

Leading Stoker Cyril Frederick Kitchen, MiD, A-1571



- **Royal Canadian Naval Reserve**
- **Born: Hamilton ON, 19 June 1918**
- **Enlisted: Hamilton Division RCNVR, 21 Sep 1939**
- **Civilian Occupation: Fireman/Great Lakes ships & radio serviceman/Wentworth Radio Supply Company**
- **Death: Died when his ship was torpedoed on 10 February 1942**
- **Mentioned in Despatches**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 6 and the town of Dundas War Memorial**

Do you have a better photo of L/Stoker Kitchen that you can share? Please submit to CSVC.CVMC@gmail.com

Leading Stoker Cyril Frederick Kitchen was born on 19 June 1918, in Hamilton Ontario. His parents William Richard and Rebecca had emigrated to Canada from England. Cyril was their only child. The family resided in Hamilton where William worked for Westinghouse, one of the big industrial employers in Hamilton. Little is known of Cyril's life growing up in Hamilton. His newspaper obituary indicates he was 'prominent in amateur athletics especially as a cyclist and swimmer'. His family and he listed their religion as Church of England. He was a Sea Cadet for 2 years. His father had died in March of 1937 and his mother died in June 1939. Before enlisting, Cyril worked as a radio sales and serviceman for the Wentworth Radio Supply Company in Hamilton. He had previously been employed as a Fireman on Great Lakes ships.



On the 21 September 1939, Cyril enlisted at the Hamilton Division of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) as an Ordinary Seaman. His vital statistics were documented as age 21, height 5 feet 7 1/4 inches tall, 164 pounds, brown hair, blue eyes and a complexion reported as 'fair' or 'ruddy'. Distinguishing features included an appendix scar, scars on his neck and over his right eye and a tattoo.

Early in Second World War, naval basic training was centralized on the east and west coasts, so recruits waited at home until a spot was available. When a spot was not available immediately, some initial training was provided at the RCNVR Division. This was the case for Cyril; he began

his initial training on 19 Oct 1939 at the Hamilton Division RCNVR. In early Jan 1940, after exhibiting some proficiency at wireless transmission (W/T) training, Cyril was remustered to Ordinary Telegraphist and was sent to HMCS *Stadacona* for training.



Ordinary Telegraphist Kitchen was back home within a couple of weeks for his wedding to Miss Vera Marie White on 3 Feb 1940. His new in-laws were well known in the Hamilton military community and the event that was captured in the local newspaper. By mid-May 1940, Cyril has been recommended for transfer to a third trade – Stoker. Drawing on his experience as a fireman in Great Lakes ships, he met the expectations of the Engineering Officer and he was re-enrolled, this time the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve (RCNR), as a Stoker 1st Class on 16 May 1940.

From 11 June 1940 through 30 October 1940, Cyril served in HMCS *Otter*. *Otter* was steel-hulled civilian yacht that was converted for naval service as an armed yacht. It was used for local defence in Halifax harbour, alternating between training duties and anti-submarine patrols. As a probationary Stoker, Cyril's duties involved learning how to tend to the ship's oil-fed fires and boilers; this included oiling and cleaning the main engines and auxiliary machinery. Cyril served in *Otter* while she was undergoing conversion to a naval vessel in Quebec City, and he sailed with her back to Halifax for her commissioning on 4 Oct 1940.

After *Otter*, Stoker 1st Class Kitchen then spent three months in HMCS *St Eloi*. This ship was also known as *Gate Vessel 12*. This type of ship had a different engine room set-up and auxiliary machinery; Cyril gained additional experience and watch hours working in *St Eloi's* engine room.

By the end of 1940, Cyril's performance had been assessed as "Satisfactory" (high praise in the Navy) and his character was assessed as "Very Good". On 14 February 1941 Cyril was drafted to HMCS *Prince Henry*: an ocean-liner that was converted to an armed merchant cruiser. This ship was based in Jamaica, a much more hospitable climate than Halifax in February. On 21 February, after completing work-ups in Bermuda, *Prince Henry* sailed on her first operational cruise. She transited the Panama Canal and was assigned to operate off the coast of South America with an RN cruiser HMS *Diomedé*. Still under-training, Cyril gained additional experience and watch hours in yet another engine room. Finally, on 30 June 1941, Cyril was granted his Auxiliary Machinery Watch-Keeping Certificate. This qualified him to "stand watch" unsupervised, and on 1 Aug 1941, Cyril was rated Acting Leading Stoker.

During his time in *Prince Henry*, Cyril was involved in a three-day search and chase to sink two German merchant ships in early April 1941. After three additional weeks of patrolling in the Pacific, *Prince Henry* travelled to Esquimalt, BC to resupply and offload German prisoners. *Prince Henry* continued to patrol in the Pacific until



September 1941 when the ship was ordered back to the East Coast to become a depot ship for the Newfoundland Escort Force.

