



A research note on the history of ships, places, organisations and events associated with the
Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA)

The Fort name plaques

Thomas A Adams MBE

Introduction

A range of Canadian-built dry cargo ships with an average capacity in region of 10,000 tons were built under the auspicious of the Government of Canada. The design was a version of the 'North Sands' type that originated from the UK yard of J L Thompson & Sons, Sunderland.

These dry-cargo ships are frequently described as 'Canadian-built Liberty ships'. The Canadian shipyards constructed over 350 standard ships that were categorised as the:

- 'North Sands type' with coal-fired machinery,
- 'Canadian type' with dual fuel oil/coal machinery, and
- 'Victory type' with oil-fired machinery.

A substantial number went to HM Government under bareboat charter. These were given FORT names and the Ministry of War Transport placed them under commercial

management. Post war six Victory and two Canadian hulls were fitted out to serve in various roles as Royal Fleet Auxiliaries. Although not designed for or indeed suitable for replenishment-at-sea, a number were fitted with limited equipment enabling them to undertake this function.

The builders of these ships are known to have placed a plaque in the officer's saloon to explain the North American origins of the ship's name. A verbatim copy of these plaques is reproduced here.



FORT BEAUHARNOIS

Stores ship, Fort class (Victory type)

FORT BEAUHARNOIS

(ex SS CORNISH PARK)

Built by

West Coast Shipbuilders Limited, Vancouver BC

Keel laid June 20, 1944 Launched August 31, 1944

Completed October 1944

Commissioned by the French Government, Jesuit Father Charlevoix sailed for the New Worlds early in the 18th Century in search of a route to the Western Sea. His explorations through the Illinois country and Louisiana led him to believe that a line of fur-trading and missionary posts should be established at once in the Mississippi valley.

This suggestion was adopted and in 1727 Fort Beauharnois was built at Point de Sable on Lake Papin in the present State of Minnesota and named after the contemporary Governor of New France. The following year was remarkable for floods and the rising waters plus the hostility of the Indians forced many of the traders and missionaries to withdraw.

Several years later Fort Beauharnois was rebuilt out of reach of the high water and traders are recorded there as late as 1745-46. By 176, however, travellers were describing the ruins of the early fort.

To commemorate this fort in the joint history of Canada and the United States this cargo ship has been named the

SS FORT BEAUHARNOIS

Wartime Shipbuilding Limited
Montreal, Canada

FORT CHARLOTTE

NS/VSIS stores support ship, Fort class (Victory type)

FORT CHARLOTTE

The Grand Portage, which was part of the earliest route between Lake Superior and the West, extended from Lake Superior to the Pigeon River. At the most easterly end of the portage, the North-West Company had built the Grand portage Fort, in 1778.

A few years later they established Fort Charlotte at its western end and on the south bank of the Pigeon River in what is now the State of Minnesota. The port consisted of several buildings enclosed by a stockade where goods were stored until traders were ready to load them into their canoes and start east for the wintering grounds. Name after Queen Charlotte, this post was of considerable importance for many years.

The newly defined boundary line between Canada and the United States forced the North-West Company to withdraw into Canadian territory in 1800-1801.

Fort Charlotte was therefore abandoned and very quickly fell into disrepair.

To commemorate this Fort, which was one of the main stopping places on the long journey westwards, this cargo ship has been named the
SS FORT CHARLOTTE



FORT CONSTANTINE

Store ship, Fort class (Victory type)

FORT CONSTANTINE

The discovery of rich gold deposits in the Yukon and Alaska started fortune-hunters flocking northwards in large numbers. With this inrush of people this question of boundary lines, customs duties and law and order immediately arose between Canadian and American authorities. Sent to report on conditions in 1894, Inspector Charles Constantine of the Mounted Police recommended that a contingent of 20 men be sent to the Upper Yukon at once.

Accordingly, in the summer of 195, a detachment set out under his command. Eighteen hundred miles up the Yukon River at the point where it is joined by Forty Mile Creek, a fort site was chosen on a spot already marked by a collection of miners' shanties known as Fort Cudahy. By November of that year eight building had been erected a the new fort was known as Fort Constantine. From this point the Mounted Police patrolled the countryside, introducing law and order in a land of mushroom communities, peopled by adventurers of every nationality and type.

With the discovery of greater quantities of gold on Bonanza Creek, a tributary of the Klondyke River, the police abandoned Fort Constantine and moved their headquarters upstream to the present Dawson City.

To commemorate this fort and the brave and valiant men of the garrison the ship was named

SS FORT CONSTANTINE

FORT DUNVEGAN

Stores ship, Fort class (Victory type)

FORT DUNVEGAN

Fort Dunvegan was a North-West Company post built by Archibald Norman McLeod in 1805-06 on the south bank of the Peace River, fifty-seven miles above Smoky Forks in what is now the Province of Alberta. It was established on land which had been given as a formal gift to the North-West Company by the Beaver Indians.

Named by its founder after the ancestral castle of the McLeods on the Isle of Skye, it was noted for the extent of land under cultivation and the excellence of its garden produce.

When, in 1821 the Hudson's Bay Company and the North-West Company were merged, retaining the name of the former, Fort Dunvegan was one of the posts to continue operations. In 1825, however, due to Indian disturbances, the fort was abandoned for three years. At the end of that the Chief Trader Colin Campbell was sent to Peace River district to open the post once more. From then on it was operated continuously until the beginning of the twentieth century, when it was permanently abandoned. A settlement has now grown up on the old site, which was taken over the name of the Fort.

