

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Thursday, November 9, 2006**

**Committee Room 1**

**Canadian Merchant Marine Navy Veterans Association**

**Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services**

**VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

Stephen McNeil (Chair)  
Keith Bain  
Patrick Dunn  
Chuck Porter  
Gordon Gosse  
David Wilson (Sackville-Cobequid)  
Percy Paris  
Harold Theriault  
Wayne Gaudet

[Harold Theriault was replaced by Leo Glavine.]

In Attendance:

Darlene Henry  
Legislative Committee Clerk

**WITNESSES**

Canadian Merchant Marine Navy Veterans Association

Captain Earle Wagner (Ret.)  
Chair

Captain Donald MacAlpine (Ret.)

Max Zwicker



**HALIFAX, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2006**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**9:00 A.M.**

**CHAIR**

**Stephen McNeil**

THE CHAIR: If I could just call this meeting to order.

Good morning, gentlemen. My name is Stephen McNeil, and I'm the chairman of this committee. I'll ask the members to please introduce themselves

[The members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming in. We have in front of us today the Canadian Merchant Marine Navy Veterans Association. We have Retired Captain Earle Wagner, Chairman; Retired Captain Donald MacAlpine, and Mr. Max Zwicker. If you would introduce the rest of the group, we'd much appreciate it.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Thank you all for coming. We'll turn the floor over to you to begin the meeting.

EARLE WAGNER: Good morning, Mr. Chairman, committee members, can you hear me? I have a strong voice, because I'm hard of hearing. So when you speak, just speak a little bit louder and I'll hear you - I left my hearing aids at home.

Good morning, committee members and fellow veterans, ladies and gentlemen, and I hope the media is here, too. Mr. Chairman, thank you for the invitation to speak to your committee about medals and the merchant navy issue. Our committee is Captain Donald MacAlpine, here on my right, and Max Zwicker on my left, and yours truly, who'll act as chairman. We represent the Canadian Merchant Marine Navy Veterans Association of Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island, and the Master Mariners of Canada, Maritime

Division. We believe we speak for the majority of merchant navy veterans and merchant seaman in Nova Scotia, as well as Canada.

The selection of material and preparation of a document to fully describe the topic in the allotted time and to meet your requirements is practically impossible, but we will try. My choice is to present some of my personal experiences, together with historical facts about the merchant navy, which generally describe the conditions and hazards experienced by most teenage boys who served on Canadian and Allied merchant ships during the Battle of the Atlantic.

In 1939, Canada had 37 ocean-going merchant ships, manned by 1,450 Canadian seaman. By 1945, it was the fourth-largest merchant navy in the world and employed approximately 12,000 officers and crew. The significance of this remarkable effort was Canada's exceptional shipbuilding program. Approximately 120,000 Canadians were employed in shipyards, and they built a total of 4,043 craft of all types, including the Royal Canadian naval vessels - and the highlight of the program was the building of the Canadian "Park" ships. These cargo vessels included 354 of the 10,000-tonners, 43 of the 4,700-tonners, and six of the 3,600-tonners for the Allied merchant navies, but most for Canada and most were manned by Canadians.

Twenty of the 4,700-tonners were built in Pictou, Nova Scotia, in 24 months - one every month. Remember, there were 43 built in Canada, and 24 were built in Pictou.

The Allied Merchant Navy consisted of many types of ships. There were tankers, troop ships, freighters, colliers, and small coastal vessels. They ferried troops across the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans, and carried all essential war supplies: ammunition, guns, tanks, airplanes, food, oil, and supplies for overseas troops and the civilian population in Great Britain. Our government recognized the merchant navy as the fourth arm of the service after the Army, the Navy and the Air Force. It was the transportation service.

On September 3, 1939, when war was declared, Canada suffered its first casualty. The ocean liner, Athenia, was torpedoed, and Hannah Baird, a waitress from Montreal, lost her life. It was not a sailor or an airman or a soldier, but it was a lady seafarer. How many Canadians know about this?

When World War II began in 1939, I was a 15-year-old kid. It was the end of my schooling, however, learning continued. Like most boys of my age in war time, I wanted a job or to join the Armed Forces. At age 16, I applied for a seaman's position in the Canadian Navy. Unfortunately, they didn't need me. So, a few months later at age 17, I joined the merchant navy. My first job was ordinary seaman aboard the oil tanker called the Reginolite; I was paid \$45 a month. The ship was 469 feet long, 9,069 gross tonnage. It operated between North America and South America carrying oil for Canada and the Armed Forces. We had about 42 officers and crew and it was fitted with a four inch deck gun for defence against attacking submarines, and anti-aircraft guns for shooting down enemy aircraft.

For a young teenager leaving home, life was quite different. We left family and friends. There were few sports or recreation, except working and reading, maybe resting in between work, or studying. Seamen were expected to do manual labour, keep the ship clean and well painted, even in war time. Dangerous jobs like going aloft to paint the mast or funnel or hull was routine. One slip, and you could fall 100 feet to the deck or into the ocean. Seamen kept regular sea watches of 4 hours on duty and 8 hours off duty, steering the ship, keeping a look out in all kinds of weather. We reported such things as aircraft, floating mines, submarines, surface raiders, torpedo attacks, or any dangers to navigation.

I was a member of the four inch guns crew used to defend our ship from submarine or surface raider attacks, and that's why I have a hearing problem today. I was an 18-year-old boy at that time.

We learned our many jobs and duties by working alongside experienced seamen until we were trained to do it alone. This was on-the-job training rather than being taught by a teacher or an instructor.

Life at sea in wartime was dangerous. Merchant ships were prime targets for enemy torpedoes, bombs, mines or gunfire. To avoid detection, ships were painted dark grey and, at night, no lights were shown. Ships were massed together in convoys of only a few ships up to 100 or more. They steamed in columns of approximately one-half mile apart, spread over areas up to as much as 100 square miles, and always escorted by naval ships.

