

Able Seaman Frank Llewellyn Evans V-13257



Able Seaman Frank Evans. Photo Credit:
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- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Calgary AB, 10 October 1917**
- **Enlisted: Calgary Division RCNVR, 18 April 1938**
- **Civilian Occupation: Warehouseman, MacDonald's Consolidated Limited**
- **Death: Lost at sea while serving in SS *Empire Amethyst* on 14 April 1942**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 8; Western Canada High School Memorial; Crescent Heights High School Memorial; HMCS *Tecumseh* memorial plaque; Naval Museum of Alberta plaque; and the Calgary Field of Crosses**

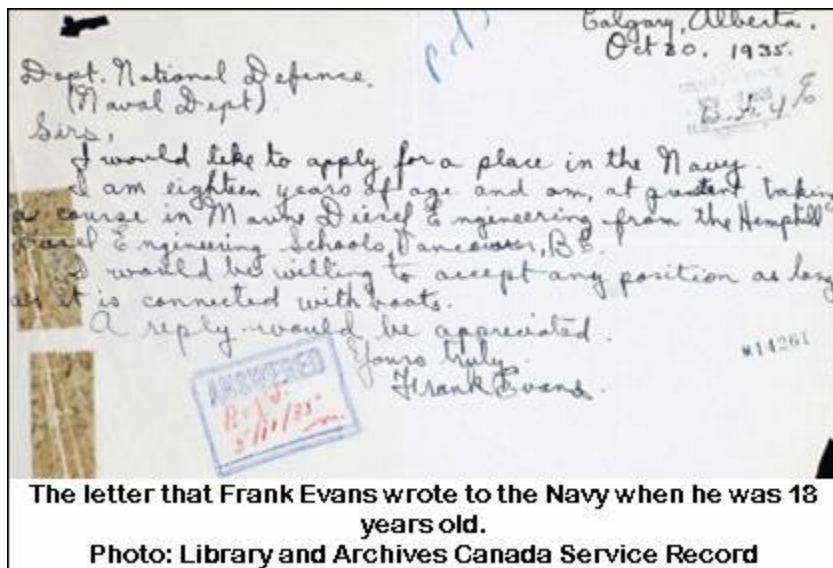
Frank Llewellyn Evans was born in Calgary on 10 October 1917. His parents were George Morris Evans and Mary Elizabeth (Edwards) Evans. Frank was the youngest of seven children. Frank's parents and siblings were all born in Wales and immigrated to Calgary in 1911. His brothers were George (born 1901) and Herbert (born 1908); his sisters were Lilian (born 1897), Florence (born 1898), Marguery (born 1903), and Doris (born 1905). This made Frank approximately 10 years younger than his youngest sibling, 20 years younger than his oldest sibling, and almost 60 years younger than his father.

Frank's father, George, worked for Pryce-Jones, a woolens goods store that successfully pioneered mail-order operations. He was transferred to Canada to help open a branch of Pryce-Jones in Calgary. The Calgary store was not open for long. After it closed, George took a job at the City of Calgary. During the First World War, at the age of 57, he took a leave from his City of Calgary job and joined the 103 Regiment (Calgary Rifles) on active service. The 103 Regiment was a Calgary militia unit that provided recruiting and training for the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

Frank's parents and siblings were incredibly talented musicians. There are numerous *Calgary Herald* articles describing their successes. They were featured on CFAC radio and various other venues. They performed solos, duets, and the siblings formed quartettes. No record was found mentioning Frank in any of their musical endeavours.

The Evans family lived at 719 2nd Street NE from the time they arrived in Calgary in 1911 until Frank's mother died in 1967. There is a family story about their first Calgary winter where the house was framed but the only siding and insulation available for that winter were cardboard boxes nailed to the framing.

Frank attended Stanley Jones Elementary School, just a few blocks from home. While he was there, the school was awarded the Birks Shield for having the most proficient class in physical training in the Public School Cadets. He also attended Crescent Heights and Western Canada High School. He finished his high school education in 1934.



