

Coder Arthur Eugene Kemp V-39976



Coder Arthur Kemp. Photo: For Posterity
Sake website

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Trenton, ON, 6 March 1917**
- **Enlisted: Kingston Division RCNVR, 22 June 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Clerk accountant, RCAF station Trenton**
- **Death: Lost at sea HMCS *Shawinigan* was torpedoed and sank on 25 November 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 12; Memorial Passageway at HMCS *Cataraqui*; HMCS *Shawinigan* Memorial and the Belleville Cenotaph**

Arthur Eugene Kemp was born in Trenton, Ontario, on 6 March 1917. His parents married on 15 April 1915 in Ameliasburg, Prince Edward County, in Ontario. His father Herbert died on 18 June 1929 and his mother Dora Mae died on 8 January 1940. The Kemp family identified as belonging to the United Church of Canada. After completing Grade 12 Arthur attended the Ontario Business College for one year before taking a job at the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) Station in Trenton as an Accountant Clerk.

On 29 July 1940, Arthur enlisted as a Private in the Argyll Light Infantry Tank Corps Band (Reserve Force). The next major step in Arthur's life occurred when he married Phyllis Elsie on 9 May 1941. Arthur and Phyllis had two small children, Rosalie Mae, born in May of 1942 and Philip Walter, born in April of 1944.

Arthur was released from the Tank Corps to join the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR). On 22 June 1942, he enlisted as an Ordinary Coder at the Kingston Division RCNVR (later known as HMCS *Cataraqui*). At enlistment, Arthur was 5' 7" with brown hair and hazel eyes. He had a medium complexion with small scars on his left thumb and left temple. Arthur went on active service on 10 August 1942. At the time of his application, Arthur confirmed he had a will held by the law firm of Graham, McNab, Barristers and Solicitors.

The Navy posted Arthur to HMCS *York* on 15 August 1942 for basic naval training. He graduated before being drafted to HMCS *St. Hyacinthe*, the Navy's communications school in Quebec for his occupational training as a Coder in the middle of October 1942.

Coders belonged to the Communications branch. They were responsible for encoding plain language messages (using a code book) and transmitting them by radio or teletype. They were also responsible for receiving coded messages which they decoded into plain language, which

was especially important for operating in a task group or during operations tactical in nature. Kemp appeared to have a talent for coding. His final examination marks during the Ordinary Coder course averaged 95%, and he received a grade of 99% for receiving coded messages. On 11 December 1942, Arthur was rated as an Ordinary Coder. Also in December, Arthur's service file notes that he was qualified as a "Type 'x' Operator". Typex was a cipher machine used to encode and decode plain text messages. It was far more powerful than the famous German Enigma machine. Once encrypted, the message could be sent over a radio channel or a landline link.



Typex Machine from the Second World War.
Photo courtesy of National Cryptologic Museum
via Jerry Proc

Although the initial Coder course was only six weeks in length and a graduate would normally be posted to an operational unit where they could gain proficiency and experience, Arthur remained at HMCS *St. Hyacinthe* until 1 June 1944. The Navy promoted Arthur to the rank of Coder on 10 August 1943 and promoted him again to Leading Coder on 21 April 1944 (he graduated with his Leading Coder course with an average of 91.5 %).

On 9 June 1944, the Navy posted Arthur to HMCS *Shawinigan*, which had just undergone a refit in Nova Scotia. The ship proceeded to Bermuda for work-ups and returned to Halifax as a member of Escort

Group W-2 protecting merchant shipping in the North Atlantic. *Shawinigan* was fitted with a Typex/CCM Mk II machine and Arthur was one of two Coders in the crew. *Shawinigan* escorted five trans-Atlantic convoys after Arthur had joined before its luck ran out.

On 24 November 1944, *Shawinigan* and USCGC *Sassafras* escorted the ferry *Burgeo* from Sydney, Nova Scotia to Port aux Basques, Newfoundland. *Sassafras* was detached from the escort without relief, leaving *Shawinigan* alone. *Shawinigan* departed on an independent anti-submarine patrol after informing the ferry that the two vessels would rendezvous in the morning.

The next morning, *Burgeo* left Port aux Basques on schedule but in heavy fog, and it could not find *Shawinigan*. Keeping radio silence and without informing the Navy of *Shawinigan's* lack of appearance, *Burgeo* made for Sydney unescorted. When *Burgeo* arrived at 1800 that evening, the Navy knew that something had happened to *Shawinigan*.

The wave of U-boats that remained in the area until the end of 1944 achieved scattered successes. These successes can be attributed to their own enterprise, poor sonar conditions, a good deal of luck, and the Canadian Northwest Atlantic Command's lack of available resources. These were the factors at work when U-1228 sank *Shawinigan* with all hands.

Based on Enigma intercepts, U-1228 was expected in the Gulf of St Lawrence. The U-Boat Captain had turned back to repair his schnorkel mast on the night of 23 November. After surfacing five miles off the southern Newfoundland coast for the better part of an hour to lubricate the valve, he submerged and headed back towards the Cabot Strait. *Shawinigan* was carrying out an antisubmarine sweep in bright moonlight to seaward of Port-aux-Basques on the evening of the 24th in preparation for its escort of the Newfoundland ferry *Burgeo* the next morning. U-1228 first detected the corvette by hydrophone. *Oberleutnant zur See Marienfeld* then sighted *Shawinigan* through his periscope. It zigzagged across the track of the submerged boat, at the limits of sonar range, and Marienfeld fired a single zaunkönig (German naval acoustic torpedo (Gnat)) from

about 2500 metres. His log describes *Shawinigan's* fate: "Torpedo and screw noises merge. A hit after 4 min 0 secs. High, 50 m, large explosion column with a heavy shower of sparks, after the collapse of explosion column, only 10 m high now, then smoke cloud, destroyer disappeared." There were no survivors, and the Corvette went down too quickly to get off an enemy report. Only when *Burgeo* turned up at Sydney on the afternoon of 25 November - without an escort - did shore authorities realize that *Shawinigan* was missing. All available ships and aircraft began to hunt for the submarine. Over the next three days searches looked for survivors but could only find flotsam and eventually, six bodies. The Commanding Officer, five officers and 85 ratings were lost including Arthur.

Arthur Kemp's wife was notified by letter on 29 November 1944 that her husband was listed as missing. A second letter dated 7 December 1944 confirmed the loss of the *Shawinigan* and its entire crew. Coder Arthur Kemp was 27 years old at the time of his death. He left behind a wife, a three-year-old daughter and a 7-month-old son.

For his service, Arthur was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp and the War Medal. The Memorial Cross was awarded to his wife, Phyllis.

Coder Arthur Kemp is commemorated on Halifax Memorial, Panel 12; the Memorial Passageway at HMCS *Cataraqui*; the HMCS *Shawinigan* Memorial, Shawinigan, QC and the Belleville Cenotaph.

Prepared By:

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