

Ordinary Telegraphist Keith Ward Jenks V-60979



Ordinary Telegraphist Keith Ward Jenks.
Photo credit: The Toronto Telegram
September 1944

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Detroit, Michigan, USA, 10 March 1925**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Prevost*, 13 May 1943**
- **Civilian Occupation: Student**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Alberni* was torpedoed and sunk on 21 August 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 12; Halifax Memorial, panel 12; Clinton Cenotaph; Memorial plaque of Clinton United Church and Clinton Collegiate Institute; and the Memorial Plaque in the HMCS *Alberni* Museum in Courtney, BC**

Keith Ward Jenks was born on 10 March 1925 in Detroit, Michigan. His mother was Dorothy Quaife, but a total absence of documentation concerning his father's identity indicates that he may have passed away. Being an only child, Jenks grew up without siblings but found solace in a close bond with his grandmother, Alice Ward. During his high school years, Jenks resided in Clinton, Ontario, where he lived with his grandmother and attended Clinton Collegiate Institute, successfully completing grade 13. His spiritual upbringing was deeply rooted in the United Church, which significantly shaped his values and beliefs.

As the Second World War reshaped communities, the Royal Air Force (RAF) recognized the strategic importance of radar and established a training school in Clinton, Ontario, in 1941. It was against this backdrop that Jenks, having completed his high school education, made the decision to enlist in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) on 13 May 1943. At the age of 18, Jenks joined HMCS *Prevost* in London, Ontario. His residence at the time was on Huron Street in Clinton, Ontario. Standing 5 feet 8 1/4 inches tall and weighing 135 lbs, Jenks had auburn hair and hazel eyes. His enlistment marked the beginning of his journey in service to his country during the war.

After enlisting, Jenks quickly found himself on active service on 4 June 1943 as an Ordinary Seaman Wireless Telegraphist (W/T). He was sent to HMCS *York* in Toronto, likely for some training to confirm his suitability for the Telegraphist occupation, which had a high failure rate. Next, Jenks proceeded to HMCS *Cornwallis* in Halifax to complete his New Entry Training. *Cornwallis*, established in 1942 to meet the growing need for training facilities in Nova Scotia, played a crucial role in preparing naval ratings for their duties. On 7 September 1943, having completed basic training, Jenks arrived just one day later at HMCS *St. Hyacinthe*, the naval

communication school founded in 1941 and located in St Hyacinthe, QC. On 24 December 1943, Jenk's hard work paid off as he excelled in his course and was promoted to Ordinary Telegraphist (O/Tel). He continued serving at *St. Hyacinthe*, where he further honed his telegraphist skills.



Re-creation of the Radio Room in a Flower-class Corvette during WW2.
 Canada's Naval Memorial: HMCS Sackville.
 Photo courtesy of Jerry Proc
<http://jproc.ca/rp/corvette.html>

Following a brief stint at HMCS *Stadacona* in the spring of 1944, the Navy posted Jenks to HMCS *Alberni*, representing the final chapter of his naval career.

Alberni, a Flower-class corvette, proudly served in the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) during the Second World War. These corvettes were specifically designed for effective anti-submarine warfare. *Alberni* played a vital role during Operation *Neptune*, the naval component of the historic invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944. As part of this significant operation, *Alberni* dutifully escorted support ships to and from the United Kingdom during the invasion, ensuring their safe passage. The bravery and dedication of *Alberni*'s crew were instrumental in the success of this pivotal military endeavour. Their

commitment to protecting the Allied forces and securing victory during this critical phase of the war will always be remembered.

Tragically, on 21 August 1944, *Alberni* received orders to relieve HMCS *Drumheller* and patrol the English Channel, east of the D-Day landing site, in search of U-boats. Despite being equipped with an ASDIC (Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee) transmitter/receiver to detect submarines, *Alberni* fell victim to an acoustic torpedo. These torpedoes were designed to home in on the noise emitted from a ship's engine. In a devastating turn of events, *Alberni* was struck. Within a mere 30 seconds, the ship sank stern first, rolling over and trapping most of the crew below deck. Among the brave sailors presumed dead and lost at sea was O/Tel Jenks, whose body was never recovered. Alongside Jenks, 58 other courageous men lost their lives, with only 31 surviving the tragedy. Investigations revealed that the U-boat responsible, U-480, was equipped with an experimental rubber coating that effectively evaded ASDIC detection, making it difficult to detect and defend against. *Alberni*'s loss stands as a poignant reminder of the perils faced by those who served at sea during the war and the sacrifices made by these noble men.

O/Tel Jenks was held in high regard by his fellow shipmates, and *Alberni*'s Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Commander Ian Bell, who survived the tragic sinking, spoke highly of him. In a heartfelt letter to Dorothy, Keith's mother, LCdr Bell expressed,

"Your son was an excellent man, both reliable and efficient, and ever since coming to my ship has done an excellent job of work. He was very well liked by all the officers and men and appeared to be quite happy aboard. Keith's dedication, competence, and positive demeanour had made a lasting impression on those who served alongside him."



For his service of one year and three months, Ordinary Telegraphist Keith Ward Jenks was awarded several medals in recognition of his contributions. These included the 1939-45 Star, the France-Germany Star, the War Medal, and the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp. In honour of his sacrifice, Keith's mother, Dorothy Quaife, was awarded the Memorial Cross.



To ensure that O/Tel Jenks' memory lives on, he is commemorated in various locations. His name is etched on Panel 12 of the Halifax Memorial, a tribute to those lost at sea with no known grave. Additionally, he is remembered on the Clinton Cenotaph, the Memorial Plaque at Clinton United Church, the Canadian Virtual War Memorial, the Memorial Plaque in the HMCS *Alberni* Museum in British Columbia, and the Clinton Collegiate Institute. These memorials stand as lasting tributes to Keith Ward Jenks and his sacrifice in serving his country.

Prepared By*:

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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 file for Keith Ward Jenks
- Library and Archives Canada Service file for O/Tel Keith Ward Jenks
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