

Stoker 1st Class John Stephenson Hartley V-12789



- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Hemsworth, York, England, 2 August 1922**
- **Enlisted: Edmonton Division, RCNVR (later known as HMCS *Nonsuch*) on 22 August 1941**
- **Civilian Occupation: Farmer, family farm**
- **Death: Killed when MTB 460 was mined on 3 July 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 12; the Naval Museum of Alberta plaque, and the HMCS *Nonsuch* Memorial plaque.**

John Stephenson Hartley was born in Hemsworth, York, England on 2 August 1922. His parents were William Hartley (1892-1958) and Annie (Cox) Hartley (1902-1928). They were married in 1920 in England. John had three siblings: George Hartley (1920-1978), Joan Mary Hartley (1923), and James Hartley (1926-2008).

The Hartleys immigrated to Canada in 1926. They sailed on the SS *Montcalm* to Quebec City and travelled by train to Edmonton. They were sponsored by a Canadian government immigration program and settled on a farm in the Ashmont area. Ashmont is about 200 km north-east of Edmonton.

John's mother, Annie, died in 1928 when he was five years old. William married Bessie Sorochan in 1932, and they had four daughters (John's half-sisters). Ina (1933), Alice (1936-2009), Doreen (1940-2002), and Dianne (1942-1997).

John completed Grade 8 and had left school by 1937 when he was 15. He went to work on the family farm. On 2 August 1941, after four years of farming, John travelled to Edmonton to enlist in the navy at the Edmonton Division (later known as HMCS *Nonsuch*) of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR). On enlistment he was rated as a Stoker 2nd Class. His attestation papers describe him as almost six feet tall, with red hair, brown eyes, and a ruddy complexion. He stated his religion as the Church of England. He described himself as competent to run a mixed farm but having no desire to return to farming. He saw his future as staying with the Navy. He was enlisted for "Hostilities Only".

On 1 October 1941, Stoker Hartley was placed on active service in Edmonton, where he likely took technical courses through the University of Alberta. The Navy contracted the university to

provide technical training to stokers and engine room artificers. In January 1942, he was sent to HMCS *Naden* – the major west coast training base in Esquimalt, BC – for further technical and seamanship training.

As sometimes happened with Prairie sailors from farming environments, John was granted Agricultural Leave in May and June 1942. He went back to help with seeding on the family farm.

After his agricultural leave, John was reinstated to active service. He spent two weeks at HMCS *Naden* before being transferred to HMCS *Stadacona*, the main training and operational base in Halifax, NS. At *Stadacona*, trained sailors awaited their draft to RCN ships.

In July 1942, John was sent to Toronto to join the crew of Motor Launch Q-081, a new Fairmile B motor launch that was completed in Midland, ON, in late May. This ship was destined for the Fairmile Motor Launch Flotilla based at HMCS *Fort Ramsay* in Gaspé Bay, QC.

Q-081 was one of 88 built in Canada for the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN). They were powered by two 650 hp (gasoline) engines and could reach a top speed of 20 knots (37kph). These wooden-hulled boats were affectionately known as Little Fighting Ships, Q-



**Q-080 operating in the St Lawrence.
Photo: Roger Litwiller Collection, courtesy of Allen E.
Singleton, RCNVR**

boats, MLs or Holy Rollers (due to their violent pitching and tossing in rough seas). They had a crew of 2 officers and 14 ratings. A feature of a Fairmile was that it could be reconfigured in 48 hours for different missions. In this way, the ships could serve as escorts, minesweepers, minelayers, navigation leaders, coastal raiders, patrol boats, ambulances or rescue launches. Most of the RCN's Fairmile B boats were used for escorting coastal convoys.



**MTB S-09 underway.
Photo: For Posterity's Sake website courtesy of
The Ships of Canada's Naval Forces 1910-1981
by Ken Macpherson & John Burgess**

In late August 1942, after 45 days of service with Q-081, Stoker Hartley was dispatched to HMCS *Hochelaga II*, a Navy base in Montreal. There, he was attached to MTB S-09. This ship was the former US Navy Patrol Boat – 9 (PT-9). It was one of several PTs transferred to the Royal Navy (and subsequently the RCN). The boat arrived in a Montreal shipyard in 1941 without engines. Repairs were completed, and the vessel was launched as MTB S-09 in late September 1942. Based on his service dates, Stoker Hartley was likely a member of the acceptance/transit crew who accepted the vessel from the shipyard and sailed S-09 to Halifax, Gaspé or Quebec City.

John was promoted to Stoker 1st Class on 18 Nov 1942.

Before a ship is accepted into the Navy fleet, it must undergo trials to ensure that all its systems, including engines, auxiliary equipment, navigation aids, and weapons, function correctly. The first



crew members assigned to the ship are responsible for testing these systems and identifying any faults before the ship can be put into operational service. Stoker Hartley must have gained a favourable reputation as an effective stoker for "ship acceptance" crews, as he was drafted to another new Fairmile Motor Launch, Q-103, in November 1942. Based on service dates, Stoker Hartley joined the ship in Sarnia, ON, where it was built and launched.

