



**SUPPLY
LINE**

War at Sea

During the Second World War, Canadian sailors and ships served around the world. The Battle of the Atlantic, however, was the central focus of the Royal Canadian Navy and Canada's merchant navy.

The Battle of the Atlantic

The Battle of the Atlantic was the longest campaign of the Second World War, lasting from 1939 to 1945. German submarines, called **U-boats**, attacked **convoys** of merchant ships transporting food, supplies and personnel.

Canadian and **Allied** merchant ships and their crews were vital to the Allied war effort. Canada's merchant navy used cargo ships, tankers and other kinds of vessels to carry people, weapons and supplies to Britain and other Allied countries.

Along with the threat of German U-boats, the Atlantic Ocean itself was dangerous,

especially in winter. Sailors faced bad weather, large waves and ice. There was also the risk of colliding with ships in fog or at night.

Protecting Allied ships in the Atlantic was the Royal Canadian Navy's primary duty. In 1939, the navy was small, needing new ships as well as training for many sailors. Canadian warships helped escort convoys, watching for U-boats and attacking them when they were detected.

The Royal Canadian Air Force and Allied air forces also helped protect convoys. Aircraft could spot U-boats moving on the surface of the water and attack them.

The Navy in Canada

Throughout the war, the navy helped patrol Canada's Atlantic and Pacific coasts. German U-boats attacked ships off the Atlantic coast. Several ships were even sunk near major ports such as Halifax, Nova Scotia, and St. John's, Newfoundland. Ships were also attacked in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Shipyards on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts – and on the St. Lawrence River and Great Lakes – built, repaired and maintained ships. The navy trained thousands of new personnel, including women.

The Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service

Like the army and the air force, the Royal Canadian Navy had a women's branch, the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (WRCNS), created in 1942.

The women who served in the WRCNS were often called "Wrens". Nearly 7,000 Wrens performed a wide variety of non-combatant roles ashore, both in Canada and abroad.

Global Operations

Canada's navy also operated with Allied forces in European waters, carrying out patrols and escorting convoys. Some Canadian ships and personnel served in the Mediterranean. Others participated in the D-Day landings

in Normandy, France, and in Allied invasions elsewhere. In the Arctic Ocean, Canadian ships and sailors took part in convoys to the **Soviet Union**. They also served in the war against Japan in the Indian and Pacific oceans.

Aftermath

During the war, the Royal Canadian Navy lost 36 ships and nearly 2,000 men and women. The enemy sank about 70 merchant ships from Canada and Newfoundland. Other merchant

ships were lost to storms and accidents. More than 1,600 merchant mariners from Canada and Newfoundland, including eight women, were killed.

Vocabulary

U-Boat:	A German submarine. It is an abbreviation for the German term <i>Unterseeboot</i> (undersea boat).
Convoy:	A group of ships or motor vehicles that travel together to support and protect each other. Convoys often have armed escorts to help provide protection.
Allies:	The countries, including Canada, that joined together in opposing the Axis powers during the Second World War. The largest Allied nations were the United Kingdom, the United States, the Soviet Union and China.
Merchant Navy:	During the Second World War, Canadian and Allied merchant ships and their crews were a vital part of the Allied war effort. Transporting personnel, munitions, weapons, and food across the world's oceans, they faced enemy attack and the ever-present dangers of weather and accidents.
Soviet Union:	Name used to refer to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1922-1991), established in the wake of the 1917 Russian Revolution. It signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany in 1939, but became one of the Allies after Germany invaded it in June 1941.

Timeline

3 SEPTEMBER 1939

Sinking of the SS *Athenia*: the first Allied ship sunk in the Battle of the Atlantic.

SEPTEMBER 1939

The first convoy of ships escorted by the Royal Canadian Navy leaves Halifax for England.

DECEMBER 1941

Japan enters the war.

MAY 1942

The Battle of the St. Lawrence begins. In 1942, 1943 and 1944, German submarines patrol the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the lower St. Lawrence River, sinking naval and merchant ships.

JULY 1942

Creation of the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service.

JUNE 1944

Canadian ships and sailors participate in the D-Day landings.

MAY 1945

Germany surrenders.

AUGUST 1945

Japan capitulates.