To commemorate this post in the history of the two trading companies and development of the west, this cargo ship was named the
SS FORT DUNVEGAN



FORT DUQUESNE
Stores ship, Fort class (Victory type)

FORT DUQUESNE
(ex SS QUEENSBOROUGH PARK)
Built by
West Coast Shipyards Limited
Vancouver BC

Keel laid July 7, 1944 Launched September 28, 1944
Completed November 1944

In the years preceding the Seven Years' War Legardeur St Pierre was ordered by Governor Duquesne of Canada to build forts in the Ohio Valley to assure its possession for the French. Hearing this, Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia, sent young Gorge Washington to ask them to retire from British soil. The French refused on the grounds that the land they built on had been discovered for them by La Salle.

Unable to move into the valley, Dinwiddie then ordered Washington to build a fort at what is now the City of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Before he arrived however, some of his own countrymen had already begun a fort on this site, which had been captured before the completion by a French officer. By the time Washington arrived he found a stockaded post, flying the fleur-de-lys and bearing the name of Fort Duquesne.

In 1755, General Braddock was ambushed nearby in an attempt to take Fort Duquesne for the British. Three years later, General Forbes in company with Washington, captured the post after the French garrison had fired it and fallen back on Fort Machault.

In honour of the British Prime Minister, Washington renamed the post Fort Pitt. Rebuilt the following year it remained in British hands until 1772 when it was finally abandoned.

To commemorate this famous post in the joint history of Canada and the United States, this cargo ships has been named the

SS FORT DUQUESNE

Wartime Shipbuilding Limited
Montreal, Canada



FORT LANGLEY

Fort class (Victory type) Stores issuing ship/freighter

FORT LANGLEY

Fort Langley was originally a Hudson's Bay Company post near the mouth of the Fraser River in what is now known as the lower mainland of the Province of British Columbia. It was built by James MacMillan in 1827. He selected the site because the region was rich in furs, the valley-lands appeared promising of agricultural development and it offered unusual advantages for defence against hostile Indians. Besides being an important fur depot in its early years, Fort Langley claims the distinction of being the first white settlement in British Columbia, and the first point west of the Great Lakes from which wheat was exported. Also, the first consignment of fish to be exported from British Columbia left Fort Langley for the Sandwich Islands about 1846.

With the influx of the gold-seekers of 1858 and the growth of the farming settlement, further progress was made in establishing Fort Langley as an important colonisation centre.

On 19th November 1858, British Columbia came into being as a Crown Colony with the wearing-in of Sir James Douglas as Governor and Sir Mathew Begbie as Chief Justice. This ceremony took place in the old fort. To commemorate the historical place of this Fort in the early development of the Province of British Columbia, the cargo ship has been named
SS FORT LANGLEY



FORT ROSALIE

Armament support ship, Fort class (Canadian type)

FORT ROSALIE

Built by
United Shipyards Limited
Montreal, Canada

Keel laid August 29, 1944 Launched November 18, 1944
Completed July 1945

Fort Rosalie was built by Bienville in 1716 on the present site of Natchez, Mississippi, and named after Mme Pontchartrain, wife of the French Prime Minister.

Cadillac, Governor of Louisiana, desperate over the poverty of the colony, the advance of the British and the hostility of the Natchez, planned to subdue the Indians. His dislike of Bienville, whom he succeeded, prompted him to clear two issues at once. Accordingly he ordered Bienville to defeat the Natchez, permitting him only fifteen men for this task. Bienville obeyed the orders, took his fifteen men, built Fort Rosalie, and with a plan both brilliant and cunning, defeated the large warlike tribe.

This deception of the Natchez only increased the trouble. A violent hostility resulted which led up to the Natchez Massacre of 1729 in which Fort Rosalie was destroyed and most of its garrison murdered. Almost immediately rebuilt, the post passed into British hands in 1763, then into Spanish hands in 1779 and finally into the hands of the Americans in 1798, only being demolished in 1805.

To commemorate this early fort in the history of North America, this cargo ship has been named the
SS FORT ROSALIE

Wartime Shipbuilding Limited
Montreal, Canada





FORT SANDUSKY

Armament support ship, Fort class (Canadian type)

FORT SANDUSKY

Built by
United Shipyards Limited
Montreal, Canada

Keel laid September 11, 1944 Launched November 25, 1944
Completed August 1945

In 1740 the powerful Wyandot Indians were severely routed by the French at Detroit and moved to the mouth of the Sandusky River which empties into Sandusky Bay in Lake Erie. Five years later they allowed the British to build a fort on the northern side of the Bay, opposite the present city of Sandusky, Ohio.

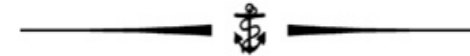
In 1751 the French ousted the British and built Fort Sandusky on the site of the original blockhouse. This post, however, was soon evacuated and three years later they established Fort Junandot on the east side of the Sandusky River. In 1761 the British erected a new blockhouse nearby which was occupied by a small garrison. This post, too, was short-lived.

Two years later, in 1763, Pontiac and his warriors fell upon it and demolished it completely.

The first permanent white settlers arrived at Sandusky shortly after 1781 and since that time the settlement has grown until today it is a city of over 28,000 inhabitants.

In commemoration of the fort which knew both French and British ownership and contributed to the joint history of Canada and the United States, this cargo ship has been named the
SS FORT SANDUSKY

Wartime Shipbuilding Limited
Montreal, Canada



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