

Rear-Admiral Robert Walter Timbrell, CMM, DSC, CD
Commander – Maritime Command
18 October 1971 to 21 August 1973

Born: 01 February 1920 Tavistock, Devon, U.K.
Died: 11 April 2006 Victoria, B.C.



Honours

23/06/1973	CMM	Commander of the Order of Military Merit
16/08/1946+	DSC	Distinguished Service Cross
20/01/1945	MID	Mentioned in Despatches

Military

1935	Officer Cadet	HMS Conway RNR
20/08/1937	Naval Cadet	RCN (Special Entry No. 43) to HMS Erebus
07/09/1937	Naval Cadet	To HMS Excellent
01/09/1938	Midshipman	To HMS Barham (Battleship)
15/06/1939	Midshipman	To HMS Afridi
16/09/1939	Midshipman	HMS Victory
04/01/1940	Midshipman	HMS Hood (Battlecruiser)
16/03/1940	Midshipman	HMS Warspite (Battlecruiser)
04/04/1940	Midshipman	HMS Excellent for Gunnery Course
01/05/1940	Sub-Lieutenant	Promoted
01/05/1940	Sub-Lieutenant	In Command - HMY Llanthony (Armed Yacht) – Rescue at Dunkirk – DSC
06/09/1940	Sub-Lieutenant	HMCS Margaree – Survived her sinking 22/10/1940
03/01/1941	Sub-Lieutenant	Anti-Submarine Officer and First Lieutenant HMCS Annapolis
15/08/1941	Lieutenant	Promoted HMCS Annapolis
15/02/1942	Lieutenant	To HMS Osprey as Anti-Submarine Course Instructor
15/03/1943	Lieutenant	To HMCS Cornwallis as Commander of Anti-Submarine School
09/05/1944	Lieutenant	HMCS Ottawa as Staff Officer (Anti-Submarine) to Senior Officer Escort Groups
19/05/1944	Lieutenant	HMCS Qu'appelle \ in EG-5 and EG-11 in HMCS Ottawa and Qu'appelle
22/01/1945	Lieutenant	Stand by for HMCS Micmac
12/09/1945	Lieutenant	First Lieutenant HMCS Micmac
01/04/1946	Lieutenant	RCN Barracks Halifax as Officer-in-Charge Anti-Submarine School
12/04/1948	Lieutenant	Commanding Officer HMCS Swansea (Frigate) to 6 February 1949
27/07/1949	Lieutenant	Naval HQ as Staff Officer Torpedo Anti-submarine (TAS) Officer
15/08/1949	LCdr	Promoted – at Naval HQ as Staff Officer TAS
12/02/1951	LCdr	Training Officer in HMCS Ontario (Light Cruiser)
01/07/1952	Commander	Promoted – To Royal Roads as Vice-Commandant and OIC Cadet Wing
22/11/1954	Commander	To Royal Naval Staff Course
29/10/1955	Commander	First Commanding Officer HMCS St. Laurent (Destroyer Escort) to 23/01/1957
23/01/1957	Commander	Executive Officer at HMCS Shearwater \ & Cdr 3 rd Cdn Escort Squadron
01/07/1957	Commander	Commanding Officer HMCS Shearwater to September 1957
01/07/1958	Captain	Promoted – To Staff of Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (Norfolk, Virginia)
07/08/1963	Captain	Commanding Officer HMCS Bonaventure (Carrier)
01/01/1965	Commodore	Promoted – Still in Command of HMCS Bonaventure – end 01/04/1965
01/04/1965	Commodore	To Naval HQ as Director Undersea Warfare
1965	Commodore	To Training Command HQ as Chief of Staff (Programs and Research)
20/10/1966	Rear-Admiral	Promoted to Naval HQ as Deputy Chief of Plans
15/07/1970	Rear-Admiral	Commander Canadian Defence Liaison Staff Washington
18/10/1971	Rear-Admiral	Commander Maritime Command
21/08/1973	Rear-Admiral	Retire

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TIMBRELL, Robert Walter, Sub-Lieutenant - Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) - RCN / HMS Llanthony - Awarded as per **London Gazette** of 16 August 1940 (no Canada Gazette).

"For good service in the withdrawal of the Allied Armies from the beaches at Dunkirk."

