

Stoker 1st Class Arthur Neufeld V-78026



Stoker 1st Class Arthur Neufeld. Photo:
For Posterity Sake Website

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Rush Lake, SK, 30 October 1924**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Discovery*, 24 January 1944**
- **Civilian Occupation: Machinist Improver, Burrard Rivet & Forge Ltd**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Guysborough* was torpedoed and sank on 18 March 1945**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 13; and HMCS *Discovery* Memorial Plaque**

Arthur Neufeld was born in Rush Lake, SK, to Heinrich P. and Katharine Neufeld on 30 October 1924. Rush Lake was a farming community near Swift Current, SK. His parents were Dutch-German immigrants, and German was spoken at home. His mother and father were married in Herbert, SK, in 1914. Arthur indicated his religion as Mennonite Brethren. It is unclear exactly when or why the family moved to Vancouver, BC. They had also lived for a time in Halifax, NS. Arthur came from a big family consisting of two brothers, Helmut and George, and seven sisters, Leona, Frieda, Emma, Elvira, Irene, Theresa, and Charlotte. The age of these siblings was not recorded. They all lived in the family home at 763 Main Street, Vancouver, BC.

Given the size of the family, it was not surprising that Arthur left school after only one year of high school. He worked in Kimberly, BC, as a mine employee in 1943. While there, he enlisted with the 2nd Battalion, Rocky Mountain Rangers, on 11 August 1943. There was no record of any training he may have undertaken while serving with the Non-Permanent Militia. He had, however, agreed to serve for the duration of the war. His service record indicated that he served continuously from 2 July 1943 to 23 January 1944. At the time of his enlistment in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR), he was back in Vancouver working as a machinist for Burrard Rivet and Forge Ltd. His employment record stated that he had been employed for 2 ½ years. These dates and time frames do not match precisely with the official record.

Arthur transferred to HMCS *Discovery* on 24 January 1944, having been released from his commitment to the Rocky Mountain Rangers the day before. His attestation document described him as 5' 10½" tall, with light brown hair and blue eyes. His complexion was fair. His stated religion was still Mennonite Brethren, which might have brought him into conflict with his parents. The Mennonites generally did not support military service and often selected non-combatative positions to serve their country during the war. His civilian occupation was described as a "Machinist

Improver," a very general term that described a variety of shipyard tasks. Outside Machinist Improvers supported Journeymen and Crew Leaders in hands-on responsibilities for removing, installing, and testing main and auxiliary shipboard equipment. As such, the trade of Stoker was a perfect choice for this young sailor.

Arthur Neufeld was rated as Stoker 1st Class and drafted to HMCS *Cornwallis* in Nova Scotia on 24 March 1944 for basic training. During this period, he saw service in HMCS *Buxton* from 24 April 1944 to 1 May 1944. *Buxton* was a Town-class destroyer used as a stationary training ship by HMCS *Cornwallis*. He was held on the books of HMCS *Stadacona* and HMCS *Peregrine* from 15 May 1944 to 29 December 1944. *Peregrine* was an accommodation barracks for men awaiting a draft to an operational ship. He spent six months in HMCS *Scotian*, better known as HMC Dockyard in Halifax, where ship repair and maintenance were conducted. The service file for Stoker Arthur Neufeld held no performance reports for his training or work ashore. After his time in the Halifax dockyard, Arthur was finally drafted to an operational ship, HMCS *Guysborough*, on 31 December 1944.

HMCS *Guysborough* was a Bangor-class minesweeper built by North Vancouver Ship Repairs



HMCS *Guysborough*
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Guysborough

Ltd for the Royal Navy but was transferred to the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) for manning. She was commissioned on 22 April 1942 and assigned to the Esquimalt Force. On 17 March 1943, she left for Halifax, arriving on 30 April 1943.