The letter that Frank Evans wrote to the Navy when he was 18 years old.

Photo: Library and Archives Canada Service Record

In 1935, Frank was taking Marine Diesel Engineering through the Hemphill Diesel Engineering School of Vancouver. He wrote to the Department of National Defence asking to apply for a place in the Navy. He was willing to “accept any position as long as it is connected with boats”. The Navy wrote back, but the reply letter did not make it to his file.

In 1936, Frank started working as a warehouseman for MacDonalds Consolidated Limited, a grocery wholesaler.

They thought that his services “have always been entirely satisfactory” and rated him as being an excellent employee.

On 18 April 1938, Frank Evans enrolled in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) at the Calgary Division as an Ordinary Seaman. He was 5 foot 4 inches tall with fair hair and blue eyes. Frank described himself as being with the United Church. In August of that year, he was sent to HMCS *Naden*, the major Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) training base at Esquimalt, BC for two weeks of Naval training.

In August 1939, Ordinary Seaman Evans went back to HMCS *Naden* for three weeks of training. At the end of this session, he was promoted to Able Seaman. On 01 September 1939 – ten days before Canada declared war – Able Seaman Evans went on Active Service with the RCNVR. He was sent to HMCS *Naden* where he initially worked in HMCS *Nootka*, a Fundy-class minesweeper that was employed on local patrol duties. From January to May 1940, he was back at HMCS *Naden* for more training and a short deployment in HMCS *Malaspina*, a patrol and examination vessel based at Esquimalt. He was assigned to HMCS *Naden* for the month of July 1940 while he waited to join his next ship.

On 29 July 1940, Able Seaman Evans travelled to Vancouver, BC to join the merchant ship SS *Ixion* a 10,263-ton British cargo steamer built in 1912. DEMS ships were “Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships” that carried naval guns for defence against surfaced U-boats and enemy aircraft. These guns were manned by naval ratings, or in some cases crews from other military branches. Able Seaman Evans’ specific job was gun layer – the person who sets the elevation of the gun.

DEMS gunners signed on as members of the merchant navy crew and wore civilian clothes. This way, if the ship stopped in a neutral port they would be seen as a merchant seaman and not be interned. The Navy paid the DEMS gunners their regular pay, and the merchant ships owners were expected to pay them an additional \$1.05 per week. DEMS gunners were issued special pay books to keep track of the pay they received from the merchant ship owners. About 2,000 Canadians served as DEMS gunners.

SS *Ixion* sailed from Vancouver to Yokohama, Japan. From there she sailed to Kobe and Shanghai and then arrived in Hong Kong on 12 September 1940. She returned to North America via Miike, Japan, arriving at Seattle on 5 October 1940.

Two more trans-Pacific voyages followed with cargos of coal from Union Bay, BC to Japan. Then, on 21 January 1941, SS *Ixion* left Seattle and transited the Panama Canal on her way to Bermuda, arriving on 21 February 1941.

A week later, *Ixion* joined her first convoy, BHX-112/HX-112: A 42-ship convoy with 12 warship escorts for protection travelling to Liverpool. For a DEMS gunner like Able Seaman Evans, travelling with the protection of a dozen warships might have seemed safer than sailing independently in the Pacific, but this was not the case. Between Iceland and Scotland, HX-112 was intercepted by five U-boats. Her Royal Navy (RN) escorts sunk two of the U-boats but not before six merchant ships were torpedoed and sank. Somewhere on the route, SS *Ixion* began straggling behind the convoy and the ship was ordered to complete the trip to Liverpool independently.



