

REFERENCE PAPERS

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CANADIAN MERCHANT SEAMEN

Since the outbreak of war, 994 Canadian merchant seamen have lost their lives by enemy action while serving on ships carrying war material to the fighting fronts of the world. Of these, 628 were serving on Canadian merchant vessels, 250 on United Kingdom ships, and 116 more died while serving on ships of other allied nations.

In addition, 145 merchant seamen are interned in enemy prison camps, and 37 have been repatriated in exchanges of prisoners.

Today Canadian merchant seamen are providing the crews for a fleet of merchant ships which has grown from 37 at the outbreak of war to nearly 150 ships in less than five years - a fleet which may total more than 300 at the end of the war.

In September, 1939, Canada had 14 fairly large shipyards and 15 smaller boat-building establishments and employed less than 4,000 men in the construction of merchant vessels. At the peak of its shipbuilding program, the summer of 1943, there were 25 major and 65 smaller yards in operation, with 75,000 men and women at work in them.

The cargo vessel program was entrusted to a crown company, Wartime Merchant Shipping Limited. In December, 1943, however, it was decided to merge the administration of the cargo boat program with that of the naval shipbuilding program. Wartime Merchant Shipping Limited was renamed Wartime Shipbuilding Limited, and supervision of combat ship construction was added to its cargo shipbuilding activities.

More than 400 cargo ships have been ordered, and 312 delivered. Those delivered include 235 10,000-tonners, 23 4,700-tonners and four 3,000-ton tankers.

The 10,000-ton cargo vessels are of four main types: North Sands, Victory, tankers and Canadian. All have a deadweight tonnage of 10,350 tons; length 441 feet; beam 57 feet; depth 37 feet; draught 27 feet; speed (loaded) 11 knots; triple expansion engines of 2,500 horsepower. They all need crews of 50 officers and men, exclusive of gunners.

It is estimated that a 10,000-ton cargo vessel, after loading with ship's stores and water, will carry on an average the following cargo:

2,850 tons of flour, cheese, bacon and ham to feed 25,000 persons for a week; 2,150 tons of steel; enough motorized equipment to outfit a full infantry battalion; 1,900 tons of bombs; sufficient lumber, plywood, wall-board and nails to build 29 four-room cottages or a row of dwellings nine blocks long; sufficient aluminum to build 310 bombers or 640 fighter planes; and two complete bombers stowed on the aft deck in knocked-down condition.

The 4,700-tonners have a length of 328 feet; beam 46½ feet; depth 25 feet; draught 20 feet; deadweight 4,700 long tons; triple expansion engines of 1,176 horsepower; speed (loaded) 10 knots.

Of the 312 ships delivered by Canadian shipyards, 10 10,000-tonners were sold to the United States Maritime Commission and two to the British Ministry of War Transport. In addition, the Canadian government has delivered 102 ships to the United Kingdom and one ship to Australia under Mutual Aid. These vessels are manned and operated by the United Kingdom and Australia for the duration, but are returnable to Canada at the end of the war.

PARK
STEAMSHIP
COMPANY

The Park Steamship Company, a crown company, was set up to control, supervise and manage merchant ships built in Canada and retained for operation under Canadian registry. Of the new merchant ships there are at present 117 ships operated by the Park Steamship Company - 87 10,000-ton cargo vessels, 18 10,000-ton tankers, eight 4,700-ton cargo vessels and four 3,600-ton tankers. All these ships bear the names of Canadian parks and have been allotted to trade routes where tonnage is required. In order to develop the Canadian shipping industry, these Park ships are allotted to Canadian shipping firms who are appointed by the Park Steamship Company as operating managers.

Hon. J.E. Michaud, minister of transport, answering a question on August 3, 1944, as to the government's post-war policy regarding the merchant marine service, told the House of Commons:

"As to a definite policy governing the future, that has not yet been determined by the government...but there is no difference of opinion as to whether Canada should retain as many of these ships as can be used for the trade of Canada. Whether our merchant marine should be operated by the government or by individuals or by private companies is another matter..."

He pointed out that with an average of 50 men required to man one of these ships, not more than 15,000 men will find employment.

"That is the utmost number we can expect to employ even if we keep our merchant marine intact, and all our ships are returned to us after the war," he said.

Although they are described as the "Fourth Arm of the Fighting Services" the fact remains that merchant seamen throughout the world are still civilians. A seaman's engagement commences the day he signs articles of agreement to join the crew of his ship and terminates the day his ship returns to its home port, whether the voyage is long or short. The seaman is then free to re-engage or to go to his home. This meant in wartime that the supply of merchant seamen at Canadian ports was uncertain and uncontrolled.

During the height of the Battle of the Atlantic, when the Canadian merchant navy suffered its heaviest casualties in both ships and personnel, the Canadian government, by order-in-council P.C. 14/3550, dated May 19, 1941, made provision for the establishment of a special branch of the Department of Transport under a director of merchant seamen for the setting up of manning pools, training facilities and for the extension of welfare facilities. This order-in-council reads in part:

"That the merchant marine, on which our seaborne commerce depends, is, under present conditions, virtually an arm of our fighting services, and the provision of merchant seamen, their training, care and protection, is essential to the proper conduct of the war, and vitally necessary to the keeping open of the sea-lanes on which the successful outcome of the present conflict so largely depends."

