

Status Report for the Naval Reserve Association of Canada AGM – Apr 2024

Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Project:

“Dying in war isn’t the worst thing that can happen. Being forgotten is.” (G.C. Krell)

Executive Summary:

Researchers are continuing to prepare sailor stories – albeit at a slower pace – in 2024. This is due to the complex nature of the research, which involves gathering information from various sources and verifying its accuracy. While it wasn’t a competition, TEC was the first NRD with a 100% completion rate. In addition to the ~ 330 life stories that are completed or in progress, 22 Vignettes newsletters were published capturing the heroics of 55 RCNVR and RCNR gallantry award recipients and exploring the sacrifices of Naval



Reserve sailors in wartime activities beyond Battle of Atlantic escort duties such as coastal warfare, fleet air arm, submarine and naval commando operations.

The Excel spreadsheet, a valuable resource, has 26 (of 37) data fields completed for ~1800 sailors that can be compiled at the users’ request. This comprehensive data includes information such as hometowns, burial locations, civilian employers, ranks, occupations, ages, and ship at the time of death. It can be used for a variety of purposes. For example, NRD command teams might be interested in hometowns, burial locations, and civilian employers for outreach activities. Ranks, occupations, ages, and ship at the time of death might be helpful for Commemoration activities, such as creating memorial plaques or organizing memorial services. This data not only provides a detailed picture of the sailors' lives but also serves as a valuable resource for historical research and commemoration efforts.

As a result of the CSVC project, a new initiative called the Citizen Sailors Guardian was launched. This initiative aimed to bring the stories of our war dead to life by publishing the locations of 631 headstones belonging to RCNVR, RCNR, and WRCNS war dead on a Google Map. The public was invited to visit these graves and submit photos of the headstones, thereby creating a virtual memorial and fostering a sense of connection and remembrance. The response to this initiative was overwhelming, with numerous photos and stories shared, further highlighting the importance and impact of our project.

The next step for the CSVC project is to find a permanent home for the stories, the spreadsheet and the research process. We are currently in discussions with NAVRESHQ

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staff to explore potential options. These discussions involve considering the best platform for hosting the virtual cenotaph, ensuring the data's security and accessibility, and maintaining the project's long-term sustainability.

CSVC Backgrounder/Refresher:

The Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Project is designed to reconnect the history of our war dead with the Naval Reserve Divisions and the cities, towns, and villages where these men and women enlisted to serve in the Second World War. It's a significant endeavour to honour their memory and service.

The CSVC project contains two products: (1) individual life stories for RCNVR, RCNR and WRCNS who perished in WW2 and (2) a searchable spreadsheet containing ~35 data fields for approximately 1800 (war dead) sailors.

Current-day sailors can delve into the contributions of their Fallen shipmates to the Second World War by reading short stories about their lives before and during the war. These sailor stories, written in a style with limited technical jargon, serve as a valuable educational resource, enabling individuals of all ages to understand the hardships endured and sacrifices made by the citizen sailors during the Second World War. They also provide a deeper insight into the contributions of the RCNVR, RCNR, and WRCNS in Canada's military history.

The searchable database allows users to find information on specific people, groups, trends, and periods during the war at the NRD, provincial or national level.

The Canadian Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph project is not just an initiative but a crucial one. It re-invests in Remembrance and Commemoration at a local level, preserving the memory of those who joined at our NRDs and made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. By providing a digital platform for remembrance and focusing on these sailors' lives and contributions, the project ensures that the sacrifices made by these brave sailors will never be forgotten.

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Status: Here is where we stand in April 2024.

Lifestories

Three hundred thirty-two (332) life stories are either published or in progress. This represents around 4000 hours of work by researchers and project crew. The published stories can be found on the CSVC page of the NRAC site. Stories in progress include those being actively researched by a volunteer, draft stories awaiting formatting, editing, and review by the project crew, and stories where the researcher is awaiting a response from family and descendants for pictures and input.

Detailed breakdown by NRD

Tecumseh’s life stories are 100% complete, and the Calgary team (led by Greg McKenzie) has taken on the 53 *Nonsuch* war dead stories. They are 50 % complete.

17 of 38 *Queen* life stories and 34 of 61 *Unicorn’s* life stories are complete. Researcher John Dalzell intends to continue until all stories are completed.