In this instance, Stoker 1st Class remained with Q-103 for 329 days – the longest posting of his Naval career. In

December 1942, Q-103 was attached to the 78th Motor Launch Flotilla in Sydney, NS. In 1943, the ship conducted patrols and escort duties in the Gulf of St Lawrence and was based at HMCS Fort Ramsay in Gaspé and in Sept Îles, QC.

CN 421
H7708
Q-103 Vol. 2

Nov '42		FAIRMILE	
18153/19	15	RNO TORONTO	Successfully launched 1600/7 Nov.
1420/14		NSHR	Completed endurance, full power, turning, other trials No 14 - Commissioning Nov 15/42.
21243/18		N910 Toronto	commissioned 18th Nov.
15217/19		✓	Departed Sarnia 19/11. P 7A Toronto P.M. 29/11
2055/19		Toronto	At Windsor due to fog
1651/20		Windsor	Departed Windsor 0800/20. P.M. 7A Toronto P.M. 20/21
1345/21		✓	Arrived Port Colborne 0400/21. To proceed to Toronto.
0040/22		✓	Arrived Toronto 21/11
1235/21		Windsor	Departed Windsor 0500/21. ETA Montreal P.M. 20/22.
21302/22		N910 Toronto	Arrived Kingston.
1544/23		Toronto	Departed Kingston 0800/23.
2121/23		Windsor	Arrived Cornwall 1035/23 proceeding Ottawa.
0230/24		Windsor	Arrived Ottawa 0800/24
15357/24		✓	Arrived Montreal A.M. 24th Nov.
1201/25		Windsor	Departed A.M. 20/25
2140/25		Windsor	Arrived Quebec.

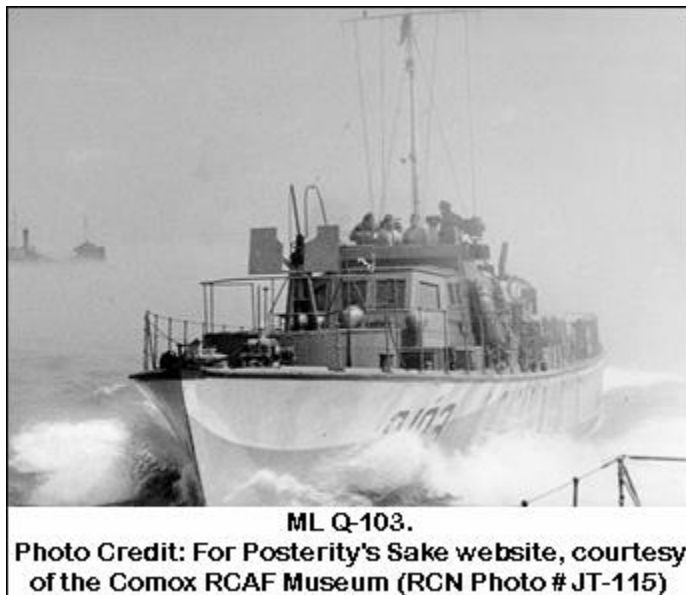
Ship's Log for Q-103 for November 1942. Note that trials were completed before the ship began its transit towards Sydney, NS where it joined the 78 ML Flotilla.
Photo: <http://www.rcnfairmiles.com/>

In November 1943 – shortly before Q-103 sailed to Bermuda for winter exercises - Stoker 1st Class Hartley was posted to Halifax, where he was briefly attached to Q-111.

In December 1943, John was sent overseas to HMCS Niobe, the Navy's manning depot base in Greenock, Scotland. From there, he was sent to HMS Attack, the Royal Navy's (RN) Coastal

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Forces base at Portland, UK, on the south coast of England. At *Attack*, he took RN Coastal Forces training courses on Motor Torpedo Boats (MTB) and Motor Gun Boats (MGB). John completed this training in February 1944 and was sent back to HMCS *Niobe*.



In May 1944, after what must have seemed a very long interlude at HMCS *Niobe*, Stoker Hartley was finally posted to the 29 Motor Torpedo Boat (MTB) Flotilla. The 29th Flotilla was an all-Canadian group of nine MTBs. John joined MTB-460. The crews were almost exclusively RCNVR. The vessels were Scott-Payne G-types built by British Power Boats. They were 71 feet long, had a range of 140 miles and a top speed of 40 knots. They carried 2500 gallons of 100-octane gasoline. The power for these boats came from three 1250 hp V-12 Packard engines, with another two Ford V-8s connected with clutches to the outboard shafts for quiet operations. Later versions had 1500 hp engines from either

Packard or Rolls-Royce. These modified aircraft engines were so highly tuned that they needed replacing after 500 hours. Talk about gear-head heaven!

