

Air Mechanic (E) 2nd Class Charles Nicholas Frankin V-84175



Photo Calgary Herald January 18, 1946

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- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Calgary AB, 18 November 1925**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Tecumseh*, 11 April 1944**
- **Civilian Occupation: Machinist Apprentice & Junior Draughtsman, Canadian Pacific Railway**
- **Died in a road accident while serving in HMCS *Niobe* on 20 December 1945**
- **Buried: Rosskeen Parish Churchyard Extensions (Or Burial Ground), Sec. B. Grave 185**
- **Commemorated: Second World War Book of Remembrance, page 515, at the Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa; HMCS *Tecumseh* Memorial Plaque; Naval Museum of Alberta Memorial Plaque; and the Calgary Field of Crosses.**

Charles (Chuck) Nicholas Frankin was the third of five children born to William and Annie (Melymuka) Frankin. His siblings were Olga, Walter, Stanley and Helen. Both his parents were born in Ukraine before immigrating to Canada, and the family identified as Roman Catholic. Charles was born in Calgary, Alberta, but the family lived in the nearby village of Albert Park (now a suburb of Calgary), a working-class neighbourhood close to the stockyards and railyards.

Chuck attended Albert Park School and then Western Canada High School, as did his older brother Walter. He left school at age 15 after completing Grade 10, apprenticed as a machinist, and trained as a junior draughtsman with the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in Calgary. He was employed as an Engine Lathe Operator and aspired to resume employment with the CPR as a Diesel Engineer following the War.

On 11 April 1944, he enrolled in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) for the duration of hostilities. Enrolment was at HMCS *Tecumseh*, in Calgary. Because his family was of Ukrainian heritage, the RCMP conducted a security check on his older brother Walter, who had joined the RCNVR in 1941. Ukraine had been allied with Germany in World War One and thus its former citizens were “suspect” until proven otherwise. A letter from the RCMP to the recruiters

was marked "Secret," and it cleared Walter Frankin to join. The only negative point noted in the letter was that perhaps his father had communist sympathies. A similar security check was not done when Chuck enlisted perhaps because he declared that his parents were of Polish ancestry rather than Ukrainian, or perhaps because the security check had already been done on his family when Walter joined. European borders shifted regularly, so it's possible that for a time his parents were Ukrainian but Polish at another time. Chuck was enrolled as a Stoker 2nd Class. Enrolment documents describe Stoker Frankin as having gold hair, green eyes and a fair complexion.

In October of 1944, after basic training in HMCS *Tecumseh*, the Navy sent Chuck to HMCS *Chippewa* in Winnipeg for a few months before posting him to the Nova Scotia training base HMCS *Cornwallis* in July of 1944. It appears that he successfully transferred into the Fleet Air Arm before being sent to HMCS *Niobe* in Scotland as an Air Mechanic (E) II (E meant Electrical).

Niobe was the shore base where most Canadian sailors were first posted for orientation before assignment to a ship or in Air Mechanic Frankin's case, to a Royal Naval Air Station (RNAS). Chuck had many postings, often for just a few months at a time. These were mostly to Royal Naval Air Stations, establishments designated His Majesty's Ship (HMS) even though they were shore establishments. The British Admiralty had named many of these shore bases after birds - appropriate for the Fleet Air Arm. The postings included HMS *Turnstone* (Oct 1944), a Royal Naval Air Training Station at Fulham England near London; HMS *Fledgling* (Dec 1944), a Royal Naval Training Station at Mill Meece, near Birmingham, England; HMS *Cadwell* (May 1944) a damaged destroyer in Reserve, likely used for accommodation in the River Tyne in England; and HMS *Kestrel* (May 1944), a Royal Naval Air Station at Worthy Down, near Winchester, England.

In August of 1945, Frankin was then posted to HMS *Peewit*, a Royal Naval Air station at East Haven, Scotland, north of Edinburgh. *Peewit* had a mock aircraft carrier deck for pilots and aircrew to practice. The 826 Air Squadron had recently been established at *Peewit* in August of 1945. The main aircraft operating from *Peewit* were Fairey Barracuda torpedo dive bombers, which operated from aircraft carriers. Next, in October of 1945, Frankin was posted to HMS *Owl* near Inverness, Scotland.



Fairley Barracuda Aircraft. Photo Credit: Wikipedia

Owl was a torpedo training Centre.

Air Mechanic Frankin and other Canadians found themselves at *Peewit* and *Owl* at the time as part of Canada's development of its own naval air capability, independent of Britain. Canada was in the process of acquiring two aircraft carriers for deployment to the Pacific War. When Japan surrendered in September of 1945, Canada carried on with the acquisition of two aircraft carriers named HMCS *Warrior* and HMCS *Magnificent*, both of which served Canada after the War.

Throughout all his postings, the military rated Frankin as "Very Good Efficiency" and "Satisfactory Performance." He was disciplined once for being late for muster and cautioned once for a fight.

Sadly, Frankin was killed just a few days before Christmas of 1945 at just twenty years of age. Chuck Frankin and six other Canadians hitched a ride into a nearby town in a naval truck. The driver was a Royal Marine who had borrowed the truck from his unit, supposedly to head to the pay office nearby. Instead, he stopped at a pub where he and his passengers enjoyed a few beverages. They then boarded the truck again, which hastily crossed a narrow bridge, but missed the sharp turn on the other side. The truck rolled, killing three Canadians including Frankin, and injuring the other passengers. The Navy conducted an extensive investigation and charged the driver with "reckless and careless driving," perhaps influenced by alcohol. The Navy also reprimanded the Chief who loaned out the truck and his superiors for allowing the driver to borrow the truck, rather than proceed to the Pay Office on a bicycle. The investigation found that the driver had also had three previous driving infractions and should never have been allowed to drive at all. Even sadder is that Canadian demobilization was almost complete: Frankin would have been on his way home to Canada in the coming weeks or months.

For his service, the Navy awarded Air Mechanic II (E) Charles Nicholas Frankin: the Defence Medal, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. They awarded his mother Annie the Memorial Cross. His older brother Walter Frankin who served as a Stoker with the RCNVR from 1941 - 45 died almost exactly one year later of tuberculosis that he contracted during his naval service.

Air Mechanic Chuck Frankin's grave marker reads:

EVER REMEMBERED AND MISSED BY MOTHER, DAD, SISTERS OLGA & HELENE, BROTHER STANLEY.

A full honour guard conducted his funeral in Scotland; six Canadians were among the mourners.

Air Mechanic Charles Nicholas Frankin is remembered in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, page 515, at the Centre Block, House of Parliament, Ottawa; HMCS *Tecumseh* Memorial Plaque, and The Naval Museum of Alberta Memorial Plaque, and the Calgary Field of Crosses.

Prepared By:

Commander (Retired) Greg McKenzie (CO HMCS *Tecumseh* 1987-90) and Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph project research team



Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database profile for Air Mechanic (E) II Charles Nicholas Frankin
- Second World War Book of Remembrance
- Library and Archives Canada-Service file for Air Mechanic (E) II Charles Nicholas Frankin
- Calgary Herald, January 18, 1946, page 19
- Keeley, J.D. and E.C. Russell (1967) A History of Canadian Naval Aviation 1918-1962. Ottawa: Queen's Printer.