27 of 55 *Catarqui* life stories have been assigned. HMCS *Catarqui’s* historian, Chris Varley, intends to continue until all are complete.

The team researching *Discovery War Dead* approached this project differently. Based on Commonwealth War Graves Commission data, Discovery has 97 war dead, but they focused their research on the names on the Discovery Memorial Plaque. The team submitted 61 stories; 26 have been posted, and the remainder are in various stages of formatting and editing.

Arthur Hastings (DIS) has taken on the task of researching the four war dead from HMCS *Chatham* in Prince Rupert. These sailors had all joined pre-war, and the unit ceased functioning as an NRD when every sailor volunteered for Active Service in September 1939. The *Chatham* war dead stories are at greatest risk of being lost since that NRD was never re-commissioned.

For the remainder of the NRDs, please see Annex A.

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Spreadsheet

The spreadsheet has around 1800 rows and is being populated in three phases. The first phase, courtesy of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, contains the first 18 data fields. The second phase involved reviewing every (war dead) RCNVR, RCNR, and WRCNS service file and completing nine fields from the individual service file. This was completed in 2022. The third and final phase involves uploading information from the prepared life story into the final nine fields.

The third phase is ongoing and will only be complete once all lifestories have been prepared. The available 27 data fields reveal some interesting things about our War Dead. For instance, around 85% of the RCN Second World War dead were RCNVR, RCNR, or WRCNS. Many died during the Battle of the Atlantic (~40%), and there are also stories about shipmates who distinguished themselves during significant Second World War operations at Dunkirk, [St Nazaire](#), Dieppe, North Africa, Sicily, Italy, [Normandy](#), and Japan. These shipmates were some of the first naval commandos, human torpedoes, submariners, Fleet Air Arm personnel, and coastal warfare sailors.

We also have other information, such as the hometown and enlistment NRD for every war-dead sailor and the burial/commemoration location. This knowledge is the foundation for a related effort, the Citizen Sailors Guardian Initiative.

Our war dead range in age from 17 to 71 years old. Many over 50 had [served in the Great War](#), and some men lied about their age to enlist. At the younger end, 17 and 18-year-olds account for 58 deaths, with some of these sailors also lying about their age on enlistment and dying in operational ships.

We have rediscovered six sets of brothers who died in naval service, including the Shelley brothers ([William](#) and [Ralph](#)) and the Frankin brothers ([Walter](#) and [Charles](#)) from Tecumseh.

We also found that our shipmates worked in various occupations before enlistment. The [top twenty pre-war employers are listed here](#); some companies still exist today. Others enlisted directly [from school](#) or [Canada’s Merchant Marine](#) or were employed in less traditional jobs, such as NHL hockey players, [journalists](#), [police officers](#), [florists](#), [musicians](#), a violin maker, and [barristers](#).

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Vignettes and Communications:

Between 2021 and 2023, we published 22 Vignettes that portray the heroics of 55 gallantry award recipients. Our Vignettes newsletter was our primary communication tool, and we consistently received positive feedback that these short stories were appreciated.

In 2024, with only a minimal project crew, we have decided to publish a Vignettes Newsletter only when we come across exceptional stories. Subscribers to the newsletter may expect to see 1-3 Vignettes this year.

Communication in 2024 will be relatively passive. Several groups, including RCN, Stone Left Alone, and the Canadian Naval Tribute Project, repost life story links on their social media, and our CSVC page is linked to several websites. We have a good relationship with RCN PA, RCN Heritage, and RCN Historian, and we will look for opportunities to publish stories in their publications this year.

In 2024, we intentionally keep project communications low-key as we focus on finding a permanent home for the CSVC project. We expect this shift towards a permanent home may require web design, grant writing, and other administrative tasks.

You can find all the Vignettes stories on our [Vignette Index](#).

