

# From The Halifax Chronicle Herald

## Mariners honour comrades

By BILL POWER Staff Reporter  
Sun, Sep 4 - 7:34 AM



Canadian merchant navy veterans sporting white gloves grip flags during a memorial service at Sackville Landing on the Halifax waterfront Saturday. (Ingrid Bulmer / Staff)



Several of the dwindling number of merchant navy veterans stand at attention during Saturday's ceremonies. (Ingrid Bulmer / Staff)



Bjorn Thonhaugen, representing the Norwegian consul, places flowers at the merchant navy memorial on the Halifax waterfront on Saturday. (Ingrid Bulmer / Staff)

They bounced around on some of the dingiest ships afloat, bringing essential supplies to the Allied forces and bringing the wounded to safety during some of the deadliest military engagements the world has experienced.

So it goes without saying that some of the last members of the Canadian Merchant Navy Veterans Association in Halifax weren't about to miss a memorial service for their comrades Saturday at Sackville Landing.

Most are in their late 80s and early 90s. Even though their memorial march included just 25 merchant navy veterans, they made for an imposing-looking group.

"We're here to honour the thousands who were lost," veteran Peter Hutchins said after the ceremony.

"Hitler had plans for England and Canada and the United States. If it wasn't for the merchant navy, a lot more people in the world would be speaking German these days."

Hutchins, 85, said he left home at 14 when the Second World War started. He eventually joined the British Merchant Navy and spent years working aboard tankers delivering fuel for the Allies. He also crewed on ships delivering aircraft.

The merchant ships were basically big sitting ducks for German U-boats, especially in the early stages of the war before Allied forces could use radar to their advantage.

"So many people were killed; so many ships were lost," said Stuart Carscadden, 92, who worked for years aboard army hospital ships.

"We helped the nurses and doctors. We were not in action. We had to deal with the aftermath."

Only a few years ago, the Canadian Merchant Navy Veterans Association had several thousand members. That number has dwindled today to fewer than 500 across the country, said Earle Wagner, 87, a merchant navy officer who presided over the memorial service.

"It would be extremely optimistic of me to suggest we're all going to be seeing each other next year," he said.

An estimated 4,600 seafarers from Canada and Newfoundland went down with 127 ships during the two world wars. Other countries lost thousands more men and hundreds more ships.

"We also recognize and honour those valiant mariners of Great Britain, the United States, Norway and other Allied nations who volunteered and served at sea in the cause of freedom and those who paid the supreme sacrifice and have no known graves," said Wagner during his memorial presentation.

He said his pet peeve these days is the sad state of the merchant navy memorial on the Halifax waterfront. Wagner said he wants it fenced so people will quit butting out cigarettes on it.

( [bpower@herald.ca](mailto:bpower@herald.ca) )