Royal United Services Institute of Nova Scotia
Information Note
8 September 2022

Warship Orthography
Conventions in Writing Warship Names

1.   The full name of a warship[1] in naval service includes a national identifier and a name, e.g., His Majesty's Canadian Ship *Halifax*; le navire canadien de sa majesté *Ville de Québec*.

2.   Prior to a naming ceremony, a ship may be known by its project number, e.g. AOPS1, or builder's number, e.g., Irving hull 103, or as 'future," e.g., future *Harry DeWolf* or future HMCS *Harry DeWolf*. After the naming ceremony, a ship may be known by its name, e.g., *Harry DeWolf*, or as 'future,' e.g., future HMCS *Harry DeWolf*, with the future applicable to the commissioning of the ship into service.

3.   Prior to a commissioning ceremony marking being taken into naval service, a ship is not a warship and the national identifier – its title – is not included with its name. A warship may be *de jure* in commissioned service when it is delivered by the shipbuilder to and accepted by the Canadian Armed Forces prior to its formal commissioning ceremony. From acceptance on its name may be written including the national identifier.

4.   A warship's name but not the national identifier is italicized, e.g., HMCS *Harry DeWolf*. Military writers may, per an operational writing convention, capitalize the name.

5.   A national identifier may be written or spoken as an initialism[2], e.g., HMCS *Kingston*, HMC Ships *Calgary* and *Vancouver*; NCSM *Montréal*. The initialism may be used after being introduced the first time the full name is used, e.g., His Majesty's Canadian Ship (HMCS) *Victoria*.

6.   A warship's name without the national identifier, e.g., *Fredericton*, may be used after the full name is first introduced in a written piece.

7.   A definite article such as 'the' is not used with a warship's full name when the national identifier starts with a pronoun. 'The HMCS *St John's*' is incorrect as it means 'the His…' For other navies, usually non-monarchies, the definite article is acceptable though not necessary, e.g., the USS *Virginia*.

8.   It is optional whether or not a period is included in a ship's name, e.g., HMCS *St John's*. A period may be used for some writings and not for others for the same ship. Hyphens are not included unless specified in the ship's organization order[3], i.e., NCSM *St-John's* is incorrect. A name may include an initialism, e.g., HMCS *St John's* where 'St' means Saint, if that is specified in the ship's organization order.

9.   Some naval vessels have alphanumeric names, e.g., Fairmile-class motor launch Q104. Such names are usually not italicized.

10.   A Canadian warship with the same name as a previous ship does not include a Roman numeral as part of its name as civil ships do. Occasionally a Canadian warship retains a Roman numeral with its civil name when taken up from civil use into naval service and its name already had a numeral, e.g., *Reo* II. When it is necessary to distinguish ships of the same name, the term "X of name" is used, e.g., *Ottawa* (3rd of name).

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11.   After being paid off[4], ceasing to be one of HMC Ships in commissioned service, a warship is no longer a warship and its full name does not include the national identifier. The remaining part of its name may continue to be used, including with a definite article, e.g., the *Cormorant*. The national identifier can be used if made evident it is no longer current, e.g., the former HMCS *Annapolis* or the ex-HMCS *Cormorant*, but that form is best reserved for when referring to the ship's past in naval service.

12.   A ship retains its name until it has been so broken up at a shipbreaker that it can no longer serve as a vessel. A wreck retains its name.

13.   Naval ships are designated by type (of a similar role and functions, e.g., frigate, destroyer). A paid off former warship is no longer the type of ship it was in service as much of its equipment is removed. If inoperable, it can be typed as a hulk.

14.   The ship type can be used to precede a name and there can be an article, e.g., the destroyer HMCS *Iroquois*. An archaic form of writing can place the type afterwards; e.g., HMCS *Niobe*, cruiser.

15.   Within a type, one or more warships of the same design are known as a class and take the name of the first or lead ship, e.g., Halifax-class frigates. When writing of a ship class, the national identifier and italics are not used and an article may be used, e.g., the Harry DeWolf-class.

16.   These conventions may apply to naval auxiliaries and to merchant ships. A merchant ship's name is italicized but not its vessel type identifier, e.g., motor vessel *Asterix*, MV *Asterix*.

Notes:
1. Warship definition: "warship means a ship belonging to the armed forces of a State bearing the external marks distinguishing the character and nationality of such a ship, under the command of an officer duly commissioned by the government of that State and whose name appears in the appropriate service list or its equivalent, and manned by a crew which is under regular armed forces discipline;" San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea Sec V para 13(g) (https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/57jmsu.htm) accessed 9 April 2015.
2. Prior to standardization on the initialism HMCS, identifiers included HMC S/M, where S/M means submarine, and HMC destroyer, both of which may occasionally still be seen.
3. Warships and other elements of the Canadian Armed Forces are established initially by the Minister of National Defence via a Ministerial Organization Order (MOO) in accordance with the National Defence Act. Details about the element are later promulgated via a Canadian Forces Organization Order (CFOO).
4. Warships of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) pay off (are taken out of naval service) at the end of a commission, which usually lasts the entire duration of the ship's life in naval service. Other navies such as the United States Navy (USN) may use the term 'decommission' to mean similar to paying off, but it is incorrect to apply the term decommission to a RCN warship.

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