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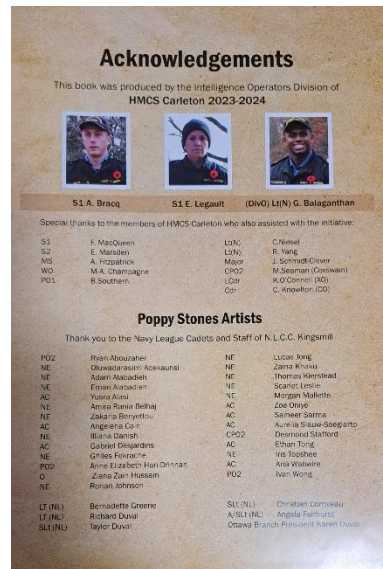
Citizen Sailors Guardian

War Dead Map

Not everyone enjoys digging into dusty archives (even virtual ones) and preparing life stories. About 2/3 of our war dead are buried at sea, and they are remembered at the Halifax Memorial. This Cenotaph is visited routinely. The other 1/3 are buried in cemeteries around the world. Are they routinely visited?

Citizen Sailors Guardian was created to engage with people interested in locating the final resting place of RCNVR, RCNR, and WRCNS around the world and submitting photos of headstones. This information is then shared to My Google Maps, with the goal of visiting every headstone as our way of saying, *“You have not been forgotten.”*

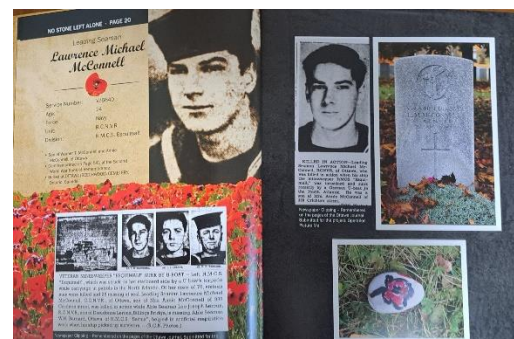
(Author's note): I think back to my Command Team years, and I wish I had known that some of my NRD’s war dead were buried in my backyard, and others were buried in far-off spots like Sri Lanka, Japan and Algeria. These graves (at those in Canada) should have been included in our commemoration ceremonies.



Thank you to the No Stone Left Alone Foundation for inventing the idea of organized Remembrance visits to individual war graves. A very special thank you for their online presence and support in creating the CSG war dead map.

We did not meet the goal of locating all 631 headstones in 2023, but we only started this initiative in the Fall, so we will continue in 2024. One of the more exceptional and best-coordinated results in 2023 was from HMCS Carleton. A section of their Ops department visits all RCNVR, RCNR and WRCNS grave sites within a 250km radius of Ottawa. Not only did they locate and clean headstones, but they also documented

their effort in a hardcopy book. The Guardians adorned every headstone with a hand-painted poppy stone created by the Navy League cadets and staff of NLCC Kingsmill. See photos on this page.



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Behind the scenes crew

I want to give a special shout-out to the volunteers who work behind the scenes. Their names are never seen, but their tireless work is essential to the project. From the time a research volunteer steps forward to volunteer to write the life story of one of our Naval Reserve war dead until the point where it is published, there are approximately 10 hours of work involved for each story. While I risk forgetting someone by listing names, here are a few of the people who make things happen:

Principal editors and proofreaders: Ross Connell, Warren Bush, and Craig Walkington.

Translators: Louise LeBlanc-Mazur and Daniel Haché.

Communications and social media experts: Scott Ferris, Paul Seguna and Emile Caron.

Subject Matter Experts: Jody Doll (medical), Jerry Proc (radio, radar, signalling and all things comms related), Garry Weir (the creator and owner of forposteritysake.ca), Roger Litwiller (fantastic collection of photos), Chris Perry (RCN Historian), Dean Boettger and John Knoll (RCN Heritage), Kim Cameron (CAF PA) and Geoff Hamilton (excel data manipulation).

Champions: Jennifer Bennett, Daniel Haché, Graham Scott, Ross Connell, and other Board members of the Naval Reserve Association of Canada.

Master researchers who have helped new researchers such as John Dalzell and Greg McKenzie.

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Way Ahead

As mentioned in several places in this report, we entered a new project phase on 1 January 2024.

This project was set up as a temporary activity designed to re-discover an essential piece of our NRD history by creating a virtual cenotaph where short stories about our Fallen Shipmates are posted and a national spreadsheet of RCNVR, RCNR, and WRCNS war dead particulars. The sum total of this grassroots effort was offered to Canada’s Naval Reserve as a 100th birthday present.

