



# NEWS

Canadian Naval Technical History Association

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## Battle of the Atlantic – 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

In his 2009 paper, "Shipyards of the Canadian Naval Shipbuilding Program, 1939-2017",<sup>1</sup> CNTHA founding member **Douglas Hearnshaw** offered a historical overview of the shipyards involved with building ships in support of the 1939-1945 Battle of the Atlantic. The following is an edited excerpt regarding one such yard in Port Arthur – now part of Thunder Bay, Ontario.

### Port Arthur Shipbuilding Company

In 1910, local capitalist James Whalen was determined to build a shipyard in Thunder Bay to augment his salvage, towing and lumber business. He approached the American Shipbuilding Company of Cleveland, Ohio to direct an engineer to Port Arthur to design and complete a shipyard, including a drydock. This individual did a first-class job: layout of the shipyard was so efficient that very little has had to be changed in the intervening years. This was the establishment of what was first known as the Western Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company, and under Whalen's management the firm built a few tugs and barges, before getting an order to build the largest and most palatial passenger ship on the Great Lakes, the 6,095-ton *SS Noronic*, launched in 1913.

During the First World War, Western Dry Dock (renamed the Port Arthur Shipbuilding Company in 1916) built several seagoing freighters, and a series of armed naval trawlers for both the Canadian Government Merchant Marine (CGMM) and the British Admiralty. Toward the end of the war, the shipyard was engaged in building more seagoing merchant ships for the CGMM as part of the government's effort to

mitigate the effects of the post-war recession. By the late 1920s, with business drying up, the shipyard turned to ship repair work and other engineering projects to remain viable throughout the Depression years and beyond.

In 1940, the Canadian government and British Admiralty were once again looking for naval vessels to be built in Canada, and Port Arthur Shipbuilding received contracts for the first of many corvettes and minesweeper escorts. The shipyard's modern and very active machine and boiler shops were able to manufacture the engines and boilers for these ships – machinery that was rated by both governments as the best of its kind made in Canada. From 1940 to 1945, Port Arthur Shipbuilding completed nine Flower-class corvettes, six Bangor-class minesweepers, and 20 Algerine-class minesweepers – 12 for Canada, and eight for the Royal Navy. All told, the Lakehead shipyard proved a very able producer for the war effort, and is in operation today under the ownership of Heddle Shipyards.



<sup>1</sup>Doug Hearnshaw's full paper can be found at: <http://www.cntha.ca/articles/shipyards-narrative.html>

HMCS *Port Arthur* (K233), built at Port Arthur Shipbuilding, on commissioning day in Montreal, May 26, 1942.

DND/RCN photo courtesy Bruce Hulbert, For Posterity's Sake.

