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# TRIDENT

THE NEWSPAPER OF MARITIME FORCES ATLANTIC SINCE 1966 • LE JOURNAL DES FORCES MARITIMES DE L'ATLANTIQUE DEPUIS 1966

## Operation HORIZON

*Chief Petty Officer 1st Class Brett Marchand, Coxswain aboard His Majesty's Canadian Ship Charlottetown, delivers a speech on February 5 prior to a port visit to Mayport Florida. The ship left Halifax earlier this month for a six-month deployment to the Indo-Pacific region.*

MS ALEXANDRE HEAGLE





Representatives from Fleetway Inc. and Modest Tree.

IRVING SHIPBUILDING



A concept image of a future River-class Destroyer.

IRVING SHIPBUILDING

# Nova Scotia company tapped for River-Class Destroyer training programs

By Trident Staff

Modest Tree, a Nova Scotia-based company, has been awarded a \$32-million subcontract by Fleetway Inc. to develop training systems for the Royal Canadian Navy's (RCN) transition from its Halifax-class frigates to the future River-class Destroyers.

The training platform will draw directly from the destroyer's digital ship design data and manufacturer documentation, translating engineering models into interactive training environments. The idea is to have sailors familiar with ship systems well before commissioning, with the aim of reducing the time needed to bring crews up to speed once the ships begin entering service.

Modest Tree claims to specialize in 3D training and digital engineering solutions for defence and industry, and has

been operating in Nova Scotia since its founding in 2011.

According to a press release announcing the contract, Fleetway personnel will also be trained to manage ongoing courseware updates for the training systems, keeping materials current as the ships move through construction and into the decades of planned service life.

"In complex warships, preparation is decisive," Rear-Admiral (Ret'd) John Newton, Managing Director at Fleetway Inc., is quoted as saying. "By generating training directly from the ship's digital design, we are compressing the learning curve and forging crews ready to operate Canada's most advanced surface combatants from day one."

Fleetway, also a Nova Scotia company, was awarded a broader contract earlier this year by shipbuilder Irving Ship-

building Inc. to provide specialist support for construction of the River-class Destroyers, covering the first three ships in the program. That work includes a class supportability solution, training, technical data products, and engineering support. Both Fleetway and Irving Shipbuilding are part of the J.D. Irving, Ltd. group of companies.

Canada has committed to building 15 River-class Destroyers under the National Shipbuilding Strategy. The ships are intended to serve as the RCN's primary surface combat capability, designed to deploy independently or alongside allied navies for extended periods anywhere in the world. Their tasking will span a wide range of operations; from high-end combat at sea and support to allies ashore, to counter-piracy, interdiction and embargo enforcement,

humanitarian assistance, search and rescue, and Arctic and coastal sovereignty patrols.

The transition from the Halifax-class, which has formed the backbone of Canada's surface fleet since the early 1990s, marks a significant generational shift for the RCN. The River-class ships are set to be larger, more capable, and more technologically complex than their predecessors, meaning early and thorough training will be important for naval personnel who will eventually sail as part of the new fleet.

The announcement was framed by both companies as a contribution to Canada's defence industrial base, with Fleetway and Modest Tree both citing the creation of skilled technology jobs in Atlantic Canada as part of the contract's value.

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*Michael, Debra and Donald Pryor surround little Anthony with the sign he wore around his neck to welcome his Dad home from the Gulf War.*

The family portrait and image of little two-year-old Anthony would land in Sentinel magazine. These family mementoes marked the beginning of Michael Pryor's service, and seeped into the next generation.

#### **From Truro to the Gulf**

Born and raised just outside of Truro, Nova Scotia, Pryor joined the Royal Canadian Navy in 1987. He was working maintenance at a hotel when he joined the Navy for steady work and better pay. After basic training at CFB Cornwallis, he trained as a Marine Engineering Mechanic, advancing through technical trade and temporarily serving aboard ships like HMCS *Annapolis* before being posted to HMCS *Athabaskan*, an Iroquois-class destroyer.

In 1990, at just 27 years old, Pryor deployed to the Arabian Gulf as part of Operation Friction. HMCS *Athabaskan* sailed into a live war zone—escorting coalition vessels, protecting hospital ships and operating in waters seeded with naval mines. At one point, the ship and crew helped clear a path through a minefield after the USS *Princeton* struck two mines, allowing the damaged ship and tug to move south for repairs.

“That’s when it really hit me that this wasn’t an exercise,” he said.

