

Stoker 1st Class (M) Ernest Frank Howe V-18476



- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Belleville, ON, 22 May 1918**
- **Enlisted: Kingston Division RCNVR, 4 July 1941**
- **Civilian Occupation: Labourer, Canadian National Railway**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Raccoon* was torpedoed and sank on 7 September 1942**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 9; Cenotaph in Memorial Park, Belleville, ON; and Memorial Passageway HMCS *Cataraqui***

Ernest Frank Howe was born in Belleville, Ontario on 22 May 1918. His parents, Albert and Ferole Howe, were married in Belleville on 25 January 1911. Ernest had two brothers, Raymond and James. The Howe family were members of the Church of England. Howe was single.

At 17, after completing one year at Belleville Technical Institute, Howe left school and started an apprenticeship in Diesel Engineering, which he did not complete. He worked as a labourer for the Canadian National Railway.

On 3 November 1940, Ernest Howe enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force in Kingston as an Aircraftsman 2nd Class. He was taken on strength at #1 Manning Depot in Toronto, where he received his basic training. Upon completion of his training, Howe was posted to Picton's Auxiliary Manning Depot in Picton, ON, and then back to RCAF Station Trenton for administration work.

Howe was promoted to Aircraftsman 1st Class on 13 February 1941 and then to Leading Aircraftsman on 13 May 1941. On his Occupational History form, Ernest noted that he hoped to join the Navy. His wish was granted. He was released on 3 July 1941 from the Royal Canadian Air Force to enlist in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve..

On 4 July 1941, Ernest Howe enlisted as a Stoker 2nd Class at Kingston Division RCNVR (later known as HMCS *Cataraqui*). Due to his previous education in Motor Mechanics Diesel, his rank was changed the next day to Stoker 1st Class (M). At the time of Howe's enlistment, he was 5' 8" tall, weighed 139 lbs, and had brown hair and green eyes. His complexion was clear. He had scars on his lower right arm and his right temple. Both scars were an inch in length. At the time of his enrollment, Howe had a Will and an insurance policy.

While at *Cataraqui*, Howe completed the Navy's New Entry training and passed his swim test on 30 July 1941.

On 7 September, Howe was drafted to HMCS *Stadacona*, the large Royal Canadian Navy Base in Halifax, NS. While at *Stadacona*, he completed the Auxiliary Machinery Watchkeeping Course and was granted his watchkeeping certificate. This certificate meant he could operate a ship's generators and other auxiliary machinery. He needed additional training to operate and maintain the engines of a warship.

Either steam engines or diesel/gas engines powered warships during this period. To avoid the need to train Stokers on all engine types, they were assigned to specialize in one engine type or the other. In the case of Stoker Howe, he was assigned to specialize in diesel/gas engines, known as the Motor Mechanic stream. On 8th November 1941, Howe was sent to the Mechanical Training Establishment in Pictou, NS, to attend his Motor Mechanics course. He completed the course and became a qualified Motor Mechanic on 31st January 1942. He was sent back to *Stadacona* to await a draft to an operational ship.



On 6 February 1942, Stoker 1st Class (M) Howe was drafted to HMCS *Raccoon*. The *Raccoon* was previously a yacht named *Halongia*, which was acquired by the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) in 1940 and converted into a patrol vessel and convoy escort. The ship had a crew of 40 men, and when Ernest joined, *Raccoon* was assigned to HMCS *Fort Ramsay* near Gaspé, QC. However, the patrol vessel was

stationed in Halifax for the winter due to the frozen St. Lawrence River.

On 25 May 1942, *Raccoon* returned to Fort Ramsay as an escort for coastal convoys travelling between Quebec and Sydney, NS. The news of U-boats in the St Lawrence was largely kept out of the newspapers. Still, there was a significant threat to shipping, and the RCN dispatched additional escorts to the Gaspé Force, including HMC Ships *Reindeer*, *Raccoon*, *Lynx*, and *Vison*.

On 2 September 1941, while escorting a convoy, *Raccoon* was attacked by a U-boat. At least two torpedoes were fired at *Raccoon*, but they missed their target. One passed ahead of the ship, while the other passed beneath the ship, forward of the bridge. This was because the depth of the torpedoes had been set too deep, which was meant for a larger vessel. *Raccoon* followed the torpedo tracks to the suspected side of the German submarine and dropped depth charges to locate the attacker, but no trace of the U-boat was found.

Several days later, *Raccoon* was escorting the convoy QS-33 on the evening of 6 September when the merchant ship *Aeas* was attacked and sunk by U-165 off Cap-Chat, Quebec. As the corvette HMCS *Arrowhead*, the lead ship of the escort slowed to pick up survivors of the merchant vessel, *Raccoon* positioned herself to screen the convoy. At 0012, two loud explosions were heard astern of the convoy. The Fairmile motor launch Q 065 saw two spouts of white water in the distance and assumed that it was *Raccoon* dropping depth charges. *Arrowhead* swept back to the rear of the convoy but did not spot *Raccoon* in position. At 0727, the corvette asked for *Raccoon's* location but received no response. The convoy continued and was attacked again on 7 September, with three more merchant vessels torpedoed.

Several warships were dispatched to aid the convoy and search for the missing armed yacht. The naval vessels found no remnants or survivors of *Raccoon*, and the search was abandoned. The body of one crew member and a corner of the wooden bridge structure were found washed up on the shore on Anticosti Island, QC, a few weeks after the attack. It was only later that it was established that the explosions were the sound of *Raccoon's* boiler exploding after being hit by a torpedo from U-165.

Thirty-seven officers and ratings, including Stoker 1st Class (M) Ernest Howe, were lost. He was 24 years old. Mrs. Howe was notified by telegram on 12 September 1942 from the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services informing her that her son was missing and believed lost at sea.

For his service, Stoker 1st Class (M) Ernest Howe was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp and the War Medal. The Memorial Cross was awarded to his mother, Mrs. Ferole Howe.

Ernest Howe is remembered on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 9; in the Second War Book of Remembrance, Page 83, at the Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa; on the Cenotaph in Memorial Park, Belleville, ON; and in the Memorial Passageway of HMCS *Cataraqui*.

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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.



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