

Canadian Navy Commemorates the Heroic Sacrifice of Lieutenant Hampton Gray

Second Lieutenant Christopher Daniel

The Canadian Naval Air Group held an official commemorative ceremony in honour of the only Canadian naval Victoria Cross (VC) recipient of the Second World War – Lieutenant Robert Hampton Gray VC, DSC, RCNVR – at the National War Memorial and Valiants Memorial in Ottawa on 19 May 2010.

The event was attended by Vice-Admiral Dean McFadden, Commander Maritime Command, Brigadier-General Dwight Davies, representing the Chief of the Air Staff, Peter Mills, Veterans Affairs Canada, and diplomatic representatives from allied countries. As well as an official wreath-laying ceremony, the commemoration included a bugler from the Stadacona band playing “The Last Post” and “Reveille” and a bagpipe rendition of the “Lament” and the “Rouse.” “Today we recognize the achievements of Canadian naval aviation and we remember the heroic deeds of Lieutenant Gray,” said Vice-Admiral McFadden. “His service is an inspiration to all of us,” he noted.

On 9 August 1945, during one of the last operational flying days of the war in the Pacific, Lt. Gray climbed into his aircraft and prepared to lead his flight of seven Corsairs in the attack on Matsushima airfield from HMS *Formidable*. To avoid anti-aircraft fire, Lt. Gray decided to approach Onagawa Bay from the mainland. He entered into a rapid descent in order to get the aircraft down to sea level for the short bombing run of *Amakusa*, the largest Japanese warship in the harbour.

Despite the risk, Lt. Gray fearlessly attacked *Amakusa*. As the citation for his VC stated, “[i]n the face of fire from shore batteries and a heavy concentration of fire from some five warships Lieutenant Gray pressed home his attack, flying very low in order to ensure success, and, although he was hit and his aircraft was in flames, he obtained at least one direct hit, sinking the destroyer.” Lt. Gray was one of the last Canadians to die during World War II, and was the last Canadian to be awarded the VC. His VC is displayed at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

He is commemorated, with other Canadians who died or were buried at sea during the First and Second World Wars, at the Halifax Memorial in Point Pleasant Park, Halifax, Nova Scotia. The Royal Canadian Legion hall in Nelson, British Columbia, and the wardroom of HMCS *Tecumseh*, his RCNVR home unit, also bear plaques in his honour.

A memorial service honouring Lt. Gray’s act of bravery was held in 2006 and a memorial erected at Onagawa Bay,



Sub-Lieutenant Hampton Gray, RCNVR, on graduation.



Vice-Admiral Dean McFadden, Commander Maritime Command, lays a wreath honouring Lieutenant Hampton Gray at the National War Memorial in Ottawa, May 2010.

just metres away from where his plane crashed. This is the only memorial dedicated to a foreign warrior on Japanese soil.

Lt. Gray is one of 14 figures commemorated at the Valiants Memorial in Ottawa. 🇨🇦

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