Below decks, life was cramped. More than 50 sailors slept in triple decker bunks stacked above fuel and water tanks, below the waterline. In peacetime, three-deck hatches on these destroyers stayed open. But in a body of water strewn with mines, the safety of the vessel came before the crew’s comfort and the mess-deck hatches were shut to preserve the ship’s integrity if a mine detonated.

## **Michael and Anthony Pryor**

A Gulf War sailor, a family on the jetty and the legacy that followed

By Veterans Affairs Canada

*Editors note: This story was originally published as part of Veterans Affairs Canada features marking the 35th anniversary of the end of the Gulf War. Visit <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/en/remembrance/get-involved/35th-anniversary-end-gulf-war> for more.*

#### **Welcoming home daddy**

It was a grey day when Her Majesty’s Canadian Ship (HMCS) *Athabaskan* sailed back into Halifax Harbour after months in the Arabian Gulf. The Atlantic air was heavy with mist. On the jetty, a young sailor’s family stood in the anxious crowd; a wife, parents, siblings and two small boys. One of them, barely old enough to understand what war was, clutched a handmade sign that read:

“Welcome Home Daddy”.

For Leading Seaman Michael Pryor, the moment he spied them alleviated months at sea in high temperatures, sailing in a war zone near mines and the anxiety of working and sleeping below the waterline.

A Halifax Herald photographer was perfectly poised to capture Pryor’s reunion kiss with his wife Debra, which made the front page the following day.



Debra, Anthony and Michael Pryor at Anthony's 2024 graduation from Dalhousie University Medical School.

"You lived with the same people, day in and day out," Pryor said. "You learned to get along. We didn't have cell phones. We had each other, our books, our cards. That was it."

He remembers watching Tomahawk missiles arc off American battleships just miles away. After the war, he remembers the thick, acrid air from Kuwait's burning oil fields, so heavy with smoke and particulate that you couldn't stay on the upper decks for long. The ship's air filtration system's filters had to be cleaned regularly.

Amid the danger, there was pride in the professionalism of the crew and trust in experienced shipmates and the men who sailed below.

"I felt safe with the people I was with," he said. "They were great engineers and solid sailors."

#### Perfume-scented love letters

Letters from home, which took weeks to arrive, were passed out from the mailbags on the mess decks. Pryor remembers excitedly opening envelopes that smelled like his wife's signature

"Eternity" perfume.

"I knew they were from her," he said.

To show support for the troops, Halifax businesses sent care packages for Christmas to those serving in the Gulf. One of the packages had a bright yellow Walkman for each of them. Sailors bought cassette tapes in Middle East foreign ports. "Small things like rock and roll blasting in your earphones helped when you were 50 days at sea, setting endurance records, and pushing through the monotony and tension of wartime operations," he said.

They didn't talk much about the work they were doing to friends and family at home.

"Loose lips sink ships," Pryor said. "You kept it close."

#### Coming home

When HMCS *Athabaskan* finally returned to Halifax in the spring of 1991, families crowded the harbour's edge. Pryor's eldest son, Donald, was old enough to remember the day. His youngest, Anthony, was just two and a half, holding that sign he would later only know from photographs.

Pryor would go on to serve nearly 35 years. Today, he works at the Halifax Shipyard as a technical inspector of mechanical systems for the Department of National Defence. He is still keeping ships safe, still serving in a different way. He is deeply proud of his service in the Gulf, the professionalism of the sailors he served beside and his time as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

"Canadians need to be strong, now more than ever," he said.

#### The son who followed

Anthony Pryor doesn't remember the day his father came home. But he remembers the photos, the magazines and the stories from his childhood.

"Those pictures were everywhere," he said. "It was a cool story growing up."

Like most military kids, he also

remembers missing his Dad during long deployments.

"I missed him a lot," Anthony said.

"That part stays with you."

Today, Anthony wears the uniform himself. As a member of the CAF, he is an Army doctor completing a two-year residency in Gander, Newfoundland and Labrador, with a focus on emergency medicine. He's drawn to the same high-pressure environments his father navigated decades earlier at sea.

"I thrive in chaos," he said with a laugh. "That's where I'm at my best."

Hearing his father talk about navigating minefields and working in a war zone made an impression on him as a kid.

"It was freaky," he explained. "There must have been so much fear doing that. You have to respect service like that, putting yourself in harm's way for the greater good."

When asked about deployments, Anthony laughed.

"Honestly, I have more fear of postings than deployments. But the work? The adrenaline? That's the right fit for me."

#### Military families

For military families, service isn't carried by one person. It lives in the waiting, the letters that smell like home, the children who grow up with stories instead of memories and the strength of spouses who keep the home fires burning.

