

## Sub-Lieutenant Alan Rudolf Johnson O-36723



Sub-Lieutenant Alan Johnson with his sister Doris. Photo: Calgary Herald Archives 26 May 1942.

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Fernie BC, 18 July 1917**
- **Enlisted: Calgary Division RCNVR, 22 July 1940**
- **Civilian Occupation: Accountant, Dominion of Canada General Insurance Company**
- **Death: Accidental death while serving in HMS *Heron* on 22 May 1942**
- **Commemorated: Yeovilton (St. Bartholomew) Churchyard, Plot M. Grave 13; the Crescent Heights High School Second World War Memorial in Calgary; the Calgary Field of Crosses; and the Memorial Plaque at HMCS *Tecumseh***

Alan Rudolf Johnson was born in Fernie, BC on 18 July 1917. He was the son of Ferdinand and Catherine E. Johnson.

Ferdinand Johnson was an American of Norwegian descent who was born in Hudson, Wisconsin in 1891. Alan's mother, Catherine Eugenie Snow, was born in Villagedale, NS in 1882. They met in Fernie, BC where Catherine was training at the Fernie Hospital School of Nursing to become a nurse. They were married in Whitefish, Montana, USA on 30 June 1915.

Alan's younger sister, Doris, was born in Whitefish, Montana in 1919.

The Johnson family established a homestead farm in the Whitefish area, but unfortunately the homestead was destroyed by fire. They then relocated to Alberta, first to the Bentley area and then they finally settled in Calgary. A 1921 census document shows them to have been living at 322 3 Avenue West in Calgary. Ferdinand was employed in a warehouse. The family suffered another hardship on 8 October 1924 when Ferdinand passed away after a short illness. It is not known exactly how Catherine managed to raise two children on her own as working as a nurse would have been difficult because there was no daycare in 1924.

The Johnson children attended the Hillhurst United Church on Kensington Close NW. Alan and Doris also attended the Hillhurst Public School (1418 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW). At that time, Hillhurst School taught grades 1 through 9. From there, Alan graduated to Crescent Heights High School for grades 10 to 12. According to his niece, Tina Shaskin, Alan was an excellent student. In a *Calgary Herald* article dated 26 May 1942, it was stated that he graduated from high school at the age of 16 and he was the Valedictorian in his senior year.

After graduating from high school, Alan was employed as a cashier and trained to be an accountant with the Dominion of Canada General Insurance Company. He and his mother had gone together to purchase a house at 405 15 Street NW. Alan gave this as his address at the time of his enlistment. His mother and sister were living at 135 2 Avenue West but moved into the house after Alan was dispatched to Halifax for naval training. His mother and sister lived in this house for many years and his sister Doris got married and raised six children at this address.

Alan enlisted in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) at the base in Calgary (later named HMCS *Tecumseh*) on 22 July 1940. On his enlistment application he stated that he would sign up for the "Duration of The Hostilities" and resume his job with Dominion Life after his military service. On his enlistment physical documentation, it was stated that he was 5' 10" tall, 150lbs, with brown hair and blue eyes and he was in good physical condition.

On 3 August 1940, Ordinary Seaman Johnson was dispatched to HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax, NS for basic training. He was in Halifax until 9 September 1940 when it was determined that he would be a good candidate for the Officer Training Course (OTC).

He was then sent to HMS *Victory* in England for officer training. *Victory* was a shore-based Navy barracks near Portsmouth. There he received officer training and began basic training with the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy (RN). His service records show him to be at HMS *Victory* until 6 January 1941 when he was sent to HMS *St. Vincent*, another RN shore base near Gosport. At some point, Alan was sent back to Canada to take a course at the Royal Canadian Air Force base in Kingston, ON. His sister Doris took this opportunity to visit him.

Alan was promoted to Sub-Lieutenant on 23 December 1941.

The Royal Canadian Navy did not have a Fleet Air Arm until 1944. Before that point in the war,



**Sub Lieutenant Alan Johnson and colleague. Date and location unknown.  
Photo: Johnson family collection**

RCNVR pilots trained with, and served in, the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm. They took extensive training courses beginning with the basics such as navigation, signalling and seamanship and progressed to actual solo flights. It usually took 18 to 24 months for a candidate to become fully trained. Alan's service records do not show the actual courses he took, only the bases at which he was stationed, the first of which was HMS *St. Vincent*. After HMS *St. Vincent*, he was stationed at HMS *Kestrel* near Winchester and then HMS *Heron*.

On 4 May 1942, Alan was sent to HMS *Heron*, a shore base that was located near Yeovil, Somerset. At *Heron*, a portion of the landing strip was lit up and made to simulate landing on an aircraft carrier. Most of the training planes at this base were Hawker Hurricanes.

Eighteen days later on 22 May 1942, a tragic training accident took Alan's life. The accident occurred near the Porton Railway Station, at Wiltshire, England. The exact cause of the accident is not known, but flying conditions were very poor that day and he may have descended below cloud cover to ascertain his location. It is possible that the engine stalled and due to the low

altitude, the plane hit the ground before he could regain control. Sub-Lieutenant Alan Johnson was 25 years old.

Alan was buried on 26 May 1942. His grave is No.13, row M in the Naval Reservation of the St. Bartholomew Churchyard Yeovilton, Yeovil, Somerset, England.

For his service, Sub-Lieutenant Alan Johnson was awarded: the Defence Medal, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp, and the War Medal. The Memorial Cross was sent to his mother on 10 July 1942.

Sub-Lieutenant Johnson is remembered on the Crescent Heights High School Second World War Memorial in Calgary; the Calgary Field of Crosses; the Second World War memorial plaque at HMCS *Tecumseh*; and the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 85 at the Centre Block Houses of Parliament, Ottawa

**Prepared By:**

Sub-Lieutenant (Retired) Ross Anderson, HMCS *Tecumseh* 1971-74  
Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Researcher



**Sources:**

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database – Profile for Alan Rudolf Johnson
- Library and Archives Canada – Service File for Sub-Lieutenant Alan Rudolf Johnson
- Discussion with Alan Johnson's niece: Tina Shaskin of Okotoks, Alberta
- <https://www.nauticapedia.ca/Sub-Lieutenant Alan Johnson>. Retrieved 15 May 22
- The Canadian Virtual War Memorial. Retrieved 15 May 22