



## OCA Wall of Honour

### Captain Thomas G. Fuller IV (1908–1994)



Born in Ottawa on December 13, 1908, Fuller grew up in the riverside community of Britannia, where the sight of boats plying the waters of the Ottawa River inspired his lifelong love of sailing. Another profound influence on young Thomas was the fact that both his father and grandfather and father had served as Chief Architect for the Dominion of Canada. Involvement in the construction of the Parliament Buildings would span four generations of Fullers—from Thomas Fuller II, who designed and oversaw the construction of the original Parliament Buildings, and Thomas Fuller III, who supervised the building of the Peace Tower, to the sons of Thomas Fuller IV, who carried out a major restoration of both the Peace Tower and Centre Block several years ago.

Moved by these seemingly genetic influences, Fuller began his career apprenticing under his father as a draftsman in Public Works before joining the firm of Mahoney and Rich. He spent the Depression years in Toronto building sewers, returning to Ottawa to start his own company—Thomas Fuller Construction Company Limited (now Thomas Fuller Construction Co. (1958) Limited)—in June 1939.

The fledgling venture was only a few months old when Canada declared war on Germany, and Fuller decided to leave his home to join the fight overseas. Told by the Royal Canadian Air Force that his only action would be in "works and bricks" because of his experience as a contractor, he sold his interest in his burgeoning enterprise to his silent partner for \$1 and returned to the recruiting office with his separation slip. Turned down this time for being too old to fly, he decided, instead, to follow his love for the water and volunteer for the Canadian Navy instead. He rose quickly through the ranks, commanding flotillas of motor torpedo boats—first in the English Channel and later in the Adriatic and Aegean seas. Nicknamed the "Pirate of the Adriatic," he revolutionized small boat warfare with his tactics, capturing enemy ships and then using their cargo to supply Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia. Captain Fuller returned home after the war with three Distinguished Services Crosses from King George IV and the added distinction of having served more time in offensive action than any other enlisted man in the Canadian Navy.

Fuller applied the same conquering spirit to his civilian life, buying back interest in his fledgling construction company in 1946. Three years later he decided to get involved in the real estate market, founding Metcalfe Realty Company Limited with a group of local businessmen. The company's first major development—the Metcalfe Building was Ottawa's first modern high-rise office building, a wondrous creation of glass and aluminum spandrel. Fuller eventually bought out his partners and went on to develop and operate more than two million square feet of commercial, industrial and rental properties in the region.

Always one to make his opinion known on industry-related issues, Fuller became vice-president of the Ontario region of the Canadian Construction Association in 1961, president of the OCA in 1964, and helped found the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA). Over the ensuing decades, he added two more entities to the Fuller Group-the construction management company Fullercon Limited, and the civil and heavy equipment contractor Thomas G. Fuller & Sons Ltd.

Although Fuller spent the last few years of his life sailing around the world with his wife, he never fully retired from the business he loved remaining at the helm of the Fuller Group until his death in 1994 at age 85. During his life, the Fuller Group completed more than 600 major industrial, commercial and institutional projects in eastern Canada-from dams, bridges and tunnels to hospitals, laboratories, universities, museums, shopping centres, hotels and office buildings. Some of the most notable include the Provincial Government Buildings in Prince Edward Island and Ottawa's internationally-renowned Heart Institute.

Today, Fuller's wife Jeanne and their sons Bill, Mark, Tony and Simon remain integral players in the Fuller empire, but a booming business isn't the only legacy he left behind. Each year, dozens of children learn how to sail aboard a 100-foot brigantine he built from an old tugboat-a gift made in honour of his wish that all kids have the opportunity to strengthen their character through adventure, as he did when he was growing up. "Dad believed that anything was possible if you put your mind to it," says Bill. "And he spent his life proving it."