It isn't just about thanking those in uniform. It's about recognizing the families who stood on the jetty in the rain. The kids who waved signs they wouldn't remember. The partners who waited through long silences. And the generations who carry forward the pride of service - and its cost.

With courage, integrity and loyalty, Michael and Anthony Pryor are leaving their mark. They are CAF Veterans and members.



## VAC hosts Gulf War commemorative ceremony in Halifax

Veterans Affairs Canada, in partnership with Persian Gulf Veterans of Canada and other partners, will commemorate the 35th anniversary of the end of the Gulf War with events in Halifax and Ottawa in February and March 2026.

In Halifax, a commemorative ceremony will be held at Royal Canadian Legion Fairview Branch 142 on February 26, 2026, beginning at 9:30 a.m. The event will bring together veterans, serving members, and community representatives to reflect on the service and sacrifices of those who participated in the Gulf War. Legion Branch 142 is located at 50 Hillcrest St. in Halifax.

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Maritime Forces Pacific leadership, Sailor 1st Class (S1) Matt Blades and his wife S1 Margaret Blades (centre), and his rescuers pose for a group photo during their meeting five days after S1 Blades' rescue.

RODNEY VENIS

## Hours in the Pacific: The rescue of Sailor 1st Class Matt Blades

By Archana Cini,  
The Lookout

**One moment Sailor 1st Class (S1)** Matt Blades was at the helm of a Rigid Hulled Inflatable Boat (RHIB). The next, he was fighting for his life in the Pacific.

“My whole thought process was that they’re either going to find me, or there’s nothing else I could have done,” said S1 Blades. What followed was a rescue effort that left S1 Blades, his rescuers, and the local community with a deeper appreciation for training, teamwork, and the fragility of life at sea.

S1 Blades and his wife S1 Margaret Blades also met some of his rescuers, Rear-Admiral (RAdm) David Patchell, Commander of Maritime Forces Pacific and Chief Petty Officer 1st Class (CPO1) Jonathon Sorensen, to thank the team and share more about his experience, just five days after his near-death experience.

The incident occurred east of Bentinck Island, where S1 Blades was operating a RHIB as part of his sentry duties with a fellow sailor.

“The waters were getting pretty choppy, so I actually tuned the radio [on the RHIB] to channel 16 in case someone fell overboard,” said S1 Blades about the moments leading up to the incident. “Obviously, this was unknowing that it would eventually be me,” he laughed. S1 Blades fell overboard at approximately 2:40 p.m. into rough waters amid stormy conditions. “I was coming up over a

wave when another one hit me and made me lose my balance,” he shared. “With that, I fell overboard and took the kill switch with me.”

The kill switch of a RHIB is a critical safety device intended to immediately stop the vessel’s engine if the operator is accidentally separated from the helm. This prevents a runaway vessel as well as potential accidents. However, S1 Blades was pulled from the RHIB and, given the day’s conditions and water currents, was unable to return to it.

At approximately 2:45 p.m., a mayday call was received by Search Mission Coordinator John Millman of the Joint Rescue Co-ordination Centre (JRCC).

“I asked the sailor who made the call if he could see S1 Blades in the water,” said Millman. “He said, ‘No, I watched him go under.’”

With more than 42 years of experience working for the Canadian Coast Guard and the JRCC, Millman then began to estimate where the RHIB could be located. To do this, Millman utilized the shape of the shore; current and wind information; and data from the caller to begin narrowing down a search location.

The team searching for S1 Blades and the RHIB included: a CH-148 Cyclone helicopter; a Cormorant helicopter; His Majesty’s Canadian Ship (HMCS) Regina; an RCN Orca-class patrol vessel; a CC-295 Kingfisher aircraft; and the Canadian and United States Coast Guards.

Once the RHIB was located, crews then began to search the area for S1 Blades.

At approximately 5 p.m., S1 Blades was spotted in the water by Major (Maj) Dennis Mann from the Cyclone aircraft, right in the middle of the estimated sector search pattern provided by Millman. “It really was a full crew effort to get me to the right spot where I was able to see him, Maj Mann said. I just happened to be at the right side of the aircraft when we went by.” S1 Blades was then rescued aboard the closest vessel, the Pacific Guardian from Pacific Pilotage Authority, a civilian company boat that also responded to the mayday call, and immediately transferred to local emergency services. S1 Blades had spent over two hours in rough, frigid waters.

When asked what factors led to S1 Blades’ rescue, Maj Gregory Clarke from the JRCC said, “Ultimately, the JRCC doesn’t rely on luck.” “We approach a search and rescue (SAR) mission to the best of our ability with experience, tools, procedures, methods, manuals, and our crews,” said Maj Clarke.