He was appointed in command of a commandeered yacht (**HMS Llanthony**) and brought back over 600 soldiers in six crossings at Dunkirk. The first four trips were unremarkable with 120+ troops being taken back to England each trip. On the fifth trip, a German bomb hit the forecastle killing five crews and severed the fuel line. The crew and army troops created a jetty out of trucks until the tide could lift the ship back into the water. The fuel line was repaired and the yacht returned to England. On the sixth trip, this young officer has four trawlers under his command as well. He had armed the yacht while fixing the fuel line with spare guns from the vehicles left behind and was able to drive off two E-Boats.



His description: "The first trip for me I ended up with the yacht unfortunately on the beach because after loading about 50 soldiers we were hit either by a bomb or a shell by the German Army and I lost my anchor. I also lost the fuel pipes and we drifted up on the beach. Fortunately, the diesel engineers that I had onboard that came from the London Bus Depot were able to take the pipes from the bathrooms and repair the fuel pipes. To get back afloat, when a Sergeant and eight Guardsmen, the remains of a British Regiment, came down to the beach, I asked the Sergeant to go back into town and get a tank and bring it back to the yacht. Now this yacht is high on the beach and the sea is about a mile away. I asked him to drive the tank out in the water as far as he could go and use that as an anchor. When the tide came back up, we were able to pull ourselves off and my bus engineers managed to get the engine going, we reloaded and we went back to Ramsgate for the first trip."

TIMBRELL, Robert Walter, Lieutenant (A/S) - Mention in Despatches - RCN / HMCS Ottawa - Awarded as per **Canada Gazette** of 20 January 1945 and **London Gazette** of 5 December 1944.

"For services in destroying an enemy submarine on 18th-19th August, 1944."

HMCS Ottawa (II) (River Class Destroyer - H31), **HMCS Kootenay**, and **HMCS Chaudiere** sank **U-621** in the Bay of Biscay on 18 August 1944. They also sank a second U-Boat, **U-984** on 20 August 1944 as well. These actions are described in Chapter 49 of "**The Canadian Naval Chronicle 1939 - 1945**".

TIMBRELL, Robert Walter, Rear-Admiral, DSC, CD - Commander - Order of Military Merit (CMM) - Awarded as per **Canada Gazette** of 23 June 1973.

MEDALS: CMM - DSC - 1939/1945 Star - Atlantic Star with bar France and Germany - Africa Star - Defence Medal - CVSM and clasp - 1939/1945 War Medal with MID - Centennial Medal - CD and 2 bars.



HMS Llanthony

Type:	Motor Yacht
Length:	77 ft 5 ins
Beam:	14 ft 6 ins
Draft:	5 ft 5 ins
Displacement:	61 tons
Engine:	2 x Daimler-Benz Diesels
Construction:	Steel
Builder:	Camper & Nicholson
Year Built:	1934



Rear-Admiral Robert W. Timbrell of the Royal Canadian Navy (Retired) was a newly-fledged Sub-Lieutenant stationed at Whale Island, Portsmouth, in May 1940 when he was summoned by an old Naval Captain sitting at his desk with a pile of paper in front of him. Twenty young officers had been told to report rather hastily after getting their gas masks, toothbrushes and shaving kit and they wondered what it was all about. Robert Timbrell knew better than to ask an irritable old Captain for details when he brusquely told him "to join the Llanthony". He had no idea what kind of ship this was and was amazed when he discovered he had been chosen to command her. He was even more astonished to find that she was a gentleman's yacht built for Lord Astor of Hever Castle and ill-equipped for naval duty. Her compass had not been swung and the only armament was the 1914 Colt 45 on Timbrell's leather belt.

With his crew of two civilian diesel engineers from London Transport and six sailors from Newfoundland (they were actually lumberjacks), he was ordered to proceed to Ramsgate where the yacht was fuelled and provided with charts. They were then told to set course for Dunkirk. There they were to anchor off the beach and embark as many troops as they could using the two tenders swung from their davits.

On the way, they encountered a strange variety of craft: sailing yachts, mud hoppers and Thames pleasure steamers. One of these they found broken down half way across. This boat was loaded with troops and so they towed her all the way back to Ramsgate.

