, MD, for five weeks' refit, returning to Halifax afterward. She went to Bermuda to work up in July 1944, and on returning, was briefly assigned to **WLEF**, but left St. John's in mid-September for the UK. There she joined the Portsmouth Command for the balance of the war. She was handed back to the RN at Rosyth on 08 Jun. 1945, and sunk as a target vessel off Portsmouth in 1946. She was salvaged and broken up at Middlesbrough, Thornaby-on-Tees in 1947.

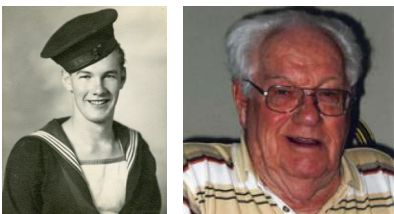
Honours and Awards: Atlantic 1941-44, Biscay 1943, English Channel 1945, Gulf of St. Lawrence 1944.

On 20 Nov. 1943, *HMCS Snowberry*, *HMCS Nene* and *HMCS Calgary* depth charged and sank *U-536* northeast of the Azores.



HMCS Snowberry (K166)

To serve aboard a corvette required unflinching courage and tenacity, as demonstrated by the heroic deeds of the Canadian sailors who escorted merchant convoys throughout all of the maritime theatres of war. One such sailor who served aboard the Canadian ship *HMCS Snowberry* was a gentleman by the name of **Alexander (Alex or 'Sandy') Thomson**, who in retirement became both a volunteer and one of the founding members of the **Naval Museum of Manitoba**.



Alexander (Sandy) Thomson

Sandy proudly donated a piece of gun shield art off of *HMCS Snowberry*, which portrays a cartoon character of Donald Duck throwing a depth charge at a passing U-boat. During WWII, ships' companies would paint art on the side of the shield that protected their main gun (gun shield art). This art usually depicted cartoon characters doing harm to the enemy's ships. You can find *HMCS Snowberry's* gun shield art prominently displayed in the Naval Museum of Manitoba. Look for it the next time you visit the Museum.



HMCS Snowberry Gun Shield Art

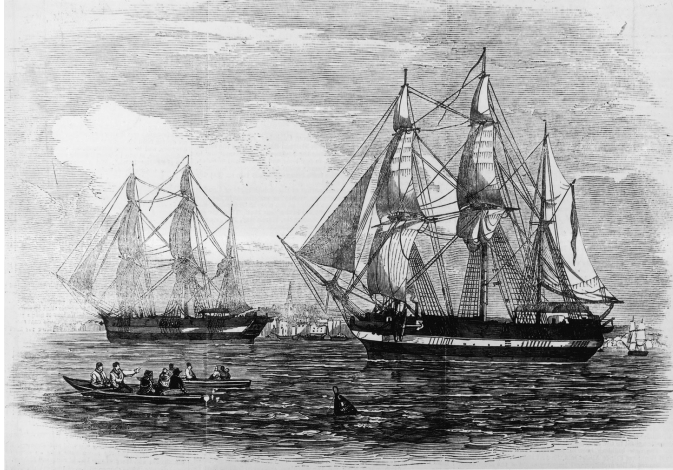
Nowadays, there is only one Canadian corvette still maintained in her original state: *HMCS Sackville*. She has now been transformed into Canada's naval memorial, a symbolic representation of the many stories of sailors who braved the dangers of a seaman's life as Canada's contribution during World War II.



Restored HMCS Sackville (K181) about to dock in Halifax

HMS Erebus Ship's Bell

Lost Ships of the Franklin Expedition



Engraving of HMS Erebus & HMS Terror departing in 1845

On May 19, 1845, Captain Sir John Franklin and a crew of 134 (24 officers and 110 men) set out from Greenhithe, England to attempt to navigate the Northwest Passage aboard two ships, *HMS Erebus* and *HMS Terror*.

