



The Battle of the Atlantic Memorial at HMCS Prevost in London, Ont. The memorial receives a constant flow of visitors. Many are veterans with mobility issues, which makes access difficult or limited.

## Touching the stones

**By Denis Flanagan CLD**  
Manager of Membership  
and Public Relations



*Landscape Ontario's London Chapter, in partnership with the Naval Association of Canada (London), is building a project of significant historical importance on the site of the HMCS Prevost,*

*located at the forks of the Thames River in London, Ont. The design was created by Barry Murphy from Ron Koudys Landscape Architects and LO's London Chapter has decided to support the project with funds, hardscape material, plants and countless volunteer hours.*

*To fully understand why this project will mean so much to thousands of Canadian families, here is an excerpt and photo from an article by David Lewis, Naval Association of Canada (London) titled, Touching the Stones.*

**T**he Battle of the Atlantic Memorial is a tribute to the ships and men of the Royal Canadian Navy, lost in the longest running battle of the Second

World War. It is a stunning and moving memorial, created with extreme gratitude for those who made the supreme sacrifice and whose final resting places cannot be marked by graves.

The memorial is built into the grass hillside at HMCS Prevost. A series of 25 blue granite stones traverse the hillside. Each stone is engraved with the name, image, hull number and date the ship was lost during the battle. There is also a stone honouring the sacrifice of the Merchant Navy. The memorial rests in central Canada as the lost sailors represented here came from small towns and large cities from across the country.

As much as we remember the ships and the gallant names of Valleyfield, Albarni, Louisburg and others, it is not the steel and iron we commemorate. It is the sons and fathers, the brothers and friends, the grandsons loved and lost. It is their service and sacrifice which permeates this memorial.

The memorial remembers the 18-year-old sailor bundled heavily against the bitter cold, standing watch on the open bridge of an RCN Corvette. Around him is the freezing North Atlantic and in the moonlight are the many plodding hulls of the convoy he's protecting. It remembers the blinding flash, being hurled into the air, and slamming down into the icy water. It remembers the

struggle to surface and the weight of the black arctic water slowly over-whelming. It also remembers the Sunday morning knock on the door, the telegram, the words "we deeply regret to inform you..."

As much as the Battle of the Atlantic Memorial has become a place of remembrance, it has also become a place of healing. It is a destination for those who, for over 70 years, have had no destination. No grave. No marker.

The stones touch those who visit, and those who visit touch the stones. Two sisters from small town Quebec had their great-granddaughter drive them to HMCS Prevost to visit the memorial. In November of 1944, their 19-year-old brother was lost with HMCS Shawinigan. Tears streamed down each face as their aged hands caressed the Shawinigan stone. There was an elderly gentleman who literally clawed his way up the hill to touch the Regina stone. He had been on Regina. And the 93-year-old gentleman in the Legion jacket, accompanied by three vans of family members, who wanted to see the Spikenard stone. He had been on another ship in the convoy and had witnessed the Spikenard, with his best friend, torpedoed and sunk.

With these memories and these visitors in mind, the Naval Association of Canada (London) has launched into an ambitious landscaping project. Where these visitors once struggled on foot, or walker, or wheelchair to get across the grassy lawn to their memorial, they will now have an even, level pathway. The slippery, dangerous grass hillside is being replaced with a safe and solid stairway. It is a huge undertaking, but it will truly enhance the accessibility to the site for generations to come.

Standing at the memorial and viewing these granite symbols of sacrifice, the words of Abraham Lincoln come to mind, "We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract." His words ring true today. We do not know what constitutes 'hallowed' ground, but we do know that this grassy hillside at HMCS Prevost has changed forever.

The Naval Association of Canada (London) has set up a donation page for anyone who would like to participate in the improvements being made at the site. Visit [gofundme.com/battleatlanticmem](http://gofundme.com/battleatlanticmem)

*For more information or to get involved, contact Denis Flanagan at [dflanagan@landscapeontario.com](mailto:dflanagan@landscapeontario.com) or 905-875-1805, ext. 2303.*