We are currently consulting with the Naval Reserve Headquarters to understand better their role and limitations regarding accepting gifts of this nature. It is possible that this gift falls outside their scope and mandate. If that is the case, we will explore other options within the RCN, CAF, or Military Association for a permanent home.

Questions regarding this report can be directed to the undersigned.

Your Aye,

//signed//

Kimberley Kubeck

Project Director

Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph

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Annex A – CSVC Life Story competition update & some national statistics.

NRD ^{5,6}	War Dead	Sailors assigned to CSVC researchers	CSVC life stories posted	total enlistments 39-45	% of enrolment that are War Dead	Ave. length of service for War dead (years)	Honours and Awards	novel and rare
BRU	61	1	1	2292	2.66%	2.43	0	OS McGibbon - The youngest Canadian navy war dead at 16. Lied about DoB
CAR	71	3	3	4620	1.54%	2.34	1	* AB Cavanaugh - 1 of 3 RCNVR killed at Dieppe
CAT	60	27	9	3211	1.87%	2.13	1	* 25% of deaths occurred over a 102 day period between 28 Apr - 8 Aug 1944 (Ops connected with Normandy)
CHI	137	3	1	7736	1.77%	2.27	3	* Robertson brothers lost
DIS	97	61	26	7221	1.34%	2.53	4	* at least 1 war dead from each: RCNVR, RCNR, FR & WRCNS
DON ⁴	248	9	7	10466	2.37%	2.38	12	* Lt Russel - one of Canada's 1st submariners * Wren McGill - only Wren to die on overseas service * Glasgow and Stephenson brothers lost
GRI	55	0	0	2412	2.28%	2.07	0	* Most deadly NRD - lowest average length of service for war dead
HUN	53	0	0	3981	1.33%	2.09	4	* L/Stoker Carnignan - oldest war dead at 71
MAL ¹	64	3	3	Needs research	#VALUE!		2	* Cook Amoth - First RCNR (FR) death 14 May 1940
MTM	42	1	0	1474	2.85%	3.90	0	* Chief ERA Bouffard - Longest serving RCNR war dead 1923 - 1944
NON	54	54	19	3588	1.51%	2.15	2	* highest % of war dead under 20
PRE	78	4	4	4480	1.74%	2.25	1	* LS Campbell - the only RCNVR to die as a PoW (Dieppe)
QCH	35	2	2	1260	2.78%	3.06	2	OS McKenna - 1 of 3 RCNVR to die at Dieppe
QUE	38	17	17	2698	1.41%	2.72	0	* LS Smith - only indigenous sailor * Stoker PO Ross among first RCNVR losses on 25 Jun 1940
SCO ² (CAB) ³	239	5	1	2510	9.52%	2.58	5	* Cook Roberts - 1st RCNR death of WW2 * LCdr Shadforth (Spikenard) - oldest combat death at 57
STA	87	7	4	7202	1.21%	2.35	2	* Stoker Lovell - 2nd youngest RCNVR war dead at 17. Lied about DoB * ERA Love - longest serving RCNVR war dead
TEC	52	54	54	3899	1.33%	2.79	2	* Frankin brothers lost * Shelley brothers lost
UNI	61	34	34	3573	1.71%	2.68	4	* Canada's 1st and last war dead serving in DEMS
YOR	237	11	10	14183	1.67%	2.40	11	* SLt Proctor - 1st RCNVR combat death * Lt Bonnell - first class of human torpedoes (charioteers) * MacLaren brothers lost
	1769.00			86806	1.84%	2.51		

Note 1: The *Malahat/Naden* recruiting #s require a deep dive at Library and Archives Canada as they were omitted from the 1952 historical publication.

Note 2: The *Scotian* enlistment #s/percentage are "off". Needs investigation.

Note 3: The *Scotian* # of war dead includes the 19 sailors from Newfoundland who travelled to Halifax to join the RCNVR. For research purposes they are assigned to *CABOT*.

Note 4: The *Donnacona* numbers include the HMCS *Cartier* #s.

Note 5: HMCS *Chatham* has been omitted from this table. They have four war dead but zero wartime enlistments because the entire division volunteered for active service in 1939. I would need to know the unit strength in Sep 1939 to include them in the calculation.