DEMS personnel, like Able Seaman Evans, taking part in a gun drill aboard an unidentified merchant ship, Halifax, NS. Photo: Library and Archives Canada

Able Seaman Evans and the *Ixion* spent a month in Liverpool and then sailed for the Clyde, Scotland. She later sailed for New York on 3 May 1941. On 7 May 1941, SS *Ixion* joined OB-318, a convoy travelling from Glasgow, Scotland to New York. They were southwest of Iceland when U-94 entered the convoy by submerging ahead of the convoy and letting the RN escorts pass. At 2310, U-94 launched torpedoes at SS *Ixion* from close range. One torpedo hit her on the port side. SS *Ixion* sank a few minutes later. All 105 sailors on SS *Ixion* survived. Some were picked up by a corvette and taken to the United Kingdom. The remaining 77 sailors, including Able Seaman Evans, were rescued by SS *Nailsea Moor* and were landed at Sydney, NS. He sent his mother a telegram from Sydney that read, "ship was wrecked arrived safely letter to follow". Telegram companies charged by the word, so his message was brief. The telegram was delivered to his mother while she was being interviewed by a *Calgary Herald* reporter who had heard the news. This resulted in a good news story in the newspaper.

Able Seaman Evans had arrived somewhat unexpectedly back in Canada without his Navy uniform, his merchant navy civilian working clothes, and probably most important to the Navy, his DEMS Paybook. On a positive note, having survived a sinking, Able Seaman Evans was entitled to extra leave. He used it wisely and returned to Calgary. On 18 June 1941, he married Lila Isabel Fenton, wearing his brand new Navy uniform.

Able Seaman Evans returned to HMCS *Stadacona*, the major Navy base in Halifax, NS and was issued a new DEMS paybook and \$20 to replace his civilian work clothes. He was given another DEMS posting, this time to SS *Katvaldis*. SS *Katvaldis* was a 3163-ton freighter that was built in 1907. Her DEMS contingent was eight gunners. The ship was armed with one 12-pounder naval gun and four machine guns. She had been owned by a company in Latvia, but in 1940 she was taken over by the UK when the Soviet Union invaded Latvia and the ship was transferred to the Ministry of War Transport. Able Seaman Evans joined SS *Katvaldis* in July 1941.

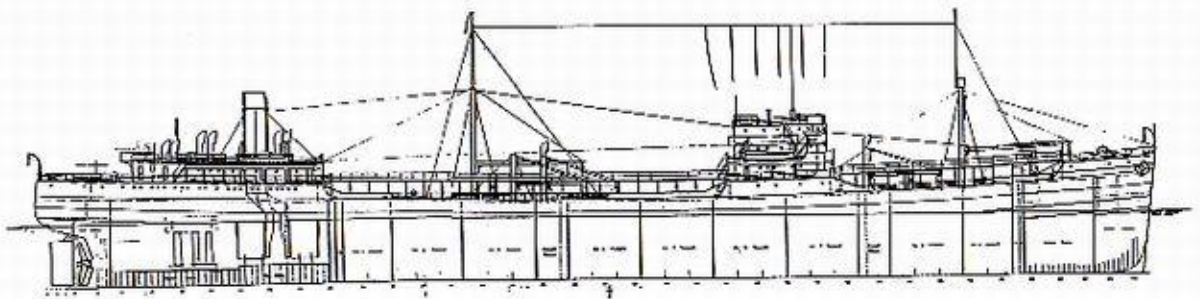


SS *Katvaldis*. Photo: Convoy Web website

During his time on SS *Katvaldis*, Able Seaman Evans crossed the Atlantic four times. Each trip was between Sydney, NS and Loch Ewe, Scotland. The two eastern trips were in convoys SC 37 and SC 49. The designator "SC" meant "Slow Convoy". In other words, these ships crossed the Atlantic between 6-9 knots or 11-17 km/hr. The western trips were with ON 10 and ON 39. During her time in the UK, she sailed between various ports, mostly in Scotland. When in Canadian waters she travelled to Montreal, Trois Rivieres, and Halifax.

In December 1941, SS *Katvaldis* returned to Halifax, and Able Seaman Evans was assigned to HMCS *Stadacona*. (Note: SS *Katvaldis* was sunk by U-605 in August 1942).

