

Ordinary Signalman George Richmond Hamilton V-35011



Signalman George Hamilton. Photo Hamilton family collection
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- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Red Deer AB, 22 December 1919**
- **Enlisted: Calgary Division RCNVR, 11 June 1941**
- **Civilian Occupation: Musician, Sonny Fry Gentlemen of Music Orchestra**
- **Died while serving in HMCS Captor II on 3 May 1942**
- **Commemorated: Calgary (Burnsland) Cemetery, Lot 7. Block 7. Sec. G; Calgary's Burnsland Cemetery Field of Honour, Calgary Field of Crosses, HMCS *Tecumseh* Second World War Memorial Plaque.**

George Richmond Hamilton was one of five children born to Clarence William Hamilton and Mary Alice Hamilton (nee Youmans). The family were of Canadian pioneer stock. His Mother was an orphan, a baby found and given to Church Missionaries in 1889 in what is now known as central Alberta. This was just 14 years after the North-West Mounted Police established Fort Calgary. She grew up with missionary parents who travelled with the Stoney indigenous people as they moved from camp to camp. She remembers being carried on the shoulders of Chief Walking Buffalo. George's grandfather was born in Pictou, Nova Scotia to a family owning a large confectionary factory. His father grew up in the business. George's grandfather and father saw opportunity in the West, so they moved to Red Deer where they opened a successful bakery.

The Hamilton family lived in Red Deer and the family bakery was housed in what is now the Hamilton block, a Heritage Building on a main street in Red Deer. The Hamilton family is honoured on a plaque in front of the building. His father died when George was eight years old. The family were United Church members. George's younger brother Howard also joined the Royal Canadian Volunteer Reserves (RCNVR) and served in the frigate HMCS *Swansea*.

George was nicknamed "Gidge" by family and friends. He attended high school in Red Deer, Alberta. George discovered his musical talent early and he performed in a youth choir called the FIAT. After graduating from high school, he became a professional musician playing in a popular music orchestra. He and his brothers Howard and Art played in the Sonny Fry & the Gentlemen of Music. It was an orchestra that performed in Red Deer and later in Calgary. George played

trumpet and the bass fiddle. Art played the piano while Howard (nicknamed "Pip") played the



George Hamilton on the far right playing the Bass Fiddle next to his brother Art on the piano. His brother Howard 'Pip' Hamilton is on the far left. Photo: "Sonny Fry and the Gentlemen of Music, Alberta.", [ca. 1940], (CU1115381) by Unknown. Courtesy of Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary. Glenbow Museum archives

clarinet. They routinely played Varsity Hall at Sylvan Lake beach near Red Deer, and for the Calgary's Penley Dance Academy which often saw 300 plus dance participants doing the waltz, foxtrot and jitterbug. The Orchestra also played as prelude to movies at theatres and was frequently the Orchestra for variety shows at Calgary's Palace Theatre. The Orchestra also toured nearby towns including Didsbury, Crossfield, Bassano, Gleichen and Strathmore. They were the local pop star musicians of the era.

George had previous military experience. He joined the Army

Reserve in Calgary served almost four years as a Gunner in the 78th Field Battery before joining the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve.

On 11 Jun 1941, George was enrolled as a Visual Signaller in the Calgary Division RCNVR (later named HMCS *Tecumseh*). Enrolment documents describe George as 5'11 and 1/2 " with brown hair, brown eyes, and a 'fresh' complexion. The Calgary Herald newspaper reported that George was part of a large draft of recruits that left Calgary by train on 18 November 1941. He arrived at HMCS *St Hyacinthe*, Quebec for training as a Signaller. *St Hyacinthe* was a shore base located near Montreal. It was a Communications school that specialized in training signalmen in morse code, semaphore, and radio communications. While there, he earned his first Good Conduct Badge for five years of service (including his time in the Army). In March 1942, after successfully completing his Signaller training, George was assigned to HMCS *Captor II* in Saint John, New Brunswick. *Captor II* was a disused barge belonging to the Department of Public works and subsequently taken over as a naval barracks. The port of Saint John was an important Naval Control of Shipping base where merchant ships were organized into convoys before sailing across the Atlantic Ocean. Signalmen were essential members of the Naval Control of Shipping staff.

Ordinary Signaller Hamilton wasn't there long however when he began suffering numbness in his face and limbs, slurring of speech and severe headaches. He was sent to the St. Anne de Bellevue Military Hospital near Montreal, Quebec where he deteriorated rapidly. Sadly, he died there of a brain tumour on 3 May 1942. He was buried there with full naval honours in the Calgary

Burnsland Cemetery Field of Honour, Grave lot 7, Block 7, Section G. The CO of HMCS *Tecumseh*, Lieutenant Bulmer, headed the Honour Guard. Chief Petty Officer Mitchell, a founder of the original 1923 Calgary Half Company headed up the gun crew along with others on parade. The Last Post and Reveille were played followed by a rifle volley at the graveside. "His Mother never cried again, after he died because the worst thing that could happen did happen and nothing could compare to his death." (niece Holly Hamilton)

For his service, Signalman Hamilton was awarded the Good Conduct Badge, and the War Medal.

Ordinary Signalman George Richmond Hamilton is remembered in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Honour Roll, and the Second World War Book of Remembrance. He is also remembered in Calgary's Burnsland Cemetery Field of Honour, the Calgary Field of Crosses and the Second world War Memorial Plaque at HMCS *Tecumseh*.

Prepared By:

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Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database – profile for George Hamilton
- Second World War Book of Remembrance, p. 79
- Library and Archives Canada - Service file for Signalman George Richmond Hamilton
- Calgary's Burnsland Cemetery Field of Honour, Grave Lot 7,Block 7, Section G
- Calgary Herald, 6 May 1942, p.8
- Calgary Herald. 8 May 1942 p.14
- Strathmore Standard, 7 March 1940, p.1
- Gleichen Call, 12 March 1941, p.1
- Bassano Recorder, 18 June 1940, p.1
- Nephew Doug Hamilton, Red Deer, Alberta
- Niece Holly Hamilton, Red Deer, Alberta