Weather conditions in the North Atlantic created storms and gales, fog, ice, freezing rain or spray, snow and an occasional hurricane. Vessel collisions were common due to poor weather, equipment failure, or human error while steaming in convoy in close proximity to other ships. To make matters worse, vessels rolled and pitched and tossed about during bad weather. Seamen were often wet, cold, seasick, scared at times, and lonely. At any time, the enemy may attack, sinking vessels and casting the crew into lifeboats or life rafts, either to perish, or, if lucky, picked up. This resulted in the highest casualty rate of any of the Armed Services in World War II - and I repeat that - this resulted in the highest casualty rate of any of the Armed Services in World War II.

As young teenagers, we felt we were too young to die - it would be someone else who may lose their life - but there was that continuing, lingering, gnawing feeling which at times made us feel very uncomfortable and, at times, scared. Enemy submarines were our greatest fear. In 1942, steaming during daylight for one day I saw 14 Allied vessels sunk, lying on the ocean floor. Only parts of the ship were above water, the funnel or the mast or the bow or parts of the superstructure. This occurred along the Atlantic American coast in sight of the land. I will never forget this devastation and tragedy of lost ships and seamen by submarine warfare.

Canada awarded medals to veterans of the army, navy, air force and merchant navy who served in a geographical area of war during World War II - most locations were the Atlantic, the Pacific, Canada, Newfoundland, England, Continental Europe, the Mediterranean, Southeast Asia, North Africa, et cetera. Other service medals awarded were

the Battle of Dieppe, the 1939-45 War Medal, the Volunteer Service Medal, et cetera. Also awarded to Canadians for bravery in action or outstanding performance by the British Ministry of Defence were: Victoria Cross, Georges Medal, Order of the British Empire, Member of the British Empire, Distinguished Flying Cross, Distinguished Service Order, Distinguished Service Medal, Military Medal, and others.

[9:15 a.m.]

The Canadian Ministry of Transport issued all seamen a small merchant navy lapel pin in World War II. It was the only type of wartime identification worn by Canadian seamen who did not wear a uniform - they had just a little pin to distinguish them from civilians.

Just for the facts of history, too, I put this in here - I thought it was important because maybe you don't know this and this will recognize and remember a Canadian mariner who commanded a British ship in World War I. He was Captain Daniel M. Taggart, Distinguished Service Cross, from Parrsboro, Nova Scotia, who was decorated on February 16, 1918, with the Distinguished Service Cross by His Majesty the King of England for sinking an enemy submarine. He was the first Canadian sea captain to be decorated with any order - one of the first. He is buried in Truro, Nova Scotia. How many Canadians know about this Canadian hero?

Other wartime Allied countries like Great Britain and the United States of America have honoured their merchant navy personnel with special medals which identified their specific service, but our applications to our government for a distinctive merchant navy medal have been refused. We fully support a similar medal as a mercantile marine war medal awarded by Great Britain between August, 1914, and November, 1918 - copy attached. You'll all get a copy. You have a copy of this little speech of mine and I'll put a copy of this medal attached to it, just black and white.

As a merchant mariner in World War II, I felt very proud to serve my country. I was only 19 years old when I became a ship's officer. My wartime experience gave me the opportunity to follow a seafaring career and after the war I received my mate's and captain's certificates and served as captain on a 570-foot tanker of 18,000 tons and I commanded several ships in the Western Arctic. I served as a ship's pilot, a port warden, navigation instructor, and I managed a fleet of government ships. I was employed for 48 years in association with the marine industry.

During World War II, approximately 50 million lives were lost. In World War I and World War II, some 2,200 Canadian merchant seamen on 127 Canadian and Newfoundland vessels were lost by enemy action. I lost relatives and friends - some are buried in Europe, others in unknown graves at sea.

People of all countries must realize the folly of war. They must learn to live peacefully with one another to avoid future wars or holocausts.

In simple terms, war is hell. After one-half of a century, my country declared us as merchant navy veterans. We really were the forgotten veterans of the unknown navy. Thank you for your attention.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

EARLE WAGNER: Could I ask Don to give a little add-on here?

THE CHAIR: Sure, I would just like to recognize my colleague who has come in, Percy Paris. I'll tell members that I'm starting a speaking order, as you were starting, and I would ask that your comrade who came in behind you to introduce himself, as well.

ROY MERRILL: I am Roy Merrill.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for coming.

CAPT. DONALD MACALPINE (Ret.): Good morning, Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Don MacAlpine. First of all, I must say that I am not a veteran. When the war ended in 1945, I was 11 years old. So I didn't go to sea until the early 1950s. However, my dad was at sea during the war, and I sailed with many veterans in those first years.

What I have done is drawn up a few remarks with respect to Canada's Merchant Navy from 1945 to the present, because on the letter we have here, there was also to be discussed, concerns and issues of the current Merchant Navy. So this would be a continuation on what Earle has said that we're dealing with here with what happened after 1945.

Following World War II, Canada's deep-sea fleet of over 400 merchant ships were sold by the Maritime Commission to Canadian shipping companies, many of which were shell companies, representing foreign beneficial owners. During this period, shipping was in demand. Operations were profitable with high freight rates, while European owners were rebuilding their fleets following the losses during the war.

By 1950, these conditions were changing fast. Rates were down. There were labour troubles with the seamen's unions. New foreign ships of faster and more efficient design were coming into the market, and Canadian deep-sea shipping was becoming non-competitive. Owners were transferring their ships to the British flag, which was quite easy in those days, because a Canadian ship was a British ship, all you did was change the flag, and manning them with crews from the U.K., which were cheaper, or they were selling their ships outright and getting out of the shipping business.

Our merchant seamen, who had been at sea during the war, or not eligible for veterans' benefits in 1945, were now forced to seek other employment. Any consideration of a medal of honour for these merchant navy veterans must be done now, as their numbers are fewer and fewer with the passage of time.