The ships and crew of this expedition were considered to be extremely well qualified. Captain Franklin and his senior officers had years of polar exploration experience. In addition, both ships had had their bows reinforced with extra layers of wood and iron, and both ships had been outfitted with steam engines to supplement their sails, provide steam heat and the ability to produce fresh water. The ships carried cattle, pigs and hens along with three year's supply of canned soup and vegetables.

By July the expedition had reached Greenland where they took on additional supplies. Their support ships, *HMS Rattler* and *Barreto Junior*, separated from the expedition and returned home with mail and several crewmen who became too ill to continue with the expedition. The remaining 129 officers and men continued on the expedition.

The expedition reached Beechey Island, Nunavut and spent the winter of 1845-46 there. After the thaw, they continued their journey, and off the northwest tip of King William Island, Nunavut, in September 1846, they became trapped in the ice again. They spend the winters of 1846-47 and 1847-48 trapped in the ice. The ships were reported to be abandoned on April 22, 1848.

After no word from the Franklin expedition for two years, Franklin's wife, along with others, persuaded the British Admiralty to launch a massive search for Franklin and his crew. For years overland and sea expeditions searched for the ships, finding only some artifacts and scattered bones. Most of the ships' companies had simply vanished.

A decade later, on May 5, 1859, a note, dated April 28, 1847, was discovered on King William Island. It indicated the crew spend the winter of 1845-46 on Beechey Island and the ships became trapped in the ice and had to spend the winters of 1846-47 and 1847-48 on King William Island. The note stated that John Franklin died on June 11, 1847, and the crew finally had to abandon the ships and undertake a journey to the Canadian mainland.

Over the next 160 years numerous searches were undertaken. In 1992, to protect them if ever found, the wrecks of *HMS Erebus* and *HMS Terror* were designated national historic sites and a 1997 agreement with the British government gave Parks Canada a role in finding and protecting the ships.

An expedition, led by Parks Canada, located the wreck of *HMS Erebus* on September 2, 2014, 80 km south of King William Island. On September 3, 2016, another expedition located the wreck of *HMS Terror* in Terror Bay, further north of *Erebus*.

Various artifacts, including the ship's bell, from *HMS Erebus* were raised from the wreck. These items currently reside at a Parks Canada archaeological conservation laboratory in Ottawa. The ship's bell from *HMS Terror* remains on the deck of the ship at the bottom of Terror Bay.

Two replicas of the *HMS Erebus* ships' bells were 3D printed. One of those replica bells is in the Nattilik Heritage Centre in Gjoa Haven, NU. The second replica bell is now held in the **Naval Museum of Manitoba** at *HMCS Chippawa* in Winnipeg, MB. The replica of the *HMS Erebus* bell is scheduled to become an integral part of the Museum's *Arctic Display*. The Museum also plans to exhibit the bell at the Red River Heritage Fair and at the Red River Exhibition this year.



Replica of the Ship's Bell of HMS Erebus

Museum Log

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

The volunteers of the Naval Museum of Manitoba have once again been very busy since our last newsletter. They further updated the First World War Medal display to add several more medals of RNCVR members serving in the First World War. In addition:



With the assistance of three Museum's Board members, the Museum acquired two additional RCN ship's bells. These bells were purchased at an auction in the USA. The bells of HMCS Loch Morlich and HMCS Mulgrave are now proudly on display in the Museum, back in Canada!



One of the members of the Museum staff used his expert woodworking skills to fabricate a magnificent oak stand to allow us to proudly display our Second World War Mark 6 Depth Charge.



The port side quarterdeck display case has been updated with a display featuring HMCS Haida, RCMP PV Roch and HMCS St. Laurent, along with miscellaneous memorabilia from those three ships.



The Museum's chapel has been updated to include the bell from HMCS Wallaceburg. This bell was used in the Christening of several babies. Also added was a poster explaining the christening procedure used aboard ship.



Finally, a poster was added to the rum (tot) display explaining and showing how the rum portions used to be distributed to the ship's company of RCN ships.



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: 257-3294