“We use drift modelling, thermal cameras, infrared scanning, night vision goggles, and so much more when it comes to finding someone.” Millman and Maj Clarke also explained the concept of functional time. “Functional time is the time that someone can be expected to help themselves in a scenario like this. After accounting for what we thought S1

Blades was wearing and the conditions of the day, we predicted this to be 4.0 hours,” said Millman.

“How long we search for someone is at least twice, if not three times the functional time,” explained Maj Clarke. “So, we were prepared to search all night long.”

Since the incident, S1 Blades has made a full recovery. For those involved, the rescue was a testament to the professionalism and detailed science underpinning modern SAR.

At the reunion, RAdm Patchell presented those involved in the successful SAR mission with challenge coins. “We owe you a tremendous amount of thanks,” he said. “We answer around 2,500 SAR calls a year, but there’s something different when it’s one of ours we recover. Thank you for saving a life this week.”

When S1 Blades was asked by RAdm Patchell if he had any fears about going back aboard a RHIB in the future, he replied, “Oh no, none at all.” The contrast is striking: S1 Blades’ rescue came just four months after a very different moment at sea, his July 2025 wedding to his wife S1 Margaret Blades, also conducted aboard a RHIB. Ultimately, this rescue will be remembered for its human impact: on the RCN sailor who survived, his loved ones waiting, and the rescuers whose dedication and excellence ensured he survived.



## Stad Band member on exchange helps mark Waitangi Day

Sailor 1st Class (S1) Melodie Peet is seen performing with the Royal New Zealand Navy Band during public performances and ceremonial events in Paihia, New Zealand. The visiting musician, a member of the Stadacona Band of the Royal Canadian Navy, joined her New Zealand counterparts in entertaining large crowds and taking part in key ceremonial activities marking Waitangi Day, including events at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds. The national day commemorates the 1840 signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, a foundational agreement between Mōri and the British Crown that shaped the creation of modern New Zealand.

S1 Peet's participation is part of CANZEX, an ongoing exchange program between the two Navy bands, meant to foster professional development, cultural understanding, and musical collaboration. During the engagement, she contributed to ceremonial elements including the Guard of Honour, Beat Retreat and Ceremonial Sunset, representing Canada alongside New Zealand bandmates.

Now in its fourth consecutive year, CANZEX continues to strengthen the relationship between the two bands. The initiative has also included exchanges in the opposite direction, with Royal New Zealand Navy musicians previously travelling to Canada to play alongside the Stadacona Band.

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# HMCS *Queen Charlotte* hosts wellness-focused training night

By Trident Staff

Members of His Majesty's Canadian Ship (HMCS) *Queen Charlotte* took part in a special yoga session during their Wednesday-night training on January 21, unrolling mats beneath nautical flags for an evening of guided stretches and poses.

The class was designed to improve morale, support mental wellness, and strengthen unit outreach efforts, according to organizer Sailor 3rd Class (S3) Faith Harrison, who also noted the connection to Bell Let's Talk Day, observed on January 21.

The session began with breathwork to create a supportive and inclusive atmosphere. Harrison, who holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, incorporated research on the mental health benefits of yoga into the session's design. In keeping with the focus on mental wellness, several of the unit's padres were present to offer

support.

"Knowing firsthand how challenging this time of year can be—whether due to seasonal affective disorder, grief, holiday stress, or the desire to become more active for a New Year's resolution—I wanted to support my fellow sailors at the unit," she said.

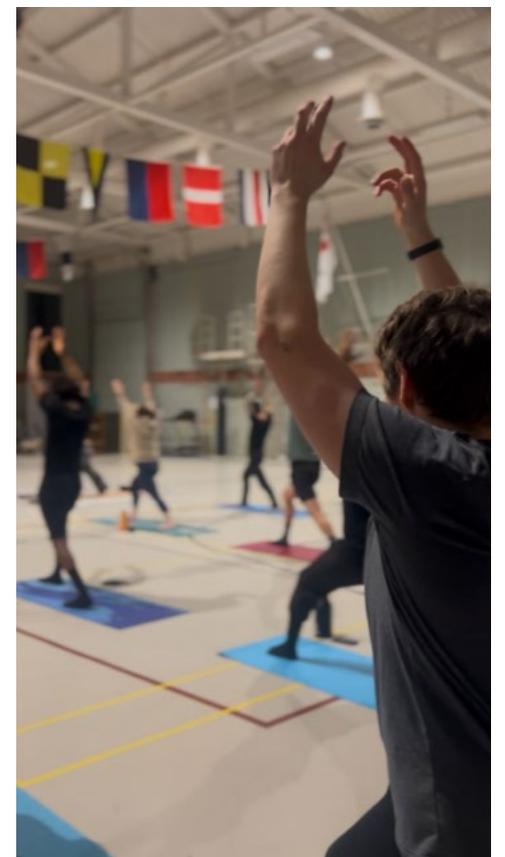
"My hope was to offer an opportunity to discover an activity that may help them as much as it has helped me and perhaps inspire them to begin their own yoga practice."

