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Military Affairs Column by Tim Dunne

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Our other Remembrance Day: Battle of the Atlantic Sunday

She turned 70 years old on Dec. 30 last year, and she is the last remaining of her family of 123 sister ships. HMCS Sackville is the last Canadian-built corvette, Canada's oldest warship and our official Naval Memorial since 1985.

Tomorrow, she will be taken to Point Pleasant Park where she will stand in silent vigil as members, veterans, family and friends of the Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Army and the Royal Canadian Air Force gather at the Halifax Memorial to commemorate the 22 Canadian warships and their 2,000 Canadian sailors who lost their lives in combat in the North Atlantic.

The Battle of the Atlantic, the longest of the Second World War, was the naval effort to meet the threats of Germany's U-boats. As the war progressed, German Admiral Karl Dönitz added more submarines to the wolf packs stalking the convoys that carried supplies to Britain for the invasion of Europe. By early 1941, they were sinking merchant ships faster than they could be constructed.

By early January 1942, U-boats came within sight of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia; by May, Korvettenkapitän Karl Thurmman took U-553 into the Gulf of St. Lawrence to begin Operation Drumbeat, Germany's strategic offensive against North America's East Coast and the Battle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Between 1942 and 1944, the U-boats

came within 300 kilometres of Québec City, sinking 23 ships.

The German wolf packs were so successful against Allied shipping that Canada, the U.S. and Britain convened the Atlantic Convoy Conference in March 1943. Canada's contribution to neutralizing the U-boat threat grew to the point that Canadian and Newfoundland waters were made a distinct theatre of operations. Pictou's own Rear-Admiral Leonard W. Murray established the Canadian Northwest Atlantic Headquarters in Halifax on April 30, 1943. He was the only Canadian to command an Allied theatre of operations during the Second World War.



Improved equipment, training and mid-ocean air cover from the RCAF's new long-range Liberator bombers turned the tide. In

early 1944, the RCN assumed responsibility for escorting North Atlantic convoys to Britain and sent escorts and destroyers into the English Channel to support the D-Day invasion.

The Battle of the Atlantic is to the RCN what the Battle of Vimy Ridge is to Canada's Army and the Battle of Britain is to the RCAF. Each of our armed services has suffered through its ordeal of fire, and each has learned bitter lessons as a result, recorded through the names written in Canada's Books of Remembrance held in the Peace Tower

on Parliament Hill.

The RCN and the RCAF accepted the challenges presented by the German Navy's undersea threat and, defeating their adversary, turned the tide in favour of the Allies. They brought the material, weapons and equipment that allowed D-Day to happen and for the Wehrmacht (German Army) to be pushed back inside Germany and ultimately defeated. As more Canadian sailors crossed the Atlantic, they showed the value of training and hard experience.

Submarines have been a significant naval asset since the American Revolution, with the "Turtle" trying to sink the British ship HMS Eagle in New York harbour in 1776. The submarine's first significant engagement was the sinking of the Lusitania by Germany's U-20, drawing the United States into the First World War. Their significance, capabilities and lethality have consistently increased since.

The RCN recognized the value of employing and deploying submarines and the necessity of anti-submarine warfare training as a direct result of the loss of 4,234 Canadian sailors, airmen and Merchant Navy personnel between September 1939

and May 1945. Few had any exposure to undersea warfare prior to their fatal encounters during the Battle of the Atlantic.

Our abilities to find and deal with submarines have improved, but so have the capabilities of submarines to evade detection. Elastomeric coatings that muffle internal sound and absorb sonar pings, faster speeds, deeper dives, more lethal weapons and newer tactics make the submarine as potentially dangerous now as it was during the Second World War. The RCN's wartime experiences with U-boats was largely responsible for the development of Canada's post-war world-class skills as anti-submarine warfare specialists.

By operating an effective, albeit small, submarine force, our surface sailors can maintain their hard-learned skills of anti-submarine warfare. Our submariners do double duty: They train our surface fleet and they also maintain our maritime security and sovereignty.

If you see HMCS Sackville as she is being taken to Point Pleasant tomorrow morning, pause and show her the respect that she deserves. She is our Navy's memorial to the 2,000 Canadian sailors who died in the Battle of the Atlantic.