

## Stoker 1st Class Allan Robert McCaig V-36923



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- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Medicine Hat AB, 3 October 1918**
- **Enlisted: Calgary Division RCNVR, 16 May 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Oil well Worker, Union Drilling**
- **Death: Accidental Death while serving in HMCS *New Liskeard* on 1 December 1944**
- **Buried: High River (Highwood) Cemetery, Plot 42. Range R**
- **Commemorated: Second World War Book of Remembrance, page 382, at the Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa, the Calgary Field of Crosses, the Highwood Memorial Centre at High River, AB, and the memorial plaques at HMCS *Tecumseh* and the Naval Museum of Alberta**

Allan McCaig was born in Medicine Hat on 3 October 1918. His father was Alexander McCaig (1883-1943) and his mother was Ellen "Ella" Sparrow (Whittal) McCaig (1885-1959). Both parents were from Ormstown, Quebec – an area southwest of Montreal near the American border. They identified as being of Scottish descent.

Alexander moved to Alberta before 1906, where a farm near Medicine Hat hired him as a farmhand. Two of his older brothers worked with him on the same farm. In 1909 he applied for a homestead plot, but there is no record of it being granted. Ella moved to Alberta from Quebec in 1910 and married Alexander in Medicine Hat later that year.

Allan's sister Gladys was born in 1912 and his brother Melvin was born in 1913. In 1914 the family lived at 1133 Steel Street in Medicine Hat. Allan was born in the family's adopted home of Medicine Hat in October of 1918. By 1921 Alexander worked for the City of Medicine Hat as a teamster, a job which helped him support Ella and raise their three young children. Melvin was a Sapper in the Royal Canadian Engineers during World War Two.

At some point around 1924, the family moved to High River, which is where Allan went to school. He finished Grade 11 around 1935. The oil and gas industry actively engaged in exploration drilling around High River, and Allan found employment in that industry and may have been present for several notable discoveries. McCaig lived in the Longview area and worked at an oil plant in 1940.

In October 1940 he underwent a month-long military training course at Training Centre 130 in Red Deer, Alberta. This training program was part of the Non-Permanent Active Militia and was conducted by the Calgary Highlanders. About 1000 men took part, and Allan participated in the inaugural course - the first of its kind.

In 1941 Allan married Lily Sarah Henrietta Edwards (1918-1999) in Turner Valley. Lily was originally from Belmont, Manitoba, a farming community in southwestern Manitoba. In September 1943 Allan and Lily had a baby girl, Sharon Anne McCaig.

On 16 May 1942 Allan enlisted in the RCNVR at HMCS *Tecumseh* in Calgary as a Stoker 2<sup>nd</sup> Class. He went onto active service on 8 July 1942, initially remaining in Calgary for basic training. His enrollment papers describe him as 5 foot 7 inches tall, with auburn hair, blue eyes, and a fair complexion. He listed his religion as the United Church.

In September 1942 he went to HMCS *Naden* – the major west coast training base in Esquimalt, British Columbia. The first two months were filled with New Entry and Gunnery training, followed by technical training at the Stokers Training Establishment. He completed this training on 31 December 1942 which prompted his promotion to Stoker 1<sup>st</sup> Class. He worked at HMCS *Naden* for the next several months.

In August 1943 the Navy assigned Stoker I McCaig to his first ship, HMCS *Courtenay*, a Bangor class steam-powered minesweeper. *Courtenay* was built in Prince Rupert at the Prince Rupert Dry Dock & Shipyards Company and spent her whole career on the west coast, serving alternately with the Esquimalt and Prince Rupert Forces. The main duty of the minesweepers serving on the



HMCS Courtenay J262. Photo credit: GC Ships Histories website

West Coast was the Western Patrol - patrolling the west coast of Vancouver Island, past the Scott Islands to Gordon Channel at the entrance to the Queen Charlotte Strait.

In April 1944 the Navy sent McCaig to the Mechanical Training Establishment (MTE) at HMCS *Naden* to complete the required curriculum for his next rank, Leading Stoker. He completed the three-month course with good marks and

the staff noted his positive attitude. He quickly qualified to be a Petty Officer Stoker and earned his Auxiliary Machinery Watch Keeping Certificate.