Some companies did survive a little longer, getting a boost from the demands of the Korean conflict, or being the shipping arm of a company that was carrying its own product, or being operated by a Crown corporation. However, by 1960, all had disappeared, and names such as Canadian National Steamships, CNS; Dominion Shipping, OSCO; Markland Shipping Company or Mersey Paper; Dingwall Shipping of National Gypsum; and Saguenay Shipping, had gone out of business or ceased operating ships under the Canadian flag. Only one company, FEDNA, or as it was known in those days, Federal Commerce of Montreal, still survives to the present day, operating its large fleet of ships internationally under foreign flags, except those few in the domestic trade, where the national flag is a requirement. The rest have faded into Canadian shipping history.

Will Canada ever have another merchant navy under the national flag consisting of ships in global international trade crewed by Canadians? In my opinion, this will never happen again as it came about twice in the last century due to the circumstances of a war in Europe. International seafaring has evolved since then to become a Third World occupation. Ships are built, registered, and managed in whatever country most advantageous to the shipowner.

For the last 45 years, Canada's merchant fleet, under the national flag, has consisted of the domestic fleet operating on the Great Lakes, the St. Lawrence Seaway, Arctic, and East and West Coasts, with continual changes to adapt to the economics of any opportunity. Today, on the East Coast, with the discovery of oil and gas, we have Canadian ships to service the drilling rigs, and three new tankers to carry the crude oil from the fields on the Grand Banks to refineries in Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Eastern Seaboard. A new ice class ore/bulk/oil or OBO ship has just gone into service transporting nickel concentrate from the Voisey Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador, to Quebec. These are the bright spots on the East Coast shipping scene, providing much-needed employment - those ships, by the way, were not built in Canada, but they are under the Canadian flag.

The large, self-unloading bulk carrier was developed in Canada initially for the Great Lakes and coastal trades, and later for ocean trading, under foreign flags but Canadian-owned. These self-unloaders are the predominant ships in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence trades. Up until about 20 years ago, all the major oil companies owned their own tonnage and employed crews to operate their tankers in the Great Lakes and the coastal trades. Over the years, however, all the company ships were sold to operating companies and chartered back by the oil company under long-term contracts. Imperial Oil, a tanker owner since 1917, was the last to go in 1997, and now charters all its oil-shipping requirements.

Domestic shipping on the West Coast consists mainly of tugs and barges for the transport of forest products. Arctic resupply from both the East and West Coasts and down the MacKenzie River is carried out during the summer months, and there are still large ferry operations on both coasts.

What are the concerns and issues today? The main issue is the lack of federal policy with respect to incentives for the renewal of the domestic fleet. The ships are getting old



and there should be a gradual replacement program to allow Canadian shipyards to maintain a workforce, instead of teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. According to a recent edition of *Canadian Sailings*, the demand for ships over the next 15 years is estimated, in dollar terms, at \$5.8 billion for renewal and conversion of government fleets, and \$2.8 billion for renewal and conversion of commercial fleets. The time to start is now.

Another issue today is the training and certification of seafarers to continue to operate our fleet, as well as supplying qualified people to enter into other marine professions such as surveying, marine management, and pilotage. With reduced crews and short turnaround times, sailing is not as attractive as it once was, regardless of more leave days and better pay. The goal of most young people entering the profession today, particularly the graduates of the nautical colleges, is to obtain their sea time and certificates of competency as quickly as possible and then get into something marine-related ashore. We really can't blame them. Are enough people attracted to seafaring to supply the future demand, afloat and ashore? Only time will tell. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I want to recognize my colleague, the member for Victoria-The Lakes, who came in, and to welcome him, Mr. Keith Bain.

We'll start off with questioning from the MLA for Clare, Mr. Gaudet.

WAYNE GAUDET: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, gentlemen, for coming in this morning.

I want to begin by asking why hasn't there been any formal recognition by our federal government - has your association ever contacted our federal government with a formal request? If so, what has the answer been? Maybe we could start off with those few questions and then we'll move on.

EARLE WAGNER: A formal request for . . .

WAYNE GAUDET: Formal recognition by the federal government.

EARLE WAGNER: Oh, recognition. Well, this is a long story and I don't want to go into that because I presented a paper in 1998 here on that whole thing. I didn't want to cover that, it is in your file.

WAYNE GAUDET: Okay.

EARLE WAGNER: Actually what really happened after the war was over and so on, as Donald MacAlpine just said here now, all these ships were tied up and there was no place for these men - they were untrained actually and even to get retraining they couldn't get that because we were all classified as civilians. That was a big thing. The big stumbling block was that the federal Government of Canada identified us officially as only civilians, even though we were alongside of what they call a DEMS gunner. As I told you, I was inside of a 4-inch gun and lost my hearing, and the guy on the opposite side - the two of us

manned a gun, and I was a trainer this way, he was a layer this way - he was naval personnel, he was entitled to everything as a veteran after the war, unfortunately we weren't.

After the years progressed, after the war was over, a lot of these people, of the approximately 12,000, it was more like 18,000, applied for it when the compensation came though. They start passing out little bits and pieces to us, and strong representation through the Legion, et cetera, and some of these fellows by the time they got up to 60 years of age, they got what they called the burned-out pension - you have probably heard about that - so they gave us bits and pieces, but it was not until the early 1990s that we had a meeting with the minister. As a matter of fact, I was one of them on the committee of five. We met with the minister, Mr. Merrithew at that time, from Saint John, New Brunswick. He has since passed on.

[9:30 a.m.]

He was very receptive to our ideas, but they still had it in the back of their minds that what they gave us - in 1992 this was - and they called us Merchant Navy veterans only, remember, not full veterans as the Army, Navy and Air Force, which we were after. So therefore, we still didn't have the full entitlement, which we didn't get until the hunger strike in the late 1900s in Ottawa. That was the catalyst that made the government move because it affected the voting pattern.

