

Able Seaman Robert Gordon Booth V-45546



Able Seaman Gord Booth. Photo: For
Posterity Sake

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Saskatoon SK, 23 March 1923**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Unicorn*, 30 July 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Labourer, Saskatoon Municipal Railway**
- **Death: Lost at sea while serving in HMCS *St. Croix* on 20 September 1943**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 10; and Booth Bay (Lat 55° 06'N Long 108° 17'W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory**

Robert Gordon Booth, known as Gord, was the first of two children born to Elizabeth Booth and Llewellyn Booth on 23 March 1923 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. His sister Maxine was born in 1928. Very little information about the family was found.

Canadian Army service records indicate that Gord's father Llewellyn was born in Alkborough, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom in 1892. He likely emigrated to Canada alone and found work near Speers, Saskatchewan as a farm labourer. He enlisted in the 232nd Battalion, Canadian Infantry, in April 1916 in North Battleford, Saskatchewan and served under combat conditions in France for 12 months. After the First World War, he worked as a farm labourer near Kindersley, Saskatchewan (1921 Canada census). The 1922 Saskatoon Henderson's Directory lists him as a labourer in Saskatoon and Gord's naval personnel file noted that his parents were married in Saskatoon in March 1922. Gord's mother, Elizabeth, is simply recorded as being born in Canada in 1897.

The family reappeared in Henderson's Directory in 1938. They lived in a neighbourhood in north Saskatoon. In 1940, the family moved to a south Saskatoon neighbourhood and Llewellyn is recorded as working for the Royal Canadian Air Force as a civilian at the major air base established there.

Gord's naval personnel file also indicated he lived in Saskatoon his entire life until enlistment. Without more detailed information about residency, however, it is not possible to deduce where he attended a school other than high school. The only high school which offered the industrial course of study he followed was the Saskatoon Technical Collegiate Institute. There he completed Grade 9 and partially completed grade 10. He also indicated that he was both an army cadet and an air cadet. Upon leaving school he worked as a labourer with the Saskatoon Municipal Railway, which operated electric trams or street cars on tracks throughout the city.

On 30 July 1942, Gord was sworn into the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) at the Saskatoon Division (HMCS *Unicorn*) as an Ordinary Seaman (Temporary). When sworn in, Gord was 19 years old, single, 5 feet 10 ¼ Inches tall, and weighed 148 pounds with brown hair, blue eyes, and a fair complexion. About a week after being sworn in, Gord commenced basic training at *Unicorn*. He completed the course on 6 December 1942.

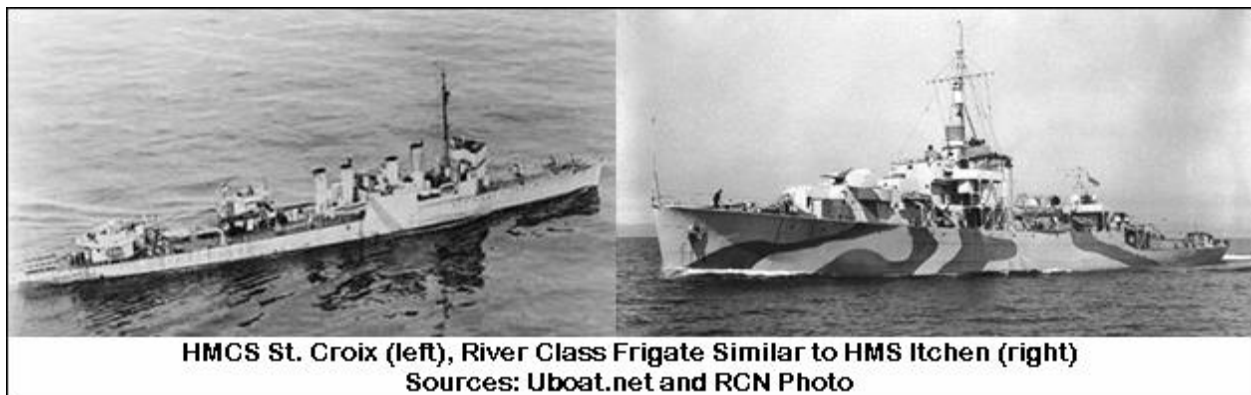
From *Unicorn*, Gord was drafted to HMCS *Naden*, the large naval base in Esquimalt, BC where he first took New Entry training. On completion in March 1943, he was selected for Submarine Detector training which involved ASDIC, the submarine detection system now referred to as sonar.

