

HMCS Drummondville by Jean Thibeault

Canada's involvement in the Second World War on September 10, 1939 resulted in an unprecedented mobilization of the country's resources; Canada therefore committed itself to producing equipment and training troops, but still had to return them to their destination, that is, in England. In fact, crossing the Atlantic involves serious dangers, caused above all by the presence of German submarines and by the mines they sow on the waterways. The Germans pushed the audacity to the point of coming to the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1942 to torpedo merchant ships or warships.

To counter this threat, the Canadian Navy, which had only 15 ships at the beginning of the war, undertook the construction of ships to ensure the safety of sea routes.

These include Bangor-class minesweepers, produced in 55 copies and responsible for escorting convoys to track down German submarines and destroy the mines they spread on the shipping routes. The government named these minesweepers after Canadian cities. Granby, Lachine, Trois-Rivières, among others, are assigned a ship, in recognition of the generosity of the populations to the war effort. Then comes the turn of Drummondville.

The Canadian Vickers of Montreal invites the authorities to attend the launch of one of its ships that will bear the name Drummondville. MP Armand Cloutier, Mayor Arthur Rajotte and members of the council attend the baptism of the NCSM Drummondville on June 26, 1941 "in an eastern port", according to the terminology authorized by censorship.

The honor done to the city, however, was accompanied by the moral obligation to contribute to the well-being of the sailors; the council therefore voted to purchase three radio devices for the crew. Soon, the 65 officers and sailors suggested that they would like to receive gifts for the holidays. A committee of the Chamber of Commerce is therefore created to periodically provide "sweets" to the crew. He sent him three phonographs, records and cigarettes. Lieutenant J.P. Fraser thanked the population for another shipment in June 1942 including a portable gramophone, "records", wool, fruit cakes, a washing machine and 100 cigarettes per sailor.

The NCSM Drummondville measures 55 meters, travels at 16 knots (30 km/h) and carries a staff of 6 officers and 77 crew members. These small and low-rayed buildings are unstable vessels that are difficult to maneuver. The ship J253 was put into service on October 30, 1941 and was assigned to various defense groups in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, with St. John's, Newfoundland or Halifax as the home port, as well as the Western Local Escort Force (WELF).

The main function of the minesweepers is to escort the ships on their way to England, a dangerous mission, because they precede the other ships in order to destroy the mines laid by the U-Boats.

The first mission of the Drummondville was in May 1942, from Sydney, Nova Scotia to Quebec, when he escorted a single ship. Then, on July 6, three ships out of the twelve of the convoy escorted by the Drummondville were sunk in a few minutes off the coast of Cap-Chat by the U-132. The minesweeper then collects 34 survivors of the British cargo Dinaric. As for the submarine, it was severely damaged by the underwater grenade dam that it wiped for two hours

and managed to reach its base in La Rochelle. The NCSM Drummondville escorts a total of 21 convoys from or to Liverpool, with Halifax or New York.



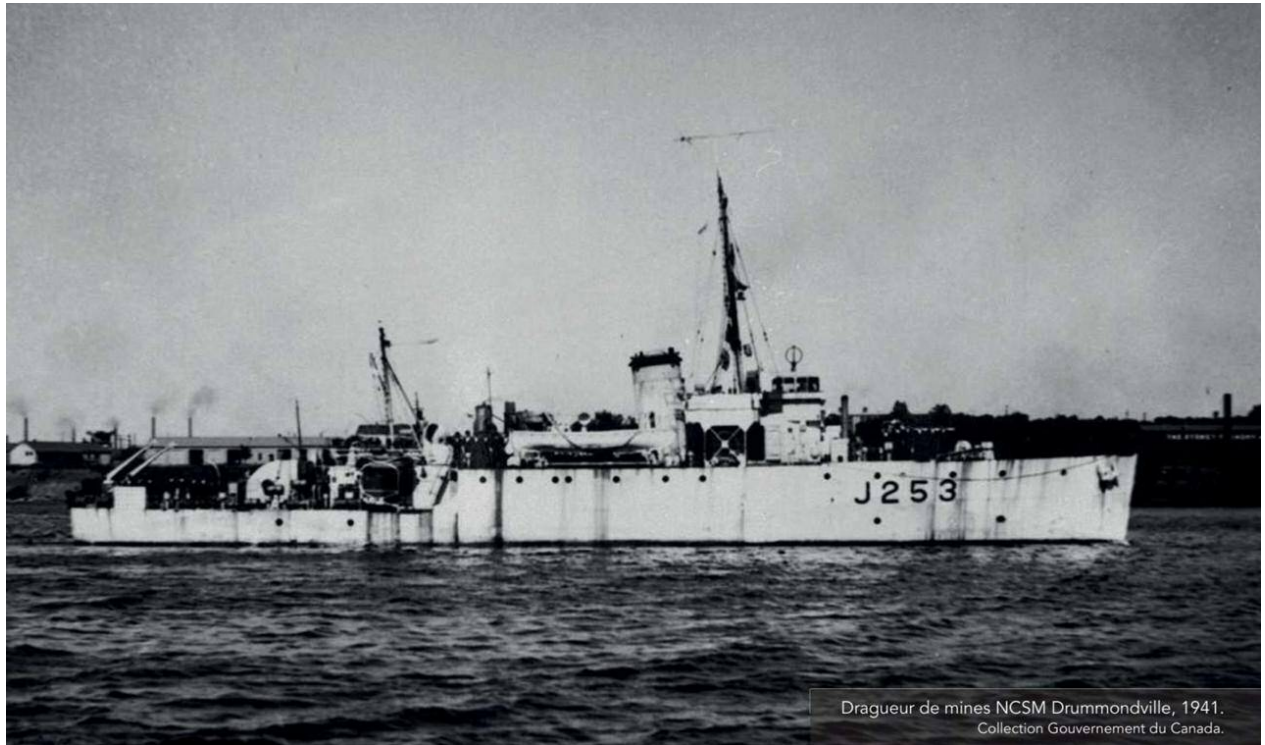
Membres de l'équipage du NCSM Drummondville, 1943.
Collection William Johns.

Crew members of the NCSM Drummondville, 1943

As a starting point. The navy withdrew it from service on October 29, 1945, put it in reserve and eventually sold it in 1958. It was then converted into a merchant ship under the name SS Fort Albany, but its commercial career ended on December 8, 1963, when it sank after colliding with the Norwegian cargo ship Procyon near Sorel.

Four of the ten crew perished in the shipwreck. The ship's carcass was removed from the water the following year, then sent to the wreckage.

The population of Drummondville is not forgotten, because the navy expresses its gratitude to the cities that "adopted" a ship during the war. On May 27, 1947, Lieutenant Pierre Gendron was received by the municipal authorities during a ceremony where he gave them the minesweeper's bell "as a memory and as an expression of gratitude to those who devoted their time and money to the benefit of his valiant crew". This precious memory of an eventful time is kept at the Canadian Legion of Drummondville.



HMCS DRUMMONDVILLE J253