

Able Seaman Neil Kenneth Beaton V-42034



Able Seaman Neil Beaton. Source: unkn

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- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Imperial SK, 20 June 1919**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Nonsuch*, 24 June 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Apprentice Butcher, City Meat Market**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Regina* was torpedoed and sank on 8 August 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 11; Second World War Book of Remembrance, p.245, at the Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa, Naval Museum of Alberta plaque, and the HMCS *Nonsuch* plaque**

Neil Beaton was born in Imperial, SK on 20 June 1919. His father was Henry Malcolm Beaton (1880-1955), and he worked as a grain buyer at a local elevator. Henry was born in North Dakota, and his parents – Neil's grandparents - were from Prince Edward Island. Henry moved to Imperial around 1911. Neil's mother was Mary Ellen Mawson (1884-unkn) from Manitoba. Henry and Mary were married in Regina on 24 December 1912.

The Beatons had five children, all born in Imperial. They were:

- Verna Audrey Beaton (1914- unkn)
- Miles Alvin Beaton (1915-2008) (A Coy, First Battalion, Loyal Edmonton Regiment in WW2)
- Ruth Evelyn Beaton (1917-unkn)
- Neil Kenneth Beaton (1919-1944)
- Barbara Jean Beaton (1924-1997)

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The family relocated to Wetaskiwin, AB, in 1925, where Henry continued his work as a grain buyer. Wetaskiwin was a major rail and service centre for the surrounding agriculture industry. It is located about 70 kilometres south of Edmonton. Neil received his education in Wetaskiwin. He completed Grade 11 and part of Grade 12, receiving his Junior Matriculation. He finished school in 1937.

In 1940, Neil worked as a delivery boy in Wetaskiwin when he joined the Edmonton Fusiliers, part of the Non-Permanent Active Militia. He remained with his unit until 23 June 1942. Later, in 1940, Neil began his apprenticeship as a butcher at City Meat Market in Wetaskiwin. The store had been established in 1921 and was known for its hectic Tuesdays, during which 12 hogs and nine cows were slaughtered. Unfortunately, in 1942, he lost his job as a butcher and could not complete his apprenticeship.

Neil travelled to Edmonton and enlisted in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) at HMCS *Nonsuch* on June 24, 1942. He had been released by the militia the day before. His parents relocated to Edmonton and lived at 11745 92 St. According to his enlistment records, Neil was 5 feet 7 inches tall, weighed 121 pounds, and had dark brown hair, blue eyes, and a medium complexion. He identified as a member of the Church of England.

He remained on Divisional strength – perhaps training once or twice a week – until October 1942, when he was put on Active Service and completed New Entry Training at *Nonsuch*. In December 1942, he was posted to HMCS *Naden*, the primary Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) training base on the West Coast in Esquimalt, BC.



**The Anti-Submarine team in HMCS Cobourg, in July 1944. A ship of the same class as HMCS Regina.
Library and Archives Canada**

At *Naden*, Neil trained in seamanship, gunnery, and submarine detection from December 1942 until April, when he was assigned to his first ship, HMCS *Courtenay*. She was a Bangor class steam-powered minesweeper. *Courtenay* was built in Prince Rupert at the Prince Rupert Dry Dock & Shipyards Company and spent her whole career on the West Coast, serving alternately with the Esquimalt and Prince Rupert Forces. The primary duty of the minesweepers serving on the West Coast was the Western Patrol - patrolling the west coast of Vancouver Island, past the Scott Islands to Gordon Channel, at the

entrance to the Queen Charlotte Strait.

Neil served aboard HMCS *Courtenay* for seamanship and submarine detector (SD) consolidation training until October 1943. Having completed his training, Neil was briefly sent ashore to HMCS *Naden*, where he was confirmed as a qualified SD and rated Able Seaman.

Neil then travelled across the country to HMCS *Protector II* – a Navy operational base in Sydney, Nova Scotia. It was from here that slower convoys departed for the UK. After a few weeks in

Sydney, Able Seaman Beaton was sent to Halifax. From here, he joined HMCS *Regina* on 7 December 1943.

HMCS *Regina* was a corvette, or to be more precise, a revised Flower-class corvette. She was built in 1941 by Marine Industries in Sorel, Quebec and commissioned into the RCN in January 1942. assigned to the Mediterranean area in support of Operation *Torch*, the Allied invasion of North Africa, and she escorted convoys between the United Kingdom and Gibraltar. On the night of 9 February 1943, HMCS *Regina* attacked and sank the Italian submarine *Avorio*. She returned to Canada for a major refit in April 1943.

In February 1944, with Able Seaman Beaton now part of her mostly new crew, HMCS *Regina* had completed her refit and workups and joined Escort Group C1, part of the Mid-Ocean Escort Force. Escort Group C1 was assigned to escort convoy SC154 to the UK. During the voyage, HMCS *Regina* was detached and ordered to escort a Royal Navy (RN) tug and a disabled ship to the Azores. Then, in March 1944, she escorted a heavily damaged HMCS *Mulgrave* under tow to Clyde, Scotland.

When HMCS *Regina* returned to Londonderry at the end of March 1944, she was assigned to Western Approaches Command for Operation NEPTUNE, the maritime component of the D-Day invasion at Normandy. From 6 June 1944 onwards, *Regina* escorted several convoys and individual ships. She was also assigned to anti-submarine patrols. Mines, U-boats, E-boats, and enemy aircraft threatened convoys. They often needed channels swept of mines and marked. Precise navigation was required so that ships knew where the minefields were located. This would have been a hectic time for Able Seaman Beaton and the rest of the anti-submarine warfare team.



HMCS Regina circa 1942-43 in a skillfully enhanced and colorized image. Her Pennant number (K234) is hidden, perhaps as a wartime security measure.

Photo National Defence, Canadian Navy Heritage Website; Image Negative Number CT-252

Neil's work efficiency was rated as Satisfactory throughout his service, and his character was pegged at Very Satisfactory.

On 8 August 1944, HMCS *Regina* escorted convoy EBC-066, ten ships bound from the Bristol area to Normandy. They heard an explosion and closed on the *Ezra Weston*, an American merchant ship. The captain of the stricken ship signaled that he had struck a mine.

The crew of the *Ezra Weston* was rescued by a Royal Navy LST (Landing Ship-Tank) and a tug in the convoy. The LST then tried to tow *Ezra Weston* to shallow water, where her cargo could be salvaged. HMCS *Regina* was standing by the rescue and salvage operations when she exploded. HMCS *Regina* sank within seconds, taking 30 of her crew with her.

Able Seaman Neil Beaton was among the Canadian sailors who were lost. He was 25 years old.

Post-war analysis of German Navy records showed that both the *Ezra Weston* and HMCS *Regina* were not mined but were torpedoed by a U-boat, U-667. A few days after sinking the two allied ships, U-667 struck a mine and was lost with all hands.

For his service, Able Seaman Neil Beaton was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star and Clasp, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal 1939-45. His mother, Mary, was awarded the Canadian Memorial Cross.

Able Seaman Neil Beaton is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial, panel 12, the Naval Museum of Alberta plaque, and the HMCS *Nonsuch* plaque.

Prepared By*:

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*All stories are edited by the project crew and sometimes altered to conform to the Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph format, length and content parameters.



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