In August 1944 the Navy sent McCaig to HMCS *Stadacona*, Halifax's major operational and training base. Following a brief stay at *Stadacona* he participated in work parties and then reported to HMCS *Peregrine*, another shore establishment in Halifax. The Navy then posted McCaig to

HMCS *Hochelaga II*, a shore base in Montreal. Among other duties, HMCS *Hochelaga II* served as a manning depot for new RCN ships that were built in Ontario and Quebec.

Next, the Navy posted McCaig to HMCS *New Liskeard* on 17 November 1944. He joined the ship in Port Arthur (now Thunder Bay). HMCS *New Liskeard* was an Algerine Class minesweeper, a steam-powered successor to the Bangor class minesweepers. The ship was named after the northern Ontario town of New Liskeard, now part of Temiskaming Shores.

HMCS *New Liskeard* was commissioned on 21 November 1944 and soon set sail for Halifax.

On 30 November 1944, *New Liskeard's* crew found themselves berthed in the Lachine Canal near Coteau-du-Lac, Quebec. After his watch ended at 20:00 (8 pm), McCaig and two friends went ashore to visit a pub. The trio was returning to the ship in a blizzard with high wind, blowing snow, low visibility, and freezing temperatures. Somehow the men separated, and only one of them returned to the ship. The lockkeeper spotted the other two, one of whom was McCaig. He informed the ship's quartermaster, who dispatched a search party. They found one of the



HMCS New Liskeard. Photo - Canada.ca

**Longview Sailor Reported Missing**  
 [By Herald Correspondent]  
 TURNER VALLEY, Dec. 11  
 Word has been received by Mrs. A. R. McCaig of Longview that her husband, Stoker (first class) McCaig, 26, has been reported missing. No other particulars were received.  
 He was born in Medicine Hat and was educated in High River. He was employed in the oil fields prior to his enlistment in July, 1942. He served at the west coast for a time and was then posted east in September, 1944.  
 His wife is a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. F. Edwards of Black Diamond and he has one daughter, Sharon Ann, one year old.  
 Calgary Herald, 11 Dec 1944

sailors and transported him back to the ship but saw no sign of McCaig. A larger search party was then dispatched. They searched for several more hours and also dragged the canal. They found no trace of McCaig, and the Navy listed him as missing.

Searchers did not recover McCaig's body from the canal until the following April. Allan Robert McCaig was 26 years old at the time of his death

*New Liskeard* continued down the St. Lawrence and stopped in la ville de Quebec where a Board of Inquiry convened. However, without one of McCaig's companions and the lockkeeper, the Board could not agree on a formal conclusion. The timing and location of the inquiry immediately drew the wrath of Rear Admiral Murray, Commander in Chief, Canadian Northwest Atlantic. Admiral Murray wanted an explanation as to why the Inquiry wasn't held in Montreal before the ship sailed further downriver. A second inquiry was held at HMCS *Stadacona* in February of 1945.

The Navy could have done a better job of keeping Lily McCaig – Allan's widow – informed of the Inquiry findings concerning his death. Mrs. McCaig was an articulate writer who very effectively let the Navy know what she thought of this lack of information through several letters.

For his service the Navy awarded Stoker 1<sup>st</sup> Class Allan Robert McCaig the 1939-1945 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother and wife were both presented with the Memorial Cross medals.

McCaig is buried in the Highwood Cemetery in High River, Alberta. His gravestone is inscribed:

*“What we keep in memory is ours unchanged forever.”*

He is commemorated in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, at the Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament in Ottawa, the Calgary Field of Crosses, the Highwood Memorial Centre at High River in Alberta, and the memorial plaques at HMCS *Tecumseh* and the Naval Museum of Alberta.

**Prepared By:**

David Mitchell, former Able Seaman, HMCS *Tecumseh*, Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Research team



**Sources:**

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission – profile for Allan Robert McCaig
- Library and Archives Canada Service via Ancestry.com – record for military service
- Ancestry.com for family information
- ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Calgary Herald
- For Posterity’s Sake website
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial website
- Naval History Net website
- GC Ships Histories website