There were four ASDIC ratings: the Anti-Submarine Artificer, the Submarine Detector, the Higher Submarine Detector, and the Submarine Detector Instructor. The first were highly trained technicians who worked onshore installing, maintaining and repairing ASDIC equipment. The Submarine Detector operated the ship-borne ASDIC equipment and performed minor maintenance under the supervision of the Higher Submarine Detector, who was the maintenance expert and senior operator onboard a ship. The Submarine Detector Instructor taught ratings ashore. The four training courses which were the pathways to these ratings differed only in their emphasis. To succeed, a knowledge of seamanship, a grasp of underwater tactics and sea conditions, and an acute sense of hearing were required. The theories of sound and electricity, operational procedure, and practical work-shop skills were covered.

Up until late 1943, ASDIC training was very rudimentary with a severe lack of equipment, instructors, and suitable accommodations. Although too late for Gord, suitable accommodations were acquired when training was moved to HMCS *Cornwallis* in Deep Cove, NS into what was termed “the finest anti-submarine school building in the British Empire.”

Gord completed his Submarine Detector training on 1 May 1943 in *Naden* and was drafted to HMCS *Stadacona*, the large naval base in Halifax, NS for travel and administrative purposes before being drafted to HMCS *St. Croix* (I-81).

HMCS *St. Croix* was a Clemson-class destroyer commissioned into the United States Navy (USN) as USS *McCook* (DD-252) on 30 April 1919. In 1939, the ship was transferred to the Royal Navy under the *Destroyers for Bases Agreement* between the United Kingdom and the United States. Subsequently, she was transferred to the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and re-commissioned in Halifax on 24 September 1940 as HMCS *St. Croix* – named after the river that marks the New Brunswick and Maine border.



HMCS *St. Croix* had an eventful career. Before Gord joined *St. Croix* in late July 1943, the ship had been heavily damaged in a hurricane in 1940, she had escorted 33 North Atlantic convoys, and she was credited with sinking two U-boats: U-90 in July 1942 and U-87 in March 1943 (credit shared with HMCS *Shediac*).

Gord arrived onboard *St. Croix* on 25 July 1943 in St. John's, Newfoundland following leave. His first voyage was uneventful; where *St. Croix* escorted a convoy from Halifax destined for Londonderry from 5-11 August.

On 10 August 1943 Gord was promoted to Able Seaman.

On 19 September 1943, an escort group that included *St. Croix*, HMC Ships *St. Francis*, *Chambly*, *Morden*, and *Sackville*, and HMS *Itchen* were proceeding to the Bay of Biscay to conduct an offensive against U-boats that were transiting from five bases on the west coast of France to the Atlantic. The group was diverted to assist several convoys under attack by what turned out to be a force of 13 U-boats in an area about 400 to 500 nautical miles southwest of Iceland.

Upon reaching convoy ON.202 on 20 September 1943, *St. Croix* was struck on the stern at 2151 by two Gnat torpedoes fired by U-305. Gravely damaged but still afloat, her ship's company began to abandon ship. Then, 53 minutes later, at 2244, she was struck by a third torpedo fired by U-305 and sunk within 6 minutes leaving 81 officers and men clinging to two Carley floats and a swamped whaler. HMS *Itchen* and HMS *Polyanthus* attempted to rescue the sailors in the water but broke off after *Itchen* narrowly avoided a torpedo fired at her at 2253, also by U-305. Instead, *Itchen* went on the offensive to hunt down her attacker. At 0022 on 21 September *Polyanthus* was sunk by U-952.

After dawn, *Itchen* rescued the sole survivor from *Polyanthus* and the 81 survivors from *St. Croix* including Able Seaman Gordon Booth. With her own ship's company of 230 officers and men, *Itchen* now had a total of 312 onboard when she was torpedoed and sunk by U-666 at 0200 on 23 September 1943. Only three survived and were rescued by the Polish merchant ship, SS *Wisla*. They were Stoker William Allan Fisher, RCNVR, from *St. Croix*; and two members of *Itchen*'s ship's company. Able Seaman Robert Gordon Booth was 20 years old when he died.

There is some controversy regarding Gord's date of death. He and those rescued by *Itchen* are officially considered to have perished when *St. Croix* was lost because there is no official list of those Canadians who were onboard *Itchen* at the time of her loss. Nevertheless, Stoker Fisher confirmed that Gord was rescued by *Itchen*. In a letter to Gord's mother, Elizabeth, dated 31 October 1943, Stoker Fisher wrote:

"Dear Mrs. Booth,

I'm sorry to say but I believe your son was lost on the Itchen. He was in the same boat as I was and was in good health and was not injured. He was on the upper deck of Itchen...He made the Itchen"

For his service, Able Seaman Robert Gordon Booth was awarded: the 1939-45 Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Booth, was awarded the Memorial Cross. Able Seaman Robert Gordon Booth, like the other 146 members of *St. Croix*'s ship's company, has no known grave. He is commemorated on Panel 10 of the Halifax Memorial at Point Pleasant Park, Halifax, NS; the Second World War Book of



Remembrance, page 138, at the Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa; and Booth Bay (Lat 55° 06'N Long 108° 17'W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory.

Prepared By:

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