The media picked it up, as you are probably well aware of, and it went through. There was over \$100 million appropriated and a lot of us veterans, by the year 2000, we had full recognition as Merchant Navy veterans and we also got compensation. The maximum you could get was \$20,000, if you had X number of years' service - I happened to be one of them, I was about four years in the service during the war. If you were a prisoner of war, you got an extra \$4,000 on top of that, which was a maximum of \$24,000. There were only 200 prisoners of war. So that is what we got.

As I said when I closed my little story off that I told you this morning, we were the forgotten veterans of the forgotten navy. It was just like you, with the name Gaudet, you know - I am just picking this out - you are in a minority. Where are the votes? Well, here it was, 1.2 million served in the military during the war, and of those there were only 12,000 Canadians in the Merchant Navy. We had no voice, or very little. We didn't impress anybody.

I started writing about this, in 1966, to the federal Government of Canada. Do you know why? I was captain on a ship and so on and I had to turn it over to an Italian crew. I was only in my early 30s yet, and I came ashore to look for a job and I couldn't get one. The Canadian Government wouldn't even allow me to sit for an examination. Why? Because I was a civilian. You talk about civil service jobs, here I served my country for over four years during the war, I had my master's foreign-going certificate, I had command experience and they wouldn't allow me to sit for an examination.

At the same time, they were bringing immigrants into the country, putting them on the coast guard ships as junior officers. Immediately, they were eligible to compete for a job in Ottawa, and some of them enlisting in their late 20s - bright young boys. They were in jobs in Ottawa.

How do you think I felt about that? If there was anything that motivated me and infuriated me was, here with my experience I was being completely ignored by my own government. I am just saying that is my own, personal experience. You will probably see down through the annals of history that I was one of the strongest lobbyists to get the recognition of compensation because it affected me personally. You know what? It hurt. Does that answer your question?

WAYNE GAUDET: Partly. Looking again, following your comments, you indicated the federal government provided you with full recognition in 2000, right?

EARLE WAGNER: Yes.

WAYNE GAUDET: Why has the federal government never recognized the Merchant Navy veterans with a medal?

EARLE WAGNER: As I said in my little letter - you will get a copy - because if you were a veteran of any of the Forces - Army, Navy, Air Force, or Merchant Navy - they did that. Even in 1946, if we served in one of those, considered battle areas or zones - it was based geographically. If you served in that zone, in wartime, we had to be serving in - the Battle of the Atlantic, we had to be there for six months. I was in the Pacific too, but you had to serve six months. That's what these medals are here, what I'm wearing here now.

They didn't strike a medal specifically for Army, Navy, Air Force, or Merchant Navy. They struck the medals for geographical locations where the war zones were established. The Battle of the Atlantic, there were a lot of people lost, as you know, and it was the longest battle of the war. Remember I talked about Hannah Baird, the first one, that was September 3, 1939. The last battle, on the Battle of the Atlantic, was the Avondale Park, a Canadian-built park ship was torpedoed on the last day of the war, that was, I guess, May 7, 1945. Does that help you?

WAYNE GAUDET: I'll finish off with one last question, Mr. Chairman. I had a chance to speak with a Merchant Navy veteran from home, so my question is, the membership from your association, has there ever been a request by other members asking the association to pursue a request to the federal government for recognition, a service medal of some type?

EARLE WAGNER: Officially, I can't go back and pinpoint it right down to say it is, but we have - it's accepted knowledge about those, we were told that we couldn't get it. Our attempts to do this, we brought it up in meetings verbally, but to say it was a special document went in by our special group, I don't know if we can pin it down. We've only

existed, we only had an association starting around 1990. Before that, there was very little representation.

WAYNE GAUDET: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: The member for Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank.

PERCY PARIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to start off by offering my apologies for being a wee bit late. I don't know how much I missed, so this maybe somewhat redundant, you might have already covered this during your presentation, but I'm going to ask it anyway so that at least I can be clear. I'm hearing the words around full recognition and I'm not clear exactly what that does mean. That leads up to a secondary question. I certainly remember the hunger strike well, it was well documented through the media. You talked about compensation, and you mentioned monetary compensation. My second question would be, do the merchant mariners now receive any sort of recognition? I almost hate to use the word recognition, but are they in receipt of the same benefits through DVA that other veterans get?

EARLE WAGNER: To answer that last question first, yes, we do. We're now on an equal basis, from 2000, when we got full recognition and full compensation, we are treated exactly the same. Remember some of the strongest advocates against this was the other forces. The Royal Canadian Legion took them until the early 1990s before they wanted to officially accept us as part and parcel of their group.

So, when I say recognition, the simple fact is, what we were after was primarily the recognition that we were actually war veterans, not Merchant Navy veterans. You're going to be a civil service veteran someday, aren't you, or an MLA veteran? We wanted to be established, we felt we contributed to our country, we put our life on the line, as I said in my notes here, actually, the highest rate of losses was in the Merchant Navy, compared to any of the other three - Army, Navy, Air Force - and that was what we were after so we had equality.

So the recognition part of it, we simply wanted to be called - come on to that particular Act of Parliament, which said that we were veterans under the Veterans Act. Not put a special little paragraph, subclause, subclause, way down, and say that the Merchant Navy are not wholly veterans because he got a bullet through his heart. Do you know what I told them? When I'm in front of the minister, Mr. Merrithew, actually, I wrote a little thing out quickly, and I said to Mr. Merrithew, I thanked him very much for bringing this up in front of him, actually, and querying us, and I said you're the first minister in Canada, I think, who ever did this, and for that I thank you very, very much from the bottom of my heart.

Now I said, Mr. Minister, I have a little missile here to tell you about. I want to bring this down to the fundamentals, Mr. Minister, if an aircraft is shot down and an airman is killed, he's dead, isn't he? Yes. Okay, if a soldier in the trench is hit with a bullet and so

on, he's killed, he's dead, isn't he? Yes. Also with a seaman, he's dead, isn't he, if he's killed as a seaman? The same as the merchant seaman.