Another branch of the Department of Transport, under a director of merchant services, is responsible for payment of compensation for loss of effects by merchant seamen, issuing of merchant navy badges, identity certificates and medals and crosses. This branch also maintains a register of seamen. During wartime, merchant seamen face risks as great or greater than those faced by many of the personnel of the three armed services and greater than the majority of Canadians. The government felt, therefore, that they were entitled to the same kind of protection and compensation for misadventure from enemy action as is enjoyed by members of the armed forces.

Under the minister of pensions and national health, the Canadian Pension Commission is responsible for administering death and disability pensions on behalf of merchant seamen, as well as payment of detention allowances on behalf of those taken prisoner of war. The sick mariners' branch of this department is responsible for the hospitalization and treatment of sick and injured seamen.

MERCHANT
SEAMEN

In the last three years four merchant seamen's manning pools have been opened in Canada: one at Halifax in October, 1941; one at Montreal in January, 1942; one at Vancouver in the spring of 1942; and one at Saint John, New Brunswick, in the spring of 1943. These pools were set up to maintain a reserve of officers and seamen to man new ships and supply crew deficiencies on ships, as well as to provide for men seeking assignments.

The manning pools accommodate from 100 to 600 men each. At any one of them seamen obtain board, lodging and basic pay between voyages on signing an undertaking to go to sea as directed.

In an attempt to stabilize the manpower situation and to provide additional benefits for officers and men, a recent measure has been introduced whereby continuous pay will be ensured if officers and seamen sign an agreement with the manning pool to accept service on foreign-going ships of Canadian registry for the duration of the war, or for two years, whichever is the shorter period. In return they become eligible for many benefits, including:

1. A war service bonus of 10% after each complete year's satisfactory service. This is computed on total earnings as an officer or seaman, whether at sea or manning pool pay during the previous year of service.
2. Leave, based on two days per month of service, will be granted at manning pool rates of pay after each completed year of service. The seaman may buy a return railway ticket to his permanent place of residence at naval rates, that is, one-third of the one-way fare, the difference being absorbed in manning pool operations.
3. Payment of basic rate of pay for maximum period of 12 weeks to seamen in hospital for sickness or injury incurred during a voyage.

The scheme of training for merchant seamen devised by the director of merchant seamen has provided for the establishment of two training schools, one the St. Margaret's Sea Training School at Hubbards, Nova Scotia, and the other, the Marine Engineering Instructional School at Prescott, Ontario. At both of these schools trainees are provided with board, lodging and remuneration.

St. Margaret's Sea Training School, opened in July, 1942, has a capacity for 120 young men between 17 and 22 years of age. The course at this school is for 13 weeks in elementary seamanship and navigation, with special attention to steering, signalling and lifeboat handling. Several opportunities to become cadet officers are available, and trainees who acquit themselves creditably at the school are selected to fill these posts. Two cadet officers are assigned to each of the new Park Steamship Company vessels, and by this means a nucleus of suitable young officers is being formed to man Canada's future merchant navy.

The Marine Engineering Instructional School opened on January 1, 1942, with a capacity for 80 men from 19 to 30 years. It gives a six-weeks' course in engine-room and stokehold duties. Men with necessary sea experience are also provided here with tuition to enable them to procure certificates of competency as certificated marine engineers.

In addition to the courses given at these two schools, special arrangements have been made for other types of training. Ten radio colleges in various cities from Victoria to Halifax train wireless telegraph officers under a special scheme. A man anxious to become a wireless telegraph officer may enroll at his own expense, but with the approval of the director of merchant seamen. During the 10 months of his course the Canadian government pays him a subsistence allowance of \$60 a month, and at the end of his course, if he passes, one-half the tuition fee is returned to him. When he has completed one year's satisfactory service at sea, the other half is returned to him also. As the average fee to the radio college is \$330, it costs the government \$930 to train a wireless telegraph officer.

Ship's cooks are trained at the manning pools by the permanent cooks.

They are given special training in baking bread and making pies. They are paid during training.

By the introduction of these new entrants into sea service through the lower grades, it is possible to arrange for a general upgrading of all ranks. Seamen who have the requisite time and experience at sea are invited to take tuition at the nautical schools to enable them to be examined for initial certificates of competency. Similarly junior officers are given the opportunity to sit for examination for higher grade certificates. The same system of upgrading applies to engine-room staffs, where ratings and junior officers are given the opportunity to take tuition to enable them to sit for initial or higher grade marine engineering certificates. During these periods of study the men are paid the wages of their rank and provided with board and lodging.

RATES OF
PAY

Canadian rates of pay for merchant seamen are substantially higher than British rates but are lower than those paid in the United States. Rates of pay vary according to rank or rating, but for comparison an able seaman receives \$135 a month on a Canadian ship, \$107 on a British ship and averages more than \$300 a month on a United States ship.

