

Stoker 1st Class Alexander Hutton Campbell V-12837



- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Cowie, Scotland, 31 March 1920**
- **Enlisted: Edmonton Division RCNVR, 3 October 1941**
- **Civilian Occupation: Painter, C. Woodward Limited**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Shawinigan* was torpedoed and sank on 24 November 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 12; Shawinigan Memorial, Shawinigan, Quebec; HMCS *Nonsuch* Memorial Plaque, Edmonton; and the Navy Museum of Alberta Memorial, Calgary**

Stoker 1st Class Alexander Campbell. Source: forposteritysake.ca

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Alexander Hutton Campbell was born on 31 March 1920 in the small town of Cowie in the County of Stirlingshire, Scotland. His family had only two children; his older brother George was born in 1918, also in Cowie.

Their father, Joseph Campbell, was born on 13 July 1892 in Greengairs, a small town in the same county. Their mother, Charlotte Campbell (nee-Hutton), was born in 1894 in Tillicoultry, another small town a few miles north of Cowie. This area was located midway between Glasgow and Edinburgh, and the primary industries there were coal mining and the operation of a large rock quarry. Joseph must have worked as a coal miner at some point, but by the time his sons were born, he was working as a house painter.

How Joseph and Charlotte met is unknown, but they married on 7 December 1917. They made an adventurous decision when Alexander was only one year old and emigrated to Canada. They left Glasgow and arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on 31 March 1921. They had a definite game plan, and as soon as they landed in Halifax, they travelled west to Edmonton, Alberta. Coal mining was a huge Edmonton industry, with many mines within the city limits. Joseph Campbell had no problem finding work because of his previous experience in the industry, and they also knew other people who had emigrated from the same area of Scotland.

By June of 1921, they lived in Strathcona, and Joseph was employed at the Strathcona Coal Company. Strathcona was located on the south side of the North Saskatchewan River, but most

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of Edmonton was on the north side. Strathcona and Edmonton had been separate cities until they amalgamated in 1912. By the time Alexander was old enough to attend public school, the Campbells had moved to the northeast part of Edmonton and settled into a house at 11163 52 Street. This area of Edmonton was called the Highlands. As the name indicates, there was a significant elevation rise on the north side of the river at this point. The Highlands had been developed early but had a sparse population because it was three miles east of the central area. It was not until 1912 that the streetcar system was extended along Alberta Avenue (118 Avenue) to 67 Street, and the Highlands were annexed into the city.

This was an excellent area to raise a family, as the Highland School had been built at 6015 118 Avenue. This school was an impressive building with a steel structure and stone and brick cladding. Construction started in 1914 and finished in 1920, and the school is still in use today. The Campbells also attended the Highland United Church located at 11305 64 Street. This church was also well-built and is still standing. By 1927, Joseph was working as a painter again.

Alexander attended the Highland School, eventually finishing grade eight at the age of 16. He participated in football, hockey and baseball, which he identified on his attestation papers when he enlisted in the Navy. Between the ages of 16 and 19, Alexander worked at numerous jobs. He eventually found permanent employment as a painter at Woodward's Limited. He had been working at this job for 15 months when he decided to enlist in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR). He had also been training with the Canadian Army in Camrose as part of the National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA) for several months before being discharged upon enlisting in the RCNVR.

Alexander first tried to enlist in the RCNVR in June of 1941 when his brother George enlisted. Unfortunately, colour blindness initially deemed him unfit at his enlistment physical. Because of this, he enlisted in the Army Militia in Camrose. His Army physical did not show him to be colour-blind, and he decided to try again. On 3 October 1941, he successfully enlisted at the Edmonton Division of the RCNVR (later named HMCS *Nonsuch*). His enlistment attestation document stated that he was 6' 2" tall, weighed 155 pounds, and had brown hair and brown eyes. He spoke only English and stated his religion to be the United Church.

Alexander requested to be trained as a Stoker, a type of sailor who specialized in engine room duties. The name originated from the time when coal powered a vessel's means of propulsion, and a Stoker's primary duty was to shovel coal. However, by World War II, their duties had become more technical, and they had to have a comprehensive understanding of all engine room components. Becoming a Stoker was an excellent trade for young sailors as it provided them with a head start in mechanical trades once their service was finished.

On enlistment, Alexander was rated Acting Stoker 2nd Class, equivalent to an Ordinary Seaman, the most junior rank in the Navy. He then waited three months before being called to active service, which was not an unusually long wait. Stoker's training was complex, and the number of training spaces/ships was limited. In January 1942, Stoker Campbell embarked on a train journey to HMCS *York* in



The engine room of HMCS Prince David. Stoker Campbell briefly served in this ship. Photo: Library and Archives Canada, item number: 3205970

Toronto, Ontario. *York* was also RCNVR Division with a more extensive facility and training staff than could be found in Edmonton. At *York*, Campbell underwent two months of basic seamanship training. On 22 March 1942, the Navy sent him to HMCS *Naden* in Esquimalt, British Columbia, the Navy's main training base in the Pacific region. There, Campbell learned the fundamental duties of a Stoker and started his on-the-job training on ships in Esquimalt Harbour.