After a month at HMCS *Stadacona*, Able Seaman Evans joined his third DEMS ship. The SS *Empire Amethyst* was an 8000-ton tanker. She was a new ship, built in 1941 and was on charter to the UK Ministry of War Transport. Able Seaman Evans was the only Canadian onboard the *Empire Amethyst*. There were five other DEMS gunners, three were from the RN and two were from the Royal Artillery 6/3 Maritime Regiment.



SS *Empire Amethyst*

The SS *Empire Amethyst* sailed from Halifax with convoy HX 173 on 24 January 1942. She landed in Belfast, Northern Ireland two weeks later. She sailed to Swansea, Wales and returned to Belfast.

The ship left Belfast on 5 March 1942. She was in ballast and bound for New Orleans. For part of the voyage, she joined convoy OS 21 which was heading for Freetown, Sierra Leone. She left the convoy and sailed independently to New Orleans. There she was loaded with what the manifest described as 12,000 tons of motor spirit, another name for gasoline.



MISSING in a steamship, which is reported by the Admiralty as "gravely overdue and presumed lost," is 'Able' Seaman Frank Llewellyn Evans (above), of Calgary.

AB Evans was a member of the R.C.N.V.R. serving aboard a defensively equipped merchant ship. The son of Mr. and Mrs. G. M. Evans of 719 2nd St. N.E., he was 23 years of age. He was married a little more than a year ago to Lila Fenton, who resides with her parents at 629 11th Ave. E. He left Calgary January 20. Mrs. Evans received word that her husband was missing in a telegram from Ottawa Tuesday. Able Seaman Evans is the 546th navy man to be officially reported dead or missing since the outbreak of hostilities.

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SS *Empire Amethyst* sailed from New Orleans for Freetown, South Africa on 6 April 1942. Again, she was sailing independently. She was a new ship capable of higher speeds and speed was a good defence against U-boats. The prevailing naval tactic of the era was to let speedy ships sail alone rather than have them slow down in a convoy. She sailed south and turned east. She passed to the south of Cuba and Jamaica.

On 12 April 1942, *Empire Amethyst* was sighted by U-154. The U-boat also spotted HMCS *Prince Henry* (an Armed Merchant Cruiser) and incorrectly assumed that it was a destroyer escorting the tanker. But HMCS *Prince Henry* was not on escort duty and left the area to rescue the crew of another ship that U-154 had sunk earlier. This left the SS *Empire Amethyst* alone, and she was spotted again by U-154. The SS *Empire Amethyst* was likely unaware of the U-boat trailing her, but still zig zagged. This caused the U-boat to lose contact.

At 0430 on 13 April 1942, U-154 again spotted the tanker south of Haiti. She fired two torpedoes. The first hit just below the bridge. The second hit forward of the engine room. SS *Empire Amethyst*, with its highly flammable cargo, exploded in a mass of flames. There were no survivors and no bodies were recovered. Able Seaman Frank Llewellyn Evans was 24 years old when he died.

It was not until 26 May 1942 that Able Seaman Frank Evans' family was notified that his ship was "gravely overdue and must now be presumed lost".

For his service, Able Seaman Frank Evans was awarded: the 1939-1945 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp, and the War Medal. His wife, Lila, and mother, Mary, received Canadian Memorial Crosses.

Able Seaman Frank Evans is commemorated on Panel 8 of the Halifax Memorial at Point Pleasant Park, Halifax, NS; on the Western Canada High School Memorial; the Crescent Heights High School Memorial; the HMCS *Tecumseh* memorial plaque; the Naval Museum of Alberta plaque; in the Calgary Field of Crosses; and the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 72 at the Centre Block Houses of Parliament, Ottawa.

Prepared By:

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Sources:

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- Naval History Net website
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- Peel's Henderson Directories
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- Convoy Web database