DIRECTOR
OF MARINE
SERVICES

The director of marine services of the Department of Transport is responsible for compensation, issuance of identity certificates, merchant navy badges, memorial crosses and for maintaining a central registry of seamen.

IDENTITY
CERTIFICATES

Identity certificates are issued to all seamen of any nationality serving in ships of Canadian registry in foreign-going, home trade and inland waters. Between January 1, 1942, and September 1, 1944, 34,827 identity certificates were issued. These certificates are a protection to the men both in foreign ports and at home.

CENTRAL
REGISTER

The Department of Transport maintains a central registry where the individual service records of merchant seamen are listed. Seamen who are missing or have lost their lives as a result of enemy action while serving on ships of Canadian registry, as well as Canadian seamen who may now be serving on ships of foreign registry, are included. More than 51,000 names have been entered in this register.

COMPENSATION

As civilians, merchant seamen provide their own clothing, tools and also special instruments. At the outbreak of war the Canadian government made provision to pay compensation for loss of personal effects by seamen due to enemy action. The maximum rate of compensation allowed is \$450 for the clothes of the master of a foreign-going ship and \$225 for his instruments, down to \$110 for the lowest ratings. Compensation is also paid to the dependents of seamen who are missing or killed as a result of enemy action. To September 1, 1944, 1,222 compensation claims had been paid. In some cases more than one claim has been paid to the same man who has suffered loss of effects on different occasions.

MERCHANT NAVY
BADGES

Seamen who have served for not less than three months in waters where enemy submarines, surface raiders or aircraft have been known to operate, or less than three months in a ship which has been attacked by the enemy, are issued merchant navy badges. It is a small silver emblem bearing the initials "M.N." To September 1, 1944, 500 merchant navy badges have been claimed.

MEMORIAL
CROSSES

The widows and mothers of Canadian merchant seamen who have lost their lives at sea through enemy action are entitled to receive the memorial cross, as are

widows and mothers of men in the three armed services. By September 1, 1944, 230 memorial crosses had been issued.

Through the Canadian Pension Commission, the Canadian government pays pensions for disabilities incurred by merchant seamen as a result of enemy action, and, in the event of death, pensions to the seamen's dependents. Rate of pension for disabilities ranges from \$900 up to \$1,560 for 100% disability cases, with allowance for dependents. Thirty-seven disability pensions are being paid to merchant seamen. In the event of death, pension to the widow ranges from \$720 to \$1,248, according to rank or rating. Death pensions are being paid to 400 adults and to 246 children. Recipients include widows, dependent parents and guardians looking after children.

Merchant seamen captured by the enemy are paid compensation, on the basis of their pay, through the Canadian Pension Commission. Before this was arranged, seamen's pay stopped as soon as they were captured, and hardship for their dependents resulted. An amount equivalent to that which the seaman had allotted to his dependents may be paid to them directly out of the detention allowance. The balance is banked on his behalf. Detention allowance is being paid to 128 merchant seamen interned in Germany and 17 interned in Asia.

Provision for hospitalization and treatment of merchant seamen, within certain limitations, existed in pre-war days under the Canada Shipping Act, and a levy for this purpose was made against vessels entering Canadian ports. As a war measure, these facilities have been greatly extended so that no seamen who has served on a Canadian ship and who is suffering from sickness or injury as a result of the war is left without treatment.

In certain cases training and assistance under the Canadian post-discharge re-establishment arrangements are provided for seamen who are prevented from following their former occupation as a result of war occupation.

Facilities for the welfare of merchant seamen in Canadian ports are supervised and co-ordinated by the director of merchant seamen. Assistance has been given to existing seamen's clubs and hostels to provide the maximum facilities for the care, comfort and recreation of seamen while ashore. A valuable arrangement was made with the Navy League of Canada whereby that organization established up-to-date clubs for the exclusive use of merchant seamen in Halifax, Sydney, Louisburg, Saint John, Quebec, Three Rivers, Montreal, Vancouver, and Victoria. Clubs exclusively for merchant navy officers have also been opened in Halifax, Sydney, Saint John and Montreal. Special recreation and sport facilities are provided by these clubs.

Outstanding contributions in the way of woollen comforts, reading material and educational facilities, care and comforts for shipwrecked seamen have been provided by the Canadian Red Cross Society, the Navy League of Canada, Independent Order Daughters of the Empire, Canadian Legion, Knights of Columbus, Young Men's Christian Association, Salvation Army, women's naval auxiliaries and other national and local organizations.

Establishment of a central mailing office for handling seamen's mail with a view to accelerating delivery has met a long felt want in the merchant navy service.

Forty-three Canadian merchant seamen have received awards for gallant action and devotion to duty while serving on vessels of Canadian registry. Of these, 17 have been made officers of the Order of the British Empire, 17 Members of the Order of the British Empire, seven have been awarded the British Empire Medal and three have had official commendation. In addition, many Canadian merchant seamen serving on vessels of other than Canadian registry have been awarded decorations by the governments of the United Kingdom, the United States, Norway and others.