Mr. Minister, I want you to start off with the premise that we're all individuals and we're all dead people. Will you start from that level? Well, the minister's hacks and everything started to push away from the table, to think that I was so frank to talk to the minister like that. But you know, that's the kind of talk that shook them. Some years afterward, he told me these are the kinds of things - this is why the lobbying and the crucial thing was the hunger strike that brought it all out, and that's why we got full recognition and compensation. Does that answer your question?

PERCY PARIS: Yes, it does. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Are there any further questions from members?

Mr. Porter.

CHUCK PORTER: Maybe more a comment than anything else. First of all, thank you for coming today. To me, it's a big issue for you and I understand that. I can probably say there's nobody more pleased than I, that you've attained that full recognition and that you're being rewarded for that. In 1944, my grandfather died on the beaches, but to me it made no difference whether it was Army or Navy. I don't think, speaking as a family member, that a medal is what stands out when people see you today on the street. I don't think - and not to take anything away, I think that a medal recognizing is an important thing to you, but I just want to explain to you that that medal on your jacket, although very significant, is not totally, I don't think, 100 per cent - I don't know what the word I'm looking for is - respect. I'm not sure what that word is that goes with it.

I just want you to know that as a family member of someone who was lost overseas during that war, the medal doesn't mean a lot to me. It's the fact that you went, you served our country, and we're free to sit here today in a democratic society like this. I guess maybe that was more of a comment than a question.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Porter.

The member for Digby-Annapolis. Mr. Theriault.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Captain Wagner, you spoke about the federal government divesting itself of all the ships they built over the years.

EARLE WAGNER: Don MacAlpine mentioned that in his part.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Anyway, we're still seeing that today in this country. They're divesting of everything that they can get their hands away from, it seems like - including our wharves around that ships come into. You mentioned that you tried entry into the Navy at age 16 or 17.

EARLE WAGNER: Sixteen.

HAROLD THERIAULT: They turned you down, yet the Merchant Marines took you on. Can you explain why?

EARLE WAGNER: Well, there wasn't such a strict examination most of the time in the Merchant Navy. We had people, and some of them are here today, I'll let them speak afterwards if they want to speak, who were only 13 or 15 years of age who went in the merchant navy. They were strong strapping lads, they had a lot of vim and vigor, and they wanted to serve their country and so on, talked his way into a job on the ship and the shipping master signed him on, maybe as a mess boy or ordinary seaman, or what have you. We had grandfathers too, at age 70, who went in the Merchant Navy.

When I speak to the school kids in the schools - I explained to them yesterday, a group who I was talking to the last couple of days, I speak to quite a few groups of people - I explain to them about what the Merchant Navy was all about. So, actually, we took some of the discards, because they didn't have the stringent regulations through age, and the physical aspect too, actually. Nobody ever checked for the mental part, as long as they could answer questions, so if you met that criteria. In the military, as you know, if you're flat-footed, you couldn't march, so you're out. In the Merchant Navy, you could get in. I'm just saying that's one instance.

So the stringent regulations and so on funneled out a lot of these people from the service of the Army, Navy and Air Force, and they went in the second best, they wanted to serve their country, and they went in the Merchant Navy.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Okay, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Gosse.

GORDON GOSSE: First of all, I would like to say thank you for your presentation. Growing up in the area I grew up, Whitney Pier, I heard many a story of many a convoy leaving Sydney and heading over on the Mermansk run back in those days. I've heard from many a veteran in my neighborhood of Martin MacKinnon, who is a member in Legion Branch 126 and a strong vocal supporter of the Merchant Navy. I'm just wondering, the only medal that you received now from the federal government is the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal?

EARLE WAGNER: We got that about 10 years ago. We're all volunteers in the merchant navy, as I think I mentioned here speaking, actually. Yes, I have one of them on. The fourth one here, that's one of the last one's we got. We did get that, like I said, approximately 10 years ago. The rest of the medals, as I say, are primarily geographical medals - and so on are the 39 to 45, that was a medal, that was the 39 to 45 war. I'll give the chairman a whole list afterwards, and I'll give you all copies of this, too. I will give you a list that I got from Veterans Affairs Canada of all the awards that have been passed out from the Canadian Government. As you know, it's changed quite a bit in recent years

because of Canada versus Great Britain and so on. That's a touchy item, as you're quite aware.

[9:45 a.m.]

GORDON GOSSE: Yes, and over the years, I've actually fought many a different battle in looking for compensation for some of the Merchant Navy fellows who were actually born in Britain or New Guinea, or somewhere like that, and then served and moved to Cape Breton and lived there, brought their family up. When it came time to get their benefits or other stuff, they were denied because they weren't a Canadian citizen. I know the geographical area, because I've seen many a list of many a boat where they served, and they had to pick a certain spot; if you were in this theatre for that many months, or you were in Newfoundland and Labrador for this many months, and the Pacific, or all those different things.

So any ideas? The committee is looking somewhat in the sense of the name of the medal. Would it be like a medal that you served in the Merchant Navy from 1939 to - it's the longest-serving battle in the Atlantic, that is well known, and the casualty rate, I'm just wondering, are there any suggestions or anything on the name of the medal or anything like that? Has there ever been a submission from the Merchant Navy to the federal government for a name of a medal or anything like that?

EARLE WAGNER: Like I said to Mr. Gaudet, I couldn't say, specifically, any date and time, but I know we've made this through our MLA, I think a lot of it maybe was verbally. I don't remember seeing a document. I know we were turned down to the point that we just figured they refused. On the back of your sheet that you'll get is what is called a VAC Canada Remembers and this is a called a Mercantile Marine War Medal. That was issued by the British Government, Great Britain, actually, in World War I, if you were in a theatre of war, and that was issued. I understand there was 600 Canadians. I knew some Canadians got this in World War I.

