



Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Project

*Our Citizen Sailors volunteered to fight for Canada.
Now we need Volunteers to bring the Sailors' stories to their home divisions.*

Project Overview

What is a “citizen sailor”? It is a nickname given to those who serve in Canada’s Naval Reserve. In World War II, citizen sailors were ordinary Canadians who joined the war effort as members of the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR), the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve (RCNR) and Women’s Royal Canadian Navy Service (WRCNS). About 85, 000 Canadians from all walks of life began their War Service at one of the Naval Reserve Divisions (NRD) scattered throughout Canada.



Able Seaman Daniel Ralph with the mascot of the patrol vessel ALLAVERDY of the Fishermen's Reserve, Esquimalt, British Columbia, Canada, 8 November 1941

In World War II, a total of 2170 Canadian Navy personnel perished. Four hundred of those casualties were Regular Navy. The remaining 1769 were Naval Reservists or citizen sailors. These war dead have graves around the world or, for those whose bodies were lost at sea they are commemorated on a Memorial in Halifax which is beautiful and breathtaking. However, they are largely unknown in their hometowns. The 100th Anniversary of the Naval

Reserve is an opportune time to repatriate this history back to the cities, towns and villages where these sailors grew up and began their naval service.

The Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph project will create a lasting memorial so that the sacrifice of these 1769 Canadians is documented and can be commemorated at the Naval Reserve Divisions where these Canadians joined the war effort, and in the hometowns where these sailors lived.

What is a Virtual Cenotaph?

You can find cenotaphs dedicated to the war dead across the country in big cities and small towns alike. They are large monuments engraved with the names of the war dead from that town. The Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph builds on this concept. It is a national database that contains more than just names. It contains important dates, honours, family information, birthplace, burial information, battle information, occupation before joining the war, and photos. It is searchable, sortable and features a short life story written by a fellow Canadian.



Marian Wingate et Margaret Little, WRCNS communications specialists, at work in St John's Newfoundland

Would you have 2-3 hours to spare to tell the story of a citizen sailor who sacrificed everything for his/her country?

Volunteers Needed



Able Seaman Joe Nantais manning an Oerlikon 20mm. anti-aircraft gun aboard H.M.C.S. PRINCE DAVID off Kithera, Greece, 16 September 1944

The project has the permission of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to use the tombstone data for Canada's 1769 citizen sailors war dead. This tombstone data already contains fascinating information about these Naval Reservists, but it will be expanded upon by volunteer researchers using the sailors' Service Files (made available online by Library and Archives Canada), online newspaper archives, and ancestry websites. Our goal is to present the Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph to the Naval Reserve in 2023 for its 100th birthday. **We need a huge team of researchers from across Canada to tackle this project.**

To be clear, no military or historical research experience is needed to become a volunteer researcher; just a commitment to write a life story based on the information found in the files and through other online, or library sources. To support this effort, materials are being developed that will guide researchers (young and old), in a step-by-step manner, to create a sailor's life story.

Apply today



Sub-Lieutenant R.A.F. Raney,
Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer
Reserve (R.C.N.V.R.), 10 May
1943

In the words of Georgie Carter Krell, a US Gold Star mother, **“Dying for freedom isn’t the worst that can happen. Being forgotten is.”** The Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph will be a lasting gift to the Naval Reserve, so that those who made the ultimate sacrifice can be properly celebrated by future generations. Help us finish this legacy project. Volunteer today!

For more information on becoming a CSVC research volunteer or to subscribe to our Vignettes mailing list, please email:

CSVC.CVMV@gmail.com

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