

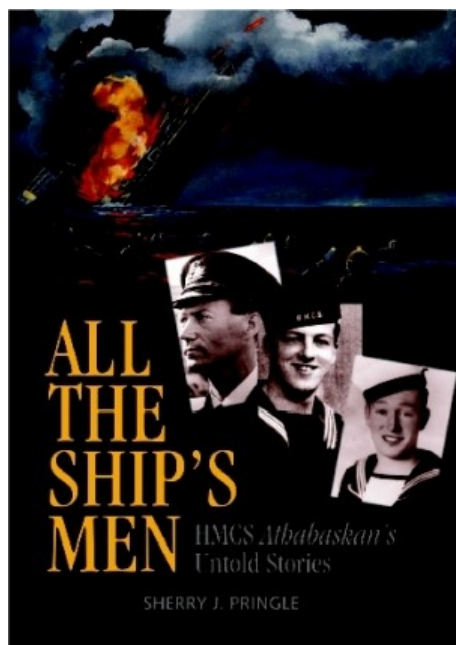
Archives & Collections Society

100 Years of Our Navy

All the Ship's Men

Lifelong Nananee resident Sherry Pringle never expected to write a book, but after pursuing her own interest in those onboard HMCS *Athabaskan* when she tragically sank in 1944, she “came to the realization that no one was recording their stories, and once they’re gone, they will be lost forever.”

HMCS *Athabaskan* G07 was a Tribal-class destroyer of the Royal Canadian Navy used in World War II. On that fateful night on April 29, 1944, a German destroyer torpedoed the *Athabaskan* near the occupied French coast of the English Channel as she was escorting a minelaying operation in preparation for the D-Day invasion. HMCS *Haida* G63, *Athabaskan*’s sister ship, was able to rescue fifty survivors hours after the *Athabaskan* sank forever beneath the ocean waves. Eighty-three more men were picked up by the Germans and became prisoners of war. Out of the 261 Canadians onboard the ship, 128 perished that night. Thirty-seven men were never found.



Pringle’s uncle, nineteen-year-old Maurice Waitson, was among the lost, only five days before his twentieth birthday. The first half of the book, “In Search for Moe,” focuses on Pringle’s personal investigation into her uncle’s young life and untimely death. Pringle soon realized, however, that her interest in the *Athabaskan* did not end there, feeling intimately connected to all of those onboard the *Athabaskan*. The second part of the book contains twenty-eight individual stories of other *Athabaskans*, drawn from interviews with survivors and their families, Red Cross war diaries, and a trip to France where she visited the graves of the deceased. Pringle insists that she is “strictly the facilitator” of these stories, helping “bring them to the public’s attention.”

Pringle feels that this book will provide closure to the families of those Canadians lost, who had no memorial service and whose bodies were never repatriated after washing up on the French coast. It also gives the *Athabaskan* and those who served on her recognition for their contributions to World War II naval operations, which have long been

overshadowed by the *Haida*. The painting on the cover is by Pringle herself, after Herb Sulkers, an *Athabaskan* survivor, asked her to capture the sinking as he remembered it.

Pringle acknowledges that her most obvious target audience will be military buffs, but she also “wants women to read it, because it’s really a story about genealogy, a tale about finding your roots.” Nevertheless, the mystery and intrigue that surround the sinking of the *Athabaskan* and the human interest stories of those onboard make it appealing to a wide audience base.

Despite its modest beginnings, Pringle’s book is enjoying nation-wide recognition that has been stimulated by the centennial of the Canadian Navy. The Navy has even offered to officially launch the book onboard today’s third HMCS *Athabaskan* on June 30, as part of the Halifax celebrations. Pringle is still “having a hard time grasping all this,” but admits that “it’s a real thrill.”

On July 8th from 1pm to 3pm, Pringle will be at *The Victory* on 205 Main Street, Picton, to sell and sign copies of her book. Pringle's book signing is part of *100 Years of Our Navy*, the Archives and Collections Society's celebration of the centennial of the Canadian Navy, ongoing from July 3rd to August 8th. This unique exhibition includes a display of rarely-seen naval photographs and other memorabilia from people in the Quinte region who served in the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), the Wrens (WRCNS), the Sea Cadets, and the Maritime Command of today's Canadian Forces. Complementing the exhibit will be an original ACS-produced documentary containing interviews with many of the contributors from Prince Edward County, Belleville, Trenton, and Kingston.

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A federally incorporated not-for-profit foundation, Letters of Patent 367302-2
Canadian Charitable Organization 88721 9921 RR0001