So this is a medal - on my paper here - I've recommended to you, as a committee. This would be probably the logical one to make a representation for this group, actually, for the Merchant Navy veterans. Once they open the flood gates, then the Army, Navy, Air Force are going to say, well, where is our medal? This is what's going to take place. We're spending our time here and we would like you, if you could, to put that forward. We don't mind wearing another medal. At least it would show that we were in the Merchant Navy. All the rest of them primarily let us know that we volunteered and were in a war zone. So that is why we put in my document, particularly, asking you people on our behalf to make representations to Veterans Affairs Canada, through the appropriate channels to do just that.

GORDON GOSSE: I think that's a very good cause, and well-deserving and long overdue for us, as a committee, to do on your behalf. I feel that we will all decide if we want to make a motion some time before the meeting ends and support your cause, absolutely.

THE CHAIR: I recognize Mr. Paris.

PERCY PARIS: Is there anyone in Ottawa who has been working with you? I don't mean to necessarily reside in Ottawa, but is there a Member of Parliament who has been an ally and has been of valuable assistance to you who maybe we should know about?

EARLE WAGNER: Well, as you know, it is quite a political "musical chairs" type of place over the last few years and the strong advocates we did have working for us - let's put it like this, the guy who did the most for us is Mr. Baker from Newfoundland and Labrador when he took over the portfolio of Veterans Affairs. Do you remember him? It was primarily through him, when he came in as Minister of Veterans Affairs - this was when he was an MP and now he is elevated to the Senate - that was his first, his primary motivation, his priority was to do something for the Merchant Navy, and he did, because he had a lot of good connections within the political circles. As you know, he is a great orator, with every convincing argument - and he got Elsie Wayne and so on, different people, they all worked together.

The strongest advocate we had, and he is gone, was the late Senator Marshall. He did more for all the Armed Forces veterans than all the other politicians combined. He was a senator then and he chaired the Senate Committee on National Defence. Who's to say right now up there - as I say, with so many new faces, I don't know who you have to touch, really. I would say, if you can get through to somebody, get through to - he is probably a friend of yours, I don't know, I don't know what side of politics you people are on here, I would just as well not, but anyway I am sure there are NDPers here and maybe you are one of them, it just dawned on me - Peter Stoffer, get through to Peter Stoffer. Does that answer your question?

PERCY PARIS: Yes, it does.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I want to provide an opportunity for the other members who came with you, if they have anything they want to add - I raised the mic, I guess I thought everybody was six foot five when I set it up, but I do want to provide any of the guests who came an opportunity if they want to be on the record - you need to go up to the mic.

MAX ZWICKER: I'd like to make a point. When I joined the merchant navy, I was just under 15 years of age in 1940. I tried to go into the navy - I said I was 16, and they said you haven't even shaved yet, so that was a giveaway right there. I had a friend who went into the navy just before the war and he was lost on the Margaree - I was quite impressed with his uniform and that's why I wanted to go in the navy. Anyway, I didn't get in, but being in foster care for almost fourteen and a half years, I ran away from a farm and they came after me and said I'd have to go back on the farm. I said no, I'm not going back on any farm again. They asked, what are you going to do? I said, there is a ship out there in the harbour and I want to go on that ship - and that was the Mersey Paper Company, the Markland Shipping Company.



Anyway, they said they would have to see about that. So, just by luck, there was somebody in the Mersey Paper Company who was on the board of the Children's Aid Society down there and they went to the captain of the ship and asked, can you hire a young kid? He said yes, so I got on and that was my first trip, from Liverpool, Nova Scotia, to Australia and New Zealand. I spent a year and a half on that run in the first part of the war. To some people it wasn't a war zone but to us it was a war zone because of the Pacific West German surface raiders - they sunk a lot of ships out around Australia and New Zealand.

Anyway, I followed the sea up until 1952 and then I said there was nothing more there for me and, with the education I had, I'm going to have to try something else. I saw this ad or someone told me they were looking for people in the Armed Forces. I went to Fredericton - I was living with a sister for a little while up in New Brunswick, so I went to Fredericton and they said, yes, what about going to PPCLI? I said, no thanks, I've done enough travelling around by foot, I'm not going to go there. They said, okay, go in the engineers. So I managed to get in the engineers and I spent 26 years in the engineers, ten years with NATO on three different occasions, and one year as a peacekeeper in Gaza - that's why I have a few more decorations than the rest of them.

During the war, the first ship I was on, I left it in December in 1941 and my twin brother stayed on that ship and on April 21, 1942, that ship was torpedoed. I was on the Imperial Oil tanker, Vancolite, at the time, running to South America and I had heard about the ship being sunk, so when the Vancolite came back to Halifax in April, I got off and I said I'll wait until he arrives back in Halifax. The survivors came back - there was only one seaman lost - I spent a bit of time with him and I wasn't quite sure what he was going to do, so I was going back to sea again. I went on a Norwegian ship, and I spent the last three years with the Norwegian Merchant Navy.

I do get a pension from the Armed Forces, but that's not a wartime pension, that's a pension I bought and paid for. I've asked many different questions and there have only been a few politicians in the House in Ottawa - one time it was an NDP, another time it was a Liberal, and another time it was a Conservative - who were speaking up for the Merchant Navy. One person would speak up and the rest of the members were there as if they had their fingers in their ears. They weren't listening to what the merchant seamen should have had. Not one of them, they're all guilty.

That was the time they should have been looking at it. Then, of course, take the Armed Forces - no disrespect to our uniform, but I still have these questions today to some fellows who were in the service, in uniform during the war. They talk about this, that and the other thing and I ask: How did you get your chocolate bars? How did you get your ammunition? How did you get your ass over there to fight anyway? Who took the fuel for the airplanes? The Norwegian tanker I was on was supplying the Navy at sea with fuel and we had 300 depth charges on deck for resupplying the Navy when they ran out of depth charges, and they put a skeleton deck on and they carried the fuselages of 20 airplanes - and you tell me our service wasn't valuable?