The MTBs were armed with torpedoes, a 40mm (2-pounder) cannon, 20mm twin cannons and machine guns. For Operation *Neptune* – the naval portion of the Normandy D-Day Invasion - the torpedoes were removed for a time and replaced with depth charges, much to the dismay of the Canadian MTB crews.



The first operational mission for the 29th Flotilla was on 16 May 1944. It was to escort a group of British Army engineers who had to gather up some samples of German mines on the beach defences on the coast of France. For the rest of May 1944, the flotilla worked in the English Channel, doing their best to deny these waters to German forces.

They lured German destroyers into the range of Tribal destroyers, duelled with E-boats and R-boats, and attacked enemy escort ships. E-boats were German fast attack craft. They were a formidable adversary - larger, faster, better armed, and had much greater range than MTBs. R-boats were smaller versions used for coastal convoy escort and minesweeping.

On 28 May 1944, it was time to move the flotilla to Portsmouth in preparation for its role on D-Day. They worked with the British 55 MTB Flotilla and 17 Destroyer Flotilla to protect the British D-Day assault area by attacking enemy vessels and keeping the enemy inside its naval base at La Havre, France. On the night of 6 June 1944, they were assigned to patrol an area outside of La Havre to prevent any German vessels from breaking through the Allied defences and attacking the vulnerable anchorage off the D-Day beaches. After 0430, the flotilla engaged six German R-boats. The Canadians opened fire at the line of R-boats, engaging each. One R-boat exploded, and the rest retreated to their base in La Havre.

The flotilla continued with the constant fighting of this assignment until mid-August 1944.

On the evening of 3 July 1944, MTB-460 and 465 were patrolling near the Normandy coast. MTB-460 - Stoker Hartley's boat - hit a mine and disintegrated. Stoker Hartley and nine other sailors were killed. Six survived and were picked up by MTB-465. Stoker John Stephenson Hartley was 21 years old. His body was not recovered.

John's service with the MTBs had not gone unnoticed. Lieutenant-Commander Anthony Law, the flotilla's senior officer, wrote to Mr Hartley and said of his son:

"... your son in my opinion has always been a most capable and efficient man. His cheery disposition made him most popular with everyone with whom he has come in contact, and his place in the 29th MTB Flotilla will not easily be filled. You may be sure we all realise that the Royal Canadian Navy has suffered a great loss when your son was listed as missing ... may I say that all Officers and ratings with the 29th MTB Flotilla are closely associated with you in your grief, for we have all lost a true and loyal companion."

For his service, Stoker 1st Class John Stephenson Hartley was awarded the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, the Atlantic Star and Clasp, the 1939-1945 Star, and the War Medal. John's father wrote to the government to request that the Memorial Cross be presented to his stepmother, but a bureaucrat in Ottawa wrote back to say that only living birth mothers and wives are eligible and how inadvisable it would be to make an exception.

John Stephenson Hartley is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial (panel 12), the Naval Museum of Alberta plaque, and the HMCS *Nonsuch* Memorial plaque.

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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:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database profile for John Stephenson Hartley
- Library and Archives Canada Service via Ancestry.com – record for military service

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- Ancestry.com for family information
- ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Calgary Herald
- Wikipedia website
- Forposterityssake.com website
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial website
- [Canadians and Coastal Forces During World War II, Friends of Canadian War Museum](#) -
- [Naval Museum of Manitoba](#)
- [Operational History of the 29 and 65 RCN MTB/MGB Flotillas 1944-1945](#) – Stephen Bagnell –
- White Plumes Astern, C Anthony Law, S/O 29 MTB Flotilla
- <http://www.rcnfairmiles.com/>

Other photos:

TWO ARE DEAD, NINE MISSING AFTER CANADIAN M.T.B. SUNK

London, July 11 — (CP) — Two sailors were killed and nine others are missing as a result of an explosion which shattered a Canadian motor torpedo boat in the English channel recently. The M.T.B.'s commanding officer, Lieut. David Killam, D.S.C., of Vancouver, is among the missing.

The boat was returning to base after a patrol off France when it disintegrated in two explosions. Six of the crew were rescued.

The dead are A.B. George Grant of Prince George, B.C., and A.B. George Ashmore of Lachine, Que. The missing, in addition to Killam, include the boat's executive officer, Lieut. Howard Hunt of Toronto; Pty. O. Motor Mechanic Douglas George of Wolfville, N.S.; Telegraphists Peter Thompson of Kindersley, Sask., and A. W. Rowe of Colchester, England; L.S. Jack Lee of Kingston and Stoker Mechanics L. Lawson of Port Dalhousie, E. A. Button of Winnipeg, and J. Hartley of Ashmount, Alta.

The survivors were picked up by another M.T.B. commanded by Lieut. Charles Chaffey. They were O.D.S. Andre Rousseau, Montreal;



LIEUT. DAVID KILLAM



Q-boats at HMCS Fort Ramsay Photo Credit – Gov't of Canada

Photo Credit: For Posterity Sake Website

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