

The Battle of the Atlantic

TEACHER GUIDE

Canadian Press reporter Sue Bailey looks at how Canada’s often unsung role in the Battle of the Atlantic helped lay crucial groundwork for Allied victory in the Second World War. The Battle of the Atlantic was the longest and arguably most important campaign of the war. It stretched from the Sept. 3, 1939, sinking of the British passenger liner Athenia off the coast of Ireland until the last German U-boats surrendered after Victory in Europe Day in May 1945.

The United Kingdom relied on constant arrivals from North America of troops, food, fuel, steel, aluminum and everything else needed to power its war machine against the Nazis. Canada helped co-ordinate and protect those supply convoys from the constant threat of enemy submarine attack.

Former British prime minister Winston Churchill would later write that the Battle of the Atlantic was so pivotal that all other war efforts by land or air depended on its outcome. “The only thing that ever really frightened me during the war was the U-boat peril,” he wrote in *Their Finest Hour*, part of his six-volume history of the Second World War.

Bailey also spoke with Norman Crewe, 95, one of the last surviving veterans of Canada’s Merchant Navy who served during the Battle of the Atlantic. The passing of so many decades has not lessened the sadness he feels when he thinks of those who died in often horrific circumstances. Many of them were his friends.

Additional discussion/research points:

- Is it important, as Norman Crewe says, for young people to know what happened during the Battle of the Atlantic and other historic conflicts?
- How might the world be different today if the Allied powers had lost the Second World War?
- Research how many veterans of the Second World War are still living.
- Is enough being done to remember the sacrifices of veterans of the First World War, the Second World War and the Korean War?
- How did Canada’s role in the Second World War change its armed forces, especially its navy?
- Could a global conflict on par with the Second World War happen again?
- How can such conflicts be avoided?