And all these politicians, it doesn't matter who your are, there are only a few - one guy was an Air Force veteran, Les Benjamin, he was an NDP guy, and he talked about it a lot, but nobody could. Then there was a Liberal guy, he's not in there anymore - his father was in the Merchant Navy during the war, but he never spoke up once for the Merchant Navy. Not once.

[10:00 a.m.]

Don't we have to have some respect here somewhere? I come from a family that was - well, I won't go back too far on that, but my twin brother joined the ship six months after I did in 1940. I had two brothers who were in the West Nova Scotia Regiment and one fellow, when he got his NCO course in England in 1942, he went on loan to the British Army and he went to North Africa with the Desert Rats, and my other brother came down from England when they started the invasion of Sicily and they both met on the beachhead. They were both wounded in Italy. I had one sister in the Army for five years. That's five out of one family who were all under foster care.

The Merchant Navy, even my brother said I wouldn't have gone on one of those ships, I was scared going overseas on a troop ship. He said, sail on one of them carrying ammunition? No way. So, it wasn't an easy time. I was just fortunate enough that I kind of kept - I asked different times about a VLA, many, many years ago. When I wanted to buy a house, my brothers, because they were in the Army, got VLA for land, for education and stuff. I asked for that, and I never got any answers from them. Even today, when you go to some of the Veterans Affairs places and you want to ask for something, one of the things they ask is were you in the Army, were you in the Navy, were you in the Air Force? No, I was in the Merchant Navy. Sorry. That's as far as it goes. We have to change that.

THE CHAIR: I think I speak for this committee when I say to you that we are grateful for our freedom, we don't distinguish between what wing of the Forces you served in. We, as a committee, recognize that we're having the right to be here today because of your contribution to the battle that allowed us to be here. There are very few words I think anybody on this committee could say to articulate the point of view better than you just did. What can you say? I have a son who will turn 15 a week from tomorrow, and you're telling me you entered in the battle at 15.

MAX ZWICKER: I nearly had five years before I was 20 years old.

THE CHAIR: He turns 15 a week from tomorrow, and I shudder to think that you at his age were faced with the horrors that you would have been faced with. I think your coming out today and making a presentation to this committee is how we will continue to press for your full recognition. I think the committee, as was mentioned by Mr. Gosse, will make that recommendation to the federal government to recognize you with a medal. I want to open that up to the committee to see if the committee is in agreement with that. I don't know whether you want to have a motion, or whether we . . .

WAYNE GAUDET: Mr. Chairman, I would like to move that our Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs here in Nova Scotia send a formal request to our federal Minister of Veterans Affairs asking our federal government to formally recognize our Canadian Merchant Marine Navy veterans with a service medal.

THE CHAIR: Do we have a seconder?

HAROLD THERIAULT: I'll second that.

CHUCK PORTER: Can we c.c. that letter to Senator Baker, would that be appropriate, as he has had some past experience with this. To follow that up, to let him know our support for Nova Scotia has landed in Ottawa, and whatever he can do to assist in moving that forward, being familiar with the file, might be of some benefit.

THE CHAIR: I think what we'll do is perhaps c.c. it to Mr. Baker and all federal Members of Parliament for Nova Scotia. Is there any further discussion?

PATRICK DUNN: Maybe just one comment. I want to thank your panel for coming here today, and I'm sure I can speak on behalf of my colleagues here on this committee. There are lots of words that can perhaps describe what I feel about the situation - disgusted, appalled, angry. I think you certainly deserve as much credit and recognition and respect compared to anyone else who served during war time. I think we certainly will do as much as we can in the authority and power we have to promote your cause. That will be the first step, sending a letter to Veterans Affairs in Ottawa. We certainly support and thank you for your contribution which occurred before, during and after the war. I want to thank you for your presentation.

MAX ZWICKER: I had a little run-in with Regan - you know who he is?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MAX ZWICKER: . . . at a Legion dinner and awards in Bedford - I belong to the Branch in Bedford. Anyway, they raved on all evening about the Army, Navy and Air Force. When it was all over, I went up to him and said, Mr. Regan, you're kind of an ignorant man; you live here in Bedford and you don't know anything about the Merchant Navy, you never mentioned them once. I said, you had better read up some of your history and find out what took place here in the Bedford Basin. I walk down there to the Bedford Basin pretty nearly every day for my exercise, and every once in a while there is a person who comes up to me and says, you were in the Merchant Navy - some of them come from England - and we thank you for your efforts. But here is the MP from Bedford and we were forgotten. The next one I am going to is on Friday night - there is going to be another one there - and if they don't say anything about the Merchant Navy, I am going to interrupt the meeting and tell them.

We have members who are quite elderly - I am one of the younger members, as a matter of fact - survivors today. We are not heroes, we are all survivors. I am trying to stay

healthy so I can pass the word out and if I have to embarrass people, I will embarrass them, I don't care.

THE CHAIR: You're getting the word out.

Is there any further discussion?

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

EARLE WAGNER: Mr. Chairman, if I may ask, could you just read that motion back - how it is worded, please?

THE CHAIR: Sure. Do you want to read . . .

DARLENE HENRY: I didn't catch all of it, but I'll try: "That the standing committee on Veterans Affairs send a formal request to the . . .

EARLE WAGNER: Bring up the sound level a bit, will you please? I'm hard of hearing.

WAYNE GAUDET: The motion reads that our standing committee send a formal request to our federal Minister of Veterans Affairs asking our federal government to formally recognize our Canadian Merchant Marine Navy veterans with a service medal.

EARLE WAGNER: The last two words I missed, you see, I didn't get the predicate part of your sentence. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Any further questions?