Harrison said the session generated strong interest among unit members and hopes to offer similar events in the future. She also plans to pursue her 200-hour yoga teacher certification to further expand her skills and support both her unit and the broader community.

The session was also planned as an outreach initiative, offering civilians

interested in the Royal Canadian Navy an opportunity to visit HMCS *Queen Charlotte* through a low-pressure activity. Members were encouraged to bring guests, while recruiters were available to answer questions and share information about naval service. Such outreach efforts are a regular part of the unit's programming, with past initiatives including Sailor for a Day events and an upcoming Naval Environmental Training Program-focused event later this month that will also welcome civilian participants.

Harrison also expressed thanks to the PEI Military Family Resource Centre for donating yoga mats for the event and future sessions. Local businesses Oxygen Yoga and Fitness and Charlottetown Yoga Space also contributed complimentary studio passes for prize draws throughout the evening.



S3 Harrison leads members of HMCS *Queen Charlotte* through a Yoga session.

SUBMITTED



## Sailors recognized aboard HMCS *Frédéric Rolette*

Members of the ship's company of His Majesty's Canadian Ship *Frédéric Rolette* were recognized during a recent ceremony marking promotions and career achievements, with Commanding Officer Commander Jolene Lisi making the presentation. Seen here, Petty Officer 2nd Class Conor Smith and Lieutenant (Navy) (Lt(N)) Reeves Matheson were promoted to their current ranks.

Also recognized for professional accomplishments were:

- Chief Petty Officer 2nd Class Marlin Morton: Awarded a Commanding Officer's Bravo Zulu and Coin in recognition of his dedication and service to the ship and its company.
- Sailor 1st Class (S1) Ritcey-Gale and S1 Nahatchewitz: Harry Dewolf-Class Roundsperson qualifications
- S1 Harrison: Operations Service Medal—Expedition for service on Operation CARIBBE.
- Lt (N) Perigo: Gun Metal Sea Service Insignia



# SPORTS & FITNESS



The 14 Wing Greenwood Bombers were gold-medal winners at the CAF Atlantic Region Senior Men's Hockey Championship.

SUBMITTED

## Greenwood takes gold as Shearwater hosts senior men's hockey

By Trident Staff

The 12 Wing Shearwater Flyers made a run for the gold at the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Atlantic Region Men's Senior Hockey Championship, taking on the defending champion 14 Wing Greenwood Bombers in a final game on February 13 on home ice at the Shearwater arena.

Despite a back-and-forth opening period, the Bombers took a 4-2 lead to the second and expanded it from there on the way to a 7-3 championship win. This marks four consecutive regional gold medals for 14 Wing's senior men's team.

The early part of the tournament, which began on February 10, saw teams

from Halifax, Shearwater, Greenwood and Gagetown play through a round-robin format. The week started strong for our local teams, with Shearwater taking a 10-1 win over the eventual champions from Greenwood, while the Halifax Mariners had their own 3-1 victory against Greenwood. This led to a quarterfinal

(4-2 Greenwood over Gagetown) and a semifinal (7-4 Greenwood over Halifax) to determine a final matchup for the Flyers, who had the No. 1 seed after round-robin play.

Congratulations to the repeat champions from Greenwood!

## Shearwater Arena offers open skate for CAF members

By PSP Halifax

Hockey season may be in full swing, but not everyone wants to chase the puck.

Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members looking to simply enjoy time on the ice are invited to take part in a weekly adult open skate at the Shearwater Arena, held Wednesdays from 2 – 3 p.m. The CAF members-only session offers a relaxed opportunity to enjoy ice skating outside of organized sport.

All participants are required to wear skates and CSA-approved hockey hel-

rets while on the ice. Equipment is not available for sign-out at the arena, and pucks or sticks are not permitted during the session.

The initiative was introduced to provide CAF members with accessible ice time without the structure or demands of a specific ice sport. Those who are new to skating or looking to improve their skills can request basic on-ice instruction by contacting Jamie Mercer at [Jamie.mercer@forces.gc.ca](mailto:Jamie.mercer@forces.gc.ca) in advance.

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