Forty years later, Admiral Timbrell told his story to Cameron Graham of the Canadian Broadcasting Service:

"It was a very shallow beach and at low tide, the water went out a long way. We were being shelled by the Germans, the town was in flames and after we had anchored, I sent the Petty Officer in with the boats; I stayed with the yacht. We could take about 120 on each trip and our instructions were to return as soon as we were loaded. We did that for a couple of trips. Then, on the third or fourth trip, we got bombed. Although the RAF were doing a marvellous job, the odd German got through. We were hit on the fo'cs'le. I lost about five of the crew and both my anchors snapped. The fuel tanks were forward of the engine room and the fuel pipes were severed so that both engines died. We drifted up on the beach. It all happened so quickly - one minute we were there and the next we were damaged, drifting and running aground.

It was a sunny afternoon and there were shells falling all the way down the beach with thousands of soldiers asking to be taken back to England. It was Day four of the evacuation and a stream of ships were going in and out. We drove some trucks into the water to form a small jetty. Then, at high tide, we could go alongside the trucks and men could walk on top of them and jump aboard.

While I was high and dry, I heard the English voice of a sergeant marching some troops down, calling out the order to halt. He was tired and his uniform was not parade ground standard, but he was still smart. He turned out to be from a Guards regiment. He asked if he could help and I told him to get a Bren-gun carrier and drive it out as far as he could in the water until the engine stopped so that I could use it to anchor by. That is what he did and my two civilian diesel engineers repaired the fuel pipe, got the capstan going and winched us off. They put a plate over my bombed fo'cs'le and we sailed back to England.

By then I was an old hand, in the eyes of the authorities, so I was given four trawlers to add to my fleet. They had come down from Scotland and their old skippers had twenty years' experience - more sea time than I will ever get in my life.

I told them the form: 'We'll sail from Ramsgate. You stay close to me and we will go straight into Dunkirk, anchor, load and come back.' As simple as that. We sailed by night and loaded by day because at night the German E-boats were coming down the coast. My Guards sergeant had got me some Bren-guns and anti-tank weapons so now the Llanthony was armed with something more than my Colt 45. The trawlers stayed close to me - almost too close - and the port one went over a mine. She disappeared in a flash and we were not able to pick up survivors. The rest of us did two or three more trips. On one of them we had a fight with an E-boat. Thanks to my sergeant and his troops we were able to hold it off and they were surprised at our volume of fire. The Guards sergeant stayed with me for the whole time. While we were on the beach, one of the soldiers came towards us on a zig-zag course which miraculously avoided all the German shells. This was not good fieldwork, but due to a whole day spent in a French pub! He was drunker than anyone I have ever seen and he told us not to go back to England without him. He said he would come back with his ticket. He staggered back to his pub and returned with a case of brandy. 'Here's my ticket, sir, to get back to England. Don't leave me behind'. With this, he shoved his case of brandy aboard and fell asleep in the wheelhouse.

Our last trip was the tightest. The Germans had started to enter the town and to close the ring around Dunkirk. There was no way we could return any more. Back at Portsmouth I had a job to find anyone who would take over Llanthony from me. She was beaten up with bullet holes in her funnels and her boats were smashed. We took off the Bren-guns and anti-tank weapons as well as our case of brandy and tried to get back to Whale Island, three and a half miles away. I stopped a bus and asked the conductor the best way to get back to our ship. The conductor said, 'Have you just come back from Dunkirk?' and when I told him we had, he walked around to the front of the bus and told the driver to take us there - with apologies for the detour to the civilian passengers. We got back to Whale Island complete with the brandy despite some protests concerning our army crew from the duty officer."

The Llanthony rescued 280 troops from Dunkirk and Lieut. Timbrell was awarded the Navy's Distinguished Service Cross. The Guards sergeant got the DSM - a rare naval award for a soldier.

Between 1985 and 1993, known as Golden Era, she cruised between Greece and Turkey as an elegant charter yacht. In 1995 she was discovered lying in Rhodes harbour in an extremely dilapidated state by her present owner Ms. Nicola McGrail. She was put to sail on one engine and taken to Marmaris in Turkey in 1995, where she has undergone extensive renovation and the complete rebuild of her Daimler-Benz engines. She has become a showpiece at Netsel Marina, Marmaris, now restored to her former glory and retains all her original fittings. She is now ready to resume her career as an elegant charter yacht and expects to return to British waters for the first time in thirty years to attend The Diamond Anniversary Reunion in June 2000. ¹



¹ Bob Timbrell with daughter Nancy Timbrell-Muckle at Dunkirk