

Protecting Canada's Ocean War Graves



Presentation to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport,
Infrastructure and Communities

By

Project Naval Distinction

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This presentation is inspired by and in support of the
work of

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Outline

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Ocean War Graves

An urgent need for Canadian action



What are Ocean War Graves?

Wrecks of Canadian-registered merchant ships and warships of the Royal Canadian Navy lost through enemy action that contain the remains of personnel (including their apparel and personal effects) associated with those vessels

- They should be considered tombs or gravesites and measures be taken to secure their protection from unauthorized interference
- Estimated up to 1,200 Canadian sailors and mariners resting in Canada's Ocean War Graves
 - 19 wrecks with 480 sailors in Canadian territorial waters alone

Where are Canada's Ocean War Graves?

- Located in:
 - Canadian waters - 9 RCN warships with 263 souls
 - International waters
 - Foreign waters
- In 2013, the Government of France provided legal protection to HMCS *Athabaskan* under France's Heritage Code
- The Government of the United Kingdom is standing by for an official request from the Government of Canada to protect Canada's Ocean War Graves in UK Waters under the UK *Protection of Military Remains Act, 1986*

A clear and present need for urgent action

- In 2016, three Dutch ships from the Second World War, considered gravesites, resting in the Java Sea discovered to have been completely salvaged (UK *Guardian* 16 Nov 2016)
 - Remains of hundreds of sailors dumped into mass graves after illegal salvaging (UK *Guardian* 22 Jan 2018)
 - Three British ships and a US submarine suspected to have been salvaged as well (BBC 16 Nov 2016)
- November 2017 - *National Post* reports blood-soaked canvas hammocks, used by Canadian soldiers in 1915 in RMS *Hesperian*, found off the coast of Ireland, indicating it has recently been disturbed (*National Post* 5 Dec 2017)

Salvagers could be desecrating other Canadian Ocean War Graves right now

Why Protect Canada's Ocean War Graves?

- Other nations currently provide legal protection for their Ocean War Graves (UK, France)
 - Canada is lagging behind internationally
- No cost for legal protection - preservation not required
- Protection exists for War Graves and battlefields in Europe (ex: Dieppe), are Canada's Ocean War Graves being treated differently?

Request for Amendments to Bill C-64

The Transport, Infrastructure and Communities committee:

- Amend Bill C-64 to define and provide protection for all Canadian Ocean War Graves in Canadian waters, under s.163(2) of the *Canada Shipping Act*, and ensure the punishments for those who commit an offence are in line with those of grave robbing.

Request for Action by Committee Members

Individually, as Members of Parliament:

- Request that the Minister of Transport, the Minister Responsible for Parks Canada and the Minister of National Defence provide immediate protection to all of Canada's Ocean War Graves under the currently existing powers under s.163(2) of the *Canada Shipping Act*;
- Request that the Minister of Foreign Affairs ask the Government of the United Kingdom to add Canadian Ocean War Graves to the list of protected places and controlled sites under the UK *Protection of Military Remains Act, 1986*; and
- Given the urgency with which protection for Ocean War Graves is needed, request the Speaker of the House of Commons hold an emergency debate on protection for Canada's Ocean War Graves.

Conclusion

- We will suffer severe, irreparable consequences for delaying protection
- Stories exist of skulls being taken from Ocean War Graves as trophies
- Does Parliament or the Government of Canada want to explain their inaction to the family of a Canadian sailor or merchant mariner after one of their skulls is taken as a trophy?

Project Naval Distinction

Background



About Project Naval Distinction

- An independent, citizen-initiative working to ensure recognition of all branches of the Canadian Armed Forces across Canada.
- Founded in 2015; created and managed by volunteers.
- Focus on assisting the Royal Canadian Navy overcome natural challenges in connecting with Canadians outside of Canada's coastal communities.

Our Objectives

To help achieve recognition of all branches of the Canadian Armed Forces across Canada, we have been calling for three specific actions by the Government of Canada:

1. designate HMCS *Haida* as the ceremonial flagship of the Royal Canadian Navy;
CONFIRMED
2. integrate HMCS *Haida* as a permanent part of the Canadian War Museum, thereby greatly increasing its ability to connect with more Canadians and strengthening its long-term financial sustainability; and
3. task the Royal Canadian Mint to commission a coin, featuring the Battle of Vimy Ridge, air-ace Billy Bishop and HMCS *Haida*, thereby representing all branches of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Support for Project Naval Distinction

“Project Naval Distinction is a wonderful initiative. For Canada, there is no more fitting ship than HMCS Haida – the “fightingest ship” of the Second World War — to be named the flagship of the Royal Canadian Navy. Today – more than seventy years after the fact – the actions of Haida stand as a testament to the spirit and ethos of the Royal Canadian Navy – a spirit and ethos which remain just as important now as they were then.

*As Royal Navy has the *Victory*, and the U.S. Navy has the *Constitution*, Canada150 is the perfect time for Canada to give just and due appreciation to the *Haida*.”*

–The Hon. Ian Holloway P.C., C.D., Q.C. (ex-Chief Petty Officer)

“HMCS Haida was named in honour of the spirit of cooperation that has always existed between Canada’s Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities during times of conflict. Recognizing the Haida as the flagship of the Royal Canadian Navy is a great way to celebrate that spirit.”

–Richard Blackwolf, President, Canadian Aboriginal Veterans and Serving Members Association

Our accomplishments (so far)

- Raised awareness of HMCS *Haida*'s incredible history through print, radio and television interviews.
- Helped generate acknowledgement, by Canada's two largest newspapers, of the passing of John Neil Bruce, the man who saved HMCS *Haida*,.
- Outreach to and support from Members of Parliament, and Canadians from every province.
- Development and submission of two, currency designs for circulation to the Minister of Finance.
- Parliamentary petition supported by Canadians in every province.

Project Naval Distinction



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