Leading Stoker Kitchen spent about one month serving in HMCS *Comox*, a minesweeper based in Halifax harbour, before joining his final ship, HMCS *Spikenard* in early December 1941. *Spikenard* was a veteran of 12 convoys by that time and she would escort three more convoys before she was torpedoed and sank. The ship was part of the Newfoundland Escort Force and was based in St. John's Newfoundland. *Spikenard's* crew along with other escorts successfully delivered 70 merchant ships to their destination in late December 1941 and early January 1942.

Dundas Seaman Lost
 A telegram received yesterday by Mrs. Cyril Kitchen, 51 York road, Dundas, from the ministry of national defence announced that her husband, A.I. Leading Stoker Cyril Kitchen, R.C.N.V.R., is missing, believed lost on active service.



Mrs. Kitchen, who was married two years ago this month, lives with her mother, Mrs. Maude White, who is O.C. the W.W.A.C. Her father, Chief Petty Officer Frank White, is serving with R.C.N.V.R. and recently returned to his duties after being on leave. He served with the Royal Navy in the last war. Several other relatives are on active service.

Leading Stoker Kitchen, who was 23 years of age, has been with the R.C.N.V.R. on service since October, 1939. Before his enlistment he was prominent in amateur athletics, especially as a cyclist and swimmer. An aunt, Mrs. J. Hall, lives on Cannon street east, Hamilton. He was employed by the Wentworth Radio company, Hamilton.

Credit: Findagrave.com

On 1 Feb 1942, *Spikenard* led convoy SC-67 as the senior escort ship; this was a slow convoy of 28 ships headed to the UK. Ships assigned to a slow convoy had to maintain 6-8 knots of speed (10-15 km/hr). Given their slow speed, they were easy target for German U-Boats. The work of Leading Stoker Kitchen and other Stokers is critical to a convoy escort because the ships need to be able to move quickly to defend ships under attack and to counter-attack. The sailors in the engine room make that happen. All went well until just before 2300 on 10 Feb 1942. The convoy was due south of Iceland when *Chilliwick*, another escort, attacked a submerged contact. Another escort at the rear of the convoy spotted the wake of a torpedo running down her port side and *Spikenard* was on the starboard side of the convoy when another torpedo struck the nearby tanker, *Heina*. The convoy was under a coordinated U-Boat attack.

Seconds later, a torpedo struck *Spikenard*. It ripped through the forward part of the ship, destroyed the bridge and the radio. It is thought that *Spikenard*

may have become aware of U-136 in the few minutes before she was hit because action stations had been sounded and the speed increased just before she was hit. We'll never know because no one on *Spikenard's* bridge survived that night. In a few minutes, *Spikenard* sank by the fore and headed for the bottom. According to the accounts of survivors, a second explosion, possibly the boilers contacting the icy cold sea water or the depth charges detonating, hastened *Spikenard's* demise. The survivors estimated she sank in two or three minutes. Only eight men survived (found by a westbound British ship the next day). Since *Spikenard* had been torpedoed at about the same time as the tanker and sank so quickly, the other escorts didn't realize she was gone until morning. Leading Stoker Kitchen was picked up out of the



water by men on a life raft. “Cyril Kitchen – we always called him Gus – died ... from internal injuries suffered when the ship blew up underwater.” Kitchen and 76 of his ship shipmates were killed, their bodies were not recovered. Cyril was 23 years old.

For his service, Leading Stoker Cyril Frederick Kitchen was awarded 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp, the War Medal, and he was mentioned in Dispatches (MiD). There are two different citations in his service file for the MiD. One reads: “*for devotion to duty in the stokehold of his ship.*”, while the second reads, “*for bravery while serving in Defensively equipped merchant ships.*” This latter being a reference to the action Cyril saw whilst on *Prince Henry*.

Cyril’s wife, Vera Marie Kitchen was awarded the Memorial Cross. Their only child, Joanne Frances, was born on March 10, 1942, exactly one month after Cyril was killed.

Leading Stoker Cyril Kitchen is memorialized on the Halifax Memorial, panel 6. He is also remembered on the Memorial Monument in the town of Dundas and the Province of Ontario has named a lake in recognition of Cyril Frederick Kitchen. It is located west of Lake Nipigon (latitude 49.583854, west longitude 89.416424).

Prepared By:

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Sources:

- ancestry.com
- Canadian military records (primarily on ancestry.com)
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission file for L/Stoker Kitchen
- Library and Archives Canada Service file for L/Stoker Kitchen
- Wikipedia (for ships’ ‘biographies’)
- Hamilton Spectator (obituary and photo)
- canada.ca
- nauticapedia.ca
- *Spikenard* Survivor accounts taken from “Corvettes Canada, Convoy Veteran of WWII Tell Their True Stories”, by Mac Johnston, McGraw Hill Ryerson 1994.