On 9 June 1942, the Navy assigned Campbell to the crew of HMCS *Dundas*. *Dundas* was a Flower Class corvette and was part of the Aleutian Campaign when Alexander joined the crew. The Japanese had been spotted in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska, and several Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) ships were sent to assist the United States Navy in the area. *Dundas* returned to Esquimalt in early September. Campbell continued his at-sea consolidation training in the Bangor Class minesweeper, HMCS *Quatsino*. Although designed to sweep mines, this ship was part of the Western Force and patrolled the west coast from Esquimalt to the Queen Charlotte Islands, working out of Prince Rupert and Esquimalt.

From a training perspective, this ship provided Campbell with ample opportunity to gain engine room experience. He served 95 days on *Quatsino* and was rated Stoker 1st class on 28 November 1942. On 16 February 1943, he spent 35 days assigned to the armed merchant cruiser HMCS *Prince David*. *Prince David* was being converted to an infantry landing craft, and Campbell helped with the refit.

On 27 March 1943, Campbell was assigned to the east coast of Canada. He spent the next 11 months working ashore as a member of the "manual and boiler party" at HMCS *Stadacona*, located in Halifax, Nova Scotia and HMCS *Fort Ramsay*, an RCN shore base located at Sandy Beach near Port of Gaspe, Quebec.



Finally, on 7 March 1944, the Navy drafted Campbell to an operational ship: HMCS *Shawinigan*.

Shawinigan was a Flower-Class Corvette built in Lauzon, Quebec, and had been in active service since 27 October 1941. *Shawinigan* was 205' long and 33' wide. The ship usually had a crew of 87 men and could travel at 16 nautical miles per hour (around 30 kilometres per hour). Although it made three round-trip escorts from St. John's to Londonderry, Ireland, in early 1942, the ship served mainly on the Western Local Escort Force (WLEF) based out of Halifax and Sydney, Nova Scotia. In the first part of 1942, 44 ships were sunk by German submarines (U-boats) in Canadian waters. The worst tragedy was the sinking of the ferry SS *Caribou* in the Cabot Strait between

Port aux Basques, Newfoundland and Sydney, Nova Scotia, on 14 October 1942. One hundred and thirty-six people died, and it had become evident that escorts were permanently needed in the St. Lawrence River, the Gulf of St. Lawrence and Cabot Strait.

Campbell joined the crew in March 1944, and *Shawinigan* went into refit in April 1944, placing the young Stoker back ashore while the ship was repaired and upgraded. In the summer of 1944, the ship was again at sea, and Stoker Campbell finally sailed the Atlantic Ocean when the ship headed to Bermuda for workups. The ship was assigned to convoy escort duties in September 1944.

One of *Shawinigan's* duties was escorting merchant ships and ferries between the ports of Sydney and Port aux Basques. On 24 November 1944, *Shawinigan* and the US Coast Guard Cutter *Sassafras* were escorting the ferry SS *Burgeo* to Port aux Basques. The crossing was uneventful, but *Sassafras* was dispatched elsewhere. Knowing that *Shawinigan* would be the lone escort vessel for the return trip, the Navy decided that they would not put into port. Instead, they initiated a submarine sweep along the proposed route in Cabot Strait. On 25 November 1944, *Burgeo* departed Port aux Basques for Sydney. When *Shawinigan* was not at the rendezvous point, *Burgeo* continued to Sydney. It was not until the ferry reached Sydney that it was realized that *Shawinigan* was missing. Rescue vessels were sent out, but nothing was located but debris and the remains of six sailors. Five of these bodies were identified and returned to their home communities. The remains of the sixth sailor could not be identified, and he was buried in Gaspé, Quebec. A total of 91 Canadian sailors were lost at sea, including Alexander Campbell, who was 24 years old.

In May 1945, shortly after the Germans surrendered to the Allies, the German submarine *U-1228* surrendered to the US Navy at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Allied forces learned the fate of *Shawinigan* when they interrogated the crew. *U-1228* had been in the St. Lawrence River when they had equipment problems and decided to return to Germany. As they transited the Cabot Strait, they had a visual sighting of *Shawinigan* and fired one GNAT (acoustic torpedo). The torpedo made a direct hit amidships, and *Shawinigan* sank very quickly. There were several more explosions as the ship submerged. The approximate location was three miles from Channel Head (which is located at the entrance of Port aux Basques Harbour), and the time was 2230 (1030pm) on 24 November 1944.

For his service, Stoker 1st Class Alexander Hutton Campbell was awarded the 1939-45 Star, Atlantic Star, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal.

Alexander is commemorated in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, page 266, at the Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa; on the Halifax Memorial, panel 10; on the HMCS *Nonsuch* Memorial Plaque in Edmonton, Alberta; on the Navy Museum of Alberta Memorial in Calgary, Alberta; the Memorial Window of Highlands United Church, Edmonton, and the HMCS *Shawinigan* Memorial in Shawinigan Quebec.



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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.

Sources:

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- Canadian Virtual War Memorial>Stoker Alexander Campbell
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- www.uboatarchive.com/U-1228
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- Corvettes Canada by Mac Johnston