GORDON GOSSE: Thank you for coming in today and I know the guys in Cape Breton - Martin McKinnon, Roman Siwak, Teddy Ketch, Teddy Baker, Joe Whalen, all the guys I have known over the years and I've sent letters off on their behalf for different medals in service areas - we really appreciate you guys coming in here today. I have heard many a story on different runs and one thing I will share today with the committee is the "Mermansk Run" and they talked about how difficult things were, and some of the guys told me that the hard part was getting over to Russia, but the dangerous part was when you were there because the people were starving and had no food or anything. You couldn't leave the boats, and then you had to turn around and go back again. I heard lots of stories in Sydney because I grew up where the convoys left from Whitney Pier. Again, I have the utmost respect for the Merchant Navy and I thank you for coming in.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

JAMES BURKE: Mr. Chairman, I've learned something here this morning myself. Being a former civil servant, I hope there is no procrastination in putting this motion

through - I was a civil servant for approximately 28 or 29 years and there was a lot of procrastination within government. When I say I have learned something this morning, I am so proud of our committee that I represent as President of the local Merchant Navy - not Merchant Marine - Merchant Navy Association. I am the area director for Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, and I'm in contact with practically all of our people who are left.

What I want to point out to you, on Saturday coming, when we meet for probably the last day for most of us, to honour Veterans Week, and Armistice Day. Yesterday, I was going over some statistics of my local union, which I was requested to do, and I found that I had 12 people - I stopped at, and could have gone a little more - 12 people belonged to the Nova Scotia - Prince Edward Island union who have passed on. Now I'll be 81 years old in a few weeks time, but thank God, God was good enough to give me something up here, that I can lead. I don't know what happened to him this morning when I didn't put my poppy on, but my wife forgot to put it on. (Laughter) So she'll get hell when I get home - but I do have one.

Anyway, I'm not going into a lecture here, but I started sailing in 1943 on a Norwegian ship. I remember going out the harbour, and the guy at the wheel said to me, we're steering by a landmark, wheel at midships. I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. So as I approached Georges' Island, the ship at that time - I would say was going left, but she actually was going port, so in order to straighten her out I gave her more port wheel, and the second officer was standing alongside of me and he grabbed me and he hauled me away and he said go get Olie. Now I didn't know who the hell Olie was. Anyway, I went down and got the AB on watch with me, and he came up and took the wheel.

I came from Cape Breton, and listening to my friend who I met this morning from Whitney Pier, it was an act of must that I joined the Merchant Navy, because I had flat feet and I couldn't get in the Army where my brother was. I came to Halifax, and the first shot was in the manning pool up in the North End, and of course the bedbugs drove me out of there.

I sailed right up until 1948, hoping that someday I would get on the bridge. When I say get on the bridge, I'm speaking of the captains who are here today. That was my ambition. The submissions these people gave today, was a great, great point of history not only to all of you, but to me as well. I'm only 81, but I can still learn.

On behalf of my organization, I would like to thank you for meeting with us today, and, hopefully, as I said earlier, that there is no procrastination in putting through that motion, because we're dropping off very fast. I wish to thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I also wanted to thank your committee for the education they gave all of us today. I can assure you from our committee's perspective that there will be no procrastination. That motion will be sent to Ottawa, and we'll continue to push to ensure that you're recognized with a medal. So again, I want to thank you for coming.

Is there anything else? The member for Clare.

WAYNE GAUDET: Maybe just on a point of order, Mr. Chairman. On the letter you will be sending on behalf of our committee, maybe you could provide a copy to these gentlemen?

THE CHAIR: We will. We'll send a copy as well, as I said earlier, we'll c.c. that to all federal members of Parliament from Nova Scotia, as well as Senator Baker. Again, we appreciate you coming in and educating us.

Mr. Zwicker.

MAX ZWICKER: A little footnote here. Talking about the lady who was lost on the Athenia, there was another Canadian woman who hasn't been recognized too much. She was from Orillia, Ontario. She went through the Marconi wireless operator school. I can't think of her name right off the bat, and she passed in the first part of the war, but Canada wouldn't allow women wireless operators on the ship, so she went on a Norwegian ship - the ship she went on was called the Mosdale.

In between ships, sometimes I would get a job down at the docks helping to load ships and I was down this day loading the Mosdale, and the Mosdale was a little ship that was built in Denmark and she went out to sea for a trial run in 1940 after Germany had occupied Denmark and the captain kept on going - the ship did 18 knots. It was originally a ship built to carry fresh fruit fast to the market. So, she got on there as a wireless operator and she stayed on that ship all during the war. The ship never went in a convoy because she could outrun submarines. She made 68 crossings.

Now, there are not very many people know about this, but it's an outstanding thing. She eventually married the captain and settled in Norway and raised her family - of course she's dead now. It's something worth knowing that there was a merchant mariner, 68 crossings, that's a lot. I mean, I don't know how many I've made, I couldn't possibly say because some took longer than others. For instance, one time coming from Scotland to New York, it took us 29 days because the weather was so bad, the ship was light, and it was bouncing around. You don't make too many trips taking that much time.

THE CHAIR: Thank you once again for your presentation today, and for the education. We will move forward quickly on that motion.

I just want to remind members that our next meeting is December 14<sup>th</sup> with Veterans Affairs Canada. We set up our meetings for January 11<sup>th</sup> with the Royal Canadian Legion, Nunavit Command, and on February 8<sup>th</sup> we have Nova Scotia No. 2 Construction Battalion coming in. We have meetings set up for the next three months.

EARLE WAGNER: Just as a comment, Mr. Chairman, and the committee here, I would like to thank you on behalf of the Canadian Merchant Navy Veterans Association and the Master Mariners of Canada for your attentiveness and in asking some very probing

questions, and specifically for your support in presenting that to Veterans Affairs Canada. Thank you very much, I appreciated being here.

THE CHAIR: You're welcome, on behalf of the committee.

As there's no further business, we stand adjourned.

[10:15 a.m. The committee adjourned.]