



Veterans Affairs
Canada

Anciens Combattants
Canada

Speaking notes for

Maurice Vellacott

Member of Parliament for Saskatoon-Wanuskewin

Speaking Notes

HMCS *Unicorn* Naval Community Dinner

Friday, May 2, 2008
405-24th Street East
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
Event time: 7:00 p.m.

Canada

Distinguished Veterans, Commander Hanson, members of the Canadian Forces, ladies and gentlemen, good evening.

On behalf of my colleague, the Honourable Greg Thompson, Minister of Veterans Affairs, I am very honoured to participate in this special event marking the 65th anniversary of the Battle of the Atlantic. Minister Thompson could not be here today as he is in Halifax this weekend leading the official Government of Canada delegation to mark this important anniversary.

Tonight, on the eve of our Battle of the Atlantic ceremonies, we commemorate and honour those who served in one of the most harrowing struggles of the Second World War—the Battle of the Atlantic. It was a military engagement that lasted six long years.

It brought the conflicts and the horrors of the Second World War right to our waters and to Canadian shores.

This battle was fought on the vast battleground of the Atlantic Ocean, where it not only threatened the lives of service personnel, but endangered the lives of many Canadian civilians and sailors.

It was this bitter battle to sustain the vital lifeline of supplies throughout six years of war that caused British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to write in later years:

“The only thing that ever really frightened me during the war was the U-boat peril.”

That statement puts the importance of the Battle of the Atlantic in the clearest and starkest of contexts.

Our Merchant Navy sailed under the constant threat of knowing that a single torpedo from a German U-boat aimed at their merchant vessel often loaded with ammunition and other dangerous cargoes made their chance of survival uncertain. Yet the Merchant Navy crews heroically rose to the challenge.

This Sunday, we will honour the contributions of the Royal Canadian Navy and Air Force who provided the armed escort to the merchant marine convoys during the Battle of the Atlantic. Our Canadian naval and air forces were among the most successful of Allied forces in finding and destroying U-boats.

Together, this “triple threat” won battle by battle. Together, the Royal Canadian Navy, Canada’s Merchant Navy and the Royal Canadian Air Force won the war.

Their sacrifices allow us to gather here of our own free will and honour their contributions. So tonight, we remember the heroes of the Battle of the Atlantic, those brave men and women who fought for our freedom on the largest battlefield of the Second World War—the Atlantic Ocean.

They continuously risked their lives with the imminent threat of torpedo attack, and the risk of transporting dangerous goods, all while at the mercy of the sea and ever changing weather conditions.

I would ask you to take a moment to pay tribute to the lives of the many that were lost at sea during the six-year battle.

Remember the more than 2,000 members of the Royal Canadian Navy who died in the Battle of the Atlantic, along with more than 900 members of the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Remember the 1,700 who served on the Merchant Navy's "Atlantic run," one in seven who did not return home.

For those who lost their lives in the frigid waters of the North Atlantic and those who lived to tell the tale are why we are gathered here today to offer the gratitude of our nation.

On this occasion, we not only remember these brave men and women, but also honour those who continue to serve our country in Afghanistan and other areas of conflict. Helping Afghanistan continues the noble Canadian tradition of taking an active role in bringing stability and peace to parts of the world that have seen turmoil and upheaval.

And as well tonight, we commemorate another special occasion—the 85th anniversary of Her Majesty's Canadian Ship *Unicorn* as a Naval Reserve Division in Saskatoon. Congratulations!

HMCS *Unicorn* has served both the community of Saskatoon and Canada with great dignity, honour and pride. HMCS *Unicorn* has been, and will continue to be, a

great credit to our nation.

In closing, we must never forget Canada's brave men and women. Never forget their accomplishments or their sacrifices.

They have our eternal gratitude for it is a debt we can never repay.

Lest we forget.

Thank you.

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