

Brief History of the H.M.C.S Brantford



Photo - Courtesy of the City of Brantford Archives

©Naval Historical Section,
Naval Headquarters,
Ottawa, Ontario.
13 April 1961.

National Defence - Reproduced with the permission of the Minister of Public Works and
Government Services, 2010.

H.M.C.S BRANTFORD (pennants K218) was one of the six "Flower" class corvettes built under the 1940-1941 programme. She was laid down on 24 February, 1941, at the Midland Shipyards, and was launched on 6 September, of the same year. When completed in the spring of 1942, she was the last of the "Flower" Class to be built, for the subsequent corvettes were revised, equipped with longer forecastles and better living accommodations and was about sixty-five tons heavier. BRANTFORD'S specifications provide a yardstick for measuring all early corvettes, those sturdy little ships that enabled the R.C.N to take its place as a strong factor in the Battle of the Atlantic.

Displacement:	950 tons
Length Overall:	203'
Breadth extreme:	33'
Draught:	3'
Designed Speed:	16.5 knots
Endurance:	3,450 miles at 12 knots 2,629 miles at full speed
Armament:	one 4' gun two .5' twin A/A guns one stripped Lewis
Depth-charges:	60 with two chutes, four throwers
Complement:	5 officers, 61 men.

At this stage in the war, the Royal Canadian Navy needed every ship it could get to help maintain the vital life lines with Great Britain, and new construction ships were almost literally fitted out while under way. BRANTFORD sailed from the Midland Shipyard to the dry dock at Collingwood on 1 May, 1942. Here she received further fittings before proceeding on to Toronto for gun and depth-charge trials.

From there she sailed to Montreal for installation of wireless equipment. On 15, May one day after the last piece of equipment had been received she was commissioned in the R.C.N. The city of Brantford, Ontario, which had followed with interest the construction of the corvette from the laying of her keel to her commissioning ceremony, had already adopted the ship, and she was amply supplied with comforts of her crew, including radios, heavy winter clothing, magazines and cigarettes.

H.M.C.S BRANTFORD has put into service at a time, which coincided with the long-expected arrival of German U-boats in the mouth of the St. Lawrence River. On 12 May, three days before BRANTFORD'S commissioning, the freighter SS NICOYA and the Dutch merchantman LETO were torpedoed North of Cap Magdalen. Emergency plans were immediately put into effect at Naval Headquarters, and all St. Lawrence shipping destined for the transatlantic route, or arriving from the Atlantic, was organized in convoys. Merchant ships were to stop at Sydney on their way to the St. Lawrence, and at Quebec on the way down, picking up their river escorts at those points. Such convoys were designated as SQ and QS, respectively.

Since BRANTFORD was due to sail from Montreal to Halifax she was used temporarily to escort two QS convoys. She sailed from Quebec with QS-2 on 22 May, arriving at Sydney with her four charges three days later, and immediately sailed back to Gaspe to pick up QS-3. For a month thereafter she was employed as escort to convoys between Halifax and Sydney.

In July BRANTFORD finally joined the Western Local Escort Force, to which she had originally been allocated. The Force, consisting of groups of R.C.N ships, shepherded the convoys from Halifax, New York and Boston to a rendezvous off St. John's with the Mid-Ocean Escort Force, and picked up incoming convoys for escort to individual ports. This was the nature of BRANTFORD'S role for two busy years.

In many ways the little corvette was typical of every escort vessel that ploughed the convoy lanes in the Western Atlantic during the war. Constantly needed, hard worked, frequently repaired by tireless dockyard hands to keep her in fighting trim, she was a tangible proof of the importance justly attached to convoys and of the pressure put on our resources by the Battle of the Atlantic to provide adequate protection. Like her sister ships, she experienced the monotony of months of convoy duty, the frequently foul weather and its effects on station keeping, and the need for constant vigilance. BRANTFORD sank no U-boats, participated in none of the terrible convoy battles that marked the First three and a half years of the war, and did not have the opportunity to take part in the dramatic sea rescues that often fell to her consorts; but the number of sea miles that she sailed throughout the period from 1942 to 1944, guarding hundreds of ships as they left and entered our coastal waters with their precious cargoes, would number many thousands. It was only due to the untiring efforts of such escort ships that it was finally possible to turn the tide of battle in the Atlantic.

Occasionally, but rarely, there occurred a few moments of excitement and anticipation that relieved the monotony inherent in convoy duty. In September 1942, H.M.C.S BRANTFORD was on hand to see the unfortunate climax of the four-day ordeal of ON-127; a transatlantic convoy from the United Kingdom. In company with HMS WITCH (Senior officer) and H.M.C.S Ships ANNAPOLIS, REGINA, and MONCTON, she left St. John's on 13 September to meet the convoy, which had been under attack by a U-boat pack and had lost eleven merchantmen. The local escorts made contact with the convoy at 0003, just in time to see H.M.C.S OTTAWA, one of the mid-ocean escorts, fatally crippled by a German torpedo that struck her amidships. While the remaining ships of Mid-Ocean Escort Force, including BRANTFORD, steered the convoy away from the area and led it safely toward Canadian waters.

BRANTFORD had two submarine attacks during her career. On 5 February 1943, she was in company with HAMS DUNDAS, about 150 miles east of Sable Island, and serving as local escort to ON-162. Shortly after noon she picked up a faint contact on her asdic. Although the contact was classed as doubtful, guesswork could never be substituted for caution, and the corvette, on general principles, dropped a pattern of five charges. Again, on 7 May 1944, she obtained a contact. The frigate HAMS VALLEYFIELD homeward bound with Escort Group C-1 after detaching from a convoy,

had been torpedoed with great loss of life south of Cape Race, Newfoundland. BRANTFORD, TIMMINS and AGASSIZ, comprising Escort Group W-2, were immediately diverted to the area as supported to EG C-1. The corvette located a fairly promising contact at 1624, about fourteen hours after VALLEYFIELD went down, and dropped a total of nineteen depth-charges. Traces of oil, the submarine hunter's delight, came to the surface, but the contact was never officially confirmed as submarine. The bottom in this particular area was littered with wrecks, and it is probable that BRANTFORD'S contact was one of these.

BRANTFORD'S career on the Atlantic convoy lanes came to an end on 26 September, 1944, when she was allocated to HAMS CORNWALLIS, the R.C.N.'s training establishment at Deep Brook, Nova Scotia. Here she served as a training ship for new-entry ratings and as escort to HM Submarines UNSEEN and SEAWOLF, which were frequently used for A/S training in the Bay of Fundy. On 16 July 1945, she was sailed to Halifax for de-ammunitioning and thence to Sydney for destoring. Her last trip under White Ensign was completed on 3 August, when she arrived back at Halifax. Here she was paid off on the 17th and turned over to War Assets Corporation for final disposal. She was brought by George E. Irving of New Brunswick, and in 1950 was sold to a Honduran company who fitted her out as the steam whaler OLYMPIC ARROW. The stout little corvette retained her short forecastle to the last, one of the very few in the R.C.N to perpetuate the original corvette design that had proved such a godsend to the free nations of the Atlantic community. Her ship's bell now belongs to the city of Brantford, her namesake, and serves as a reminder of an epic struggle that reached into the homes of Canadians across the country. As with her sister ships, BRANTFORD was a small but important instrument of strategy in the war at sea, for she protected the merchantmen on whom the successful prosecution of the war depended; and she filled her role with credit to herself and her company.