



NEWS

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Remembering Captain(N) Rolfe Monteith October 1923 – July 2025

The Royal Canadian Navy, and the Naval technical community in particular, has lost one of its heroes, Captain(N) Rolfe Monteith, CD, in his 102nd year.

Rolfe Monteith left Clinton, Ontario at the age of 17 to join the Royal Canadian Navy as an engineering cadet in 1941. He joined other Canadian volunteer cadets of the Special Entry 55, Britannia Royal Naval College, who sailed aboard the merchant cruiser RMS *Laconia* (1921), a converted Cunard passenger liner, in convoy HX 147 with 64 merchant ships and an escort screen that included several Canadian corvettes. A year later, *Laconia* would be sunk with crew and passengers including women, children, and Italian prisoners of war lost. A story retold by Rolfe Monteith in his captivating special feature in the Battle of the Atlantic 75th Anniversary issue of the *Journal* (MEJ 93).

Monteith joined HMS *Hardy* (R06) in late 1943 as a young mid-shipman and sailed in company with HMCS *Haida* (G-63) and *Iroquois* (G-89) as part of the escort for battleship HMS *Anson* (79) to the Bering Sea and later escorted Russian convoy JW 54B to Murmansk and Archangel.

As a very young midshipman, I was on a steep learning curve aboard ship. Being in the engineering branch, I naturally came to the attention of the squadron engineer – one **Cdr Ernie Mill** – who insisted that you be able to operate and restart any and all machinery in the ship, even if a compartment was blacked out. It was an invaluable lesson in damage control in case of enemy action, especially on the convoys from Scapa Flow to Russia where we could expect attacks by German U-boats and Luftwaffe aircraft at any time.

While Monteith was bitter about having to leave theatre and return to Plymouth to complete his engineering course, his former shipmates in *Hardy* were soon to serve on another run to Russia. Their destroyer was struck and sunk by U-278 about 30 days after he had disembarked.



www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpZdNev6MA

Sadly 35 men were lost, many of which had become Monteith's close friends. Although not directly involved in this action, he never really got over this incident until a chance meeting at a naval reunion held at Loch Ewe in May 2017. There he was introduced to the son of one of the crew. Learning how **Chief Petty Officer Electrical Artificer Fred Pearce**, who had befriended and mentored him aboard HMS *Hardy*, and others survived the sinking finally brought some closure.¹

After the war Capt(N) Monteith specialized as an air engineer and was the Engineering Officer of the destroyer HMCS *Sioux* (R-64), a former sister ship to HMS *Hardy*. He also served as Air Engineer Officer aboard the aircraft carrier HMCS *Magnificent* (CVL-21). Later in his career he held appointments both as Director of Air Engineering and then as Director of Marine Engineering, as well as Project Manager of the Canadian Hydrofoil Project, including many other achievements (MEJ 106). After his retirement he moved to the UK, and worked for engineering companies Babcock and Wilcox, and the Weir Group.

Upon his retirement Rolfe continued to preserve Canada's naval technical heritage through the formation of the Canadian Naval Technical History Association (CNTHA), the Canadian Naval Air Group (CNAG), the Canadian Veterans Association (UK), the Arctic Convoys to Russia Association as well as reunions including several Special Entry 55. His legacy lives on through the CNTHA News as well as through the CNAG publication "*Certified Serviceable*" – *Swordfish to Sea Kings: The Technical Story of Canadian Naval Aviation by Those Who Made It So*.

He was one of the founders of Canadian naval technical history and remains a mentor to us all.



1. Obituary by Major-General (ret'd) Mungo Melvin, <https://www.forposterityssake.ca/>