

SECOND WORLD WAR NEWFOUNDLAND ESCORT FORCE REMEMBERED IN ST. JOHN'S

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Seventy-seven years after its establishment, the Newfoundland Escort Force (NEF) was honoured in a special ceremony on September 11 at Government House in St. John's. At the same time a unique international project, thirteen years in the making, was culminated. Since May of 2005 members of HMCS *Sackville* in Halifax, the Royal Naval Association (RNA) - Londonderry, Northern Ireland (NI) and the Crow's Nest Club in St. John's have joined forces to connect their wartime port cities with specially crafted ships' bells. Most recent was the founding of the *Newfoundland Escort Force Bell*, the last in the series of three, consecrated last May, at St. Columb's Anglican Cathedral in Londonderry, NI.

The three bells commemorate Allied naval and merchant sailors, DEMS gunners, and air personnel who lost their lives between September, 1939 and May, 1945 during the Battle of the Atlantic while safeguarding convoys carrying much-needed supplies from North America to Britain and Russia.

In his opening remarks of the NEF Bell presentation ceremony to Her Honour The Honourable Judy Foote, Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), emcee LCdr *ret'd* Jim Reddy, HMCS *Sackville's* captain, explained the meaning of a bell in the world of sailors, ships and the sea:

"As much as a ship can approach being a living thing, the bell could be considered to represent its heart and its soul, and even part of its memory. The bell is engraved with the ship's name. In former times the bell served as the timekeeper announcing the change of watches so was heard regularly by everyone onboard. Today, the bell is mandated as a safety sound signal for the ship at anchor.

Recently in our Arctic waters, the tragic wrecks of HMS *Erebus* and *Terror* were discovered and visited by underwater teams after over 200 years of mystery. The most important recovered part of either ship was the bell."

Robert Buchanan, President, RNA - Londonderry Branch added:

"In recognition of the service and sacrifice of the Newfoundland Escort Force during the Battle of the Atlantic, it gives me great pleasure to present this Newfoundland Escort Force Bell to the City of St John's and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

This ceremony will bring the Convoy Bells Project to the conclusion of what could be called 'Phase One'. I say the end of Phase One, because it is my fervent hope that when people see these bells, they will ask "what's it all about" and hopefully, they will seek out answers. In that way we will have put a catalyst in place, which will perpetuate the memory of the sacrifice of our predecessors and remind generations to come of the awful cost of freedom."

LGov Foote graciously accepted the Bell on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and recalled that period of history in her province and the wide effect of the Second World War and the Battle of the Atlantic in her remarks. Her Honour thanked those responsible for making the decision to offer the Bell to Government House in St. John's.

Fourteen Shipmates from the RNA - Londonderry who travelled with the bell to St. John's attended the ceremony along with Cdr Corey Bursey, A/Naval Advisor representing the Canadian High Commission in London, Nick Whalen, Member of Parliament St. John's East, Canadian Naval Memorial Trustees from as far away as Belfast and Red Deer, Alberta, members of the historic Crow's Nest, Cdr Shannon Lewis-Simpson, CO of HMCS *Cabot*, 95 year old Second World War Veteran and Bomber Command pilot Arthur Barrett, from St. John's and local dignitaries.

Cdr Bursey, on behalf of High Commissioner for Canada to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Her Excellency Janice Charette spoke of the sailors of the convoy escort force, numbering in the tens of thousands, holding a special relationship with the ports of Halifax, St. John's and Londonderry.

"The bond between these cities and between our two nations runs much deeper than the Battle of the Atlantic. Ours is a history steeped in common values and culture, sewn together with the blood and treasure of many battles in both world wars, which continue to be consummated in places like Africa, the Middle East, and yes still today, on and in the North Atlantic.

Already in 2018 alone five Royal Canadian Navy ships, as well as Royal Canadian Air Force maritime patrol aircraft, transited the Atlantic to the UK

Area of Operations working bridge wing to bridge wing with Royal Navy ships and submarines and Royal Air Force aircraft, in both operations and exercises, helping to ensure the Atlantic Sea Lines of Communication and Trade remain open and secure.

With this bell you have helped ensure that enduring military bond between our countries is not forgotten, and equally important you have helped ensure the many lives lost at sea during the Battle of the Atlantic are not forgotten."

To cap the NEF ceremony, LCdr *ret'd* Brian McCullough performed a hauntingly beautiful tin whistle lament in honour of the those who went to sea in ships and never returned during the Battle of the Atlantic.

The *Newfoundland Escort Force Bell* is now on display and will remain in Government House for public viewing.

Captions:



The casting of the NEF bell was undertaken by the Royal Naval Association and sponsored by RNA - Londonderry Shipmates and HMCS Sackville Trustees who's names are engraved on its interior



Unveiling the Bell are Robert Buchanan, RNA - Londonderry, Jim Reddy, captain of HMCS Sackville, The Honourable Judy May Foote, Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland and Labrador, and 95 year old Bomber Command pilot Arthur Barrett.



K-116, May 1941/Library and Archives of Canada - PA1135351. On 23 June 1941, HMCS Chambly defended convoy HX 133 during the first engagement of the Newfoundland Escort Force.