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In February 1944, HMCS *Guysborough* was sent to the United Kingdom as part of Canada's contribution to the invasion of Normandy. Upon arrival, she was assigned to the British 14th Minesweeping Flotilla. She swept Channel 2 of mines in the American sector of the invasion route during the night of 5/6 June. The 14th Minesweeping Flotilla resumed minesweeping activities an hour after the assault began on 6 June. They swept Baie de la Seine until 13 June. The 14th Flotilla continued minesweeping activities in the invasion area until 21 June. *Guysborough* remained in UK waters until December 1944, when she returned to Canada to undergo refit at Lunenburg, NS.

Following the refit, she departed for Plymouth. At 1850, during the second dog watch on 17 March 1945, HMCS *Guysborough*, commanded by Temporary/Lieutenant B.R. Russell, RCNR, was hit in the stern by a Gnat torpedo (acoustic torpedo) from *U-868* about 210 miles north of Cape Finisterre in the Bay of Biscay. Sailing alone, the minesweeper was towing CAT gear against acoustic torpedoes; however, the torpedo nevertheless hit the stern, possibly because the gear was streamed too close to the ship to confuse the warhead. She settled by the stern with a slight port list, but the vessel did not sink. The U-boat fired a second torpedo at 1935. This torpedo hit the starboard side amidships and caused the minesweeper to sink quickly by the stern. Two crew members had been killed in the explosions, but the remaining men abandoned the ship onto five Carley floats because the second torpedo badly damaged the motor cutter and the whaler. One group of 48 survivors lashed four rafts together, but the fifth raft drifted away, overcrowded by the remaining men. The ship had sent a distress signal before sinking, and several vessels were sent to their rescue. Still, it took HMS *Inglis* around 19 hours to arrive at the sinking location. By this time, 49 survivors had died of injuries or exposure on the overcrowded raft. However, 40 survivors were rescued by HMS *Inglis*, with one more picked up by HMS *Loring* while searching for the submarine. The fact that she was not part of a convoy or with other escorts was a decision made by her commanding officer and the subject of some criticism. Of *Guysborough's* ship's company, 51 men were lost. Stoker 1st Class Arthur Neufeld was 20 years old when he died.

A shipmate, Coder John Gleason, recalled the long hours in the water:

"I was one of 42 crew members swarming around one Carley float designed to carry 12. Nineteen hours later, six of us were alive.

I remember the total blackness of the night. I remember the eerie silence, only the gentle slushing of the sea around us, no one uttering a sound. I remember the hopeless feeling of isolation and the awareness that I would probably die soon. That I would never marry. Never have children.

As the hours passed, the cold began claiming sailors. They just drifted away, dead or no longer able to hang on.... The more men the sea claimed, the closer those left got to the float. The float was an escape from the icy water, blessed rest for the arms, a chance to survive. I remember thinking that I was finally there. I could reach up and grab the ropes of the yellow raft!

It was my turn to climb up.... I remember reaching out to the coxswain for help. He grabbed my hand and pulled, then said, 'I don't think I can do it, John.'"

Years later, Gleason came across news of the submarine that had torpedoed *Guysborough*:

"It had one success—our ship—before being sunk by depth charges on 10 April, 1945. The U-boat's entire crew was lost. The war in Europe ended 28 days after

the U-boat was sunk. Fifty-one dead from our ship, 51 dead on the sub: man for man.

I started to cry at my desk. I was alone in the house, and I just sat and sobbed. One hundred and two young men dead. Why?"

Stoker Arthur Neufeld's file had no routine correspondence related to his death. However, one very brief letter from the Naval Secretary, dated 18 May 1945, indicated he was "missing and presumed dead." There was also a copy of a form letter from the captain of HMCS *Guysborough*, Lt B.R. Russell RCNR, dated 3 April 1945. He had survived the sinking and sent the same letter of regret to the parents of the ship's company members who had lost their lives.

Stoker Neufeld had two pay allotments cancelled on 31 March 1945. One was for \$4.00, payable to the Excelsior Life Insurance Company and the other for \$16.80 to the Receiver General for the 7th Victory War Loan. His parents expressed concern that two Victory War Loan Bonds were in Arthur's name and wanted these transferred to his mother's name. There was no response letter located in Arthur's file. His mother received \$134.38 from the War Service Gratuity, but no additional documents were related to her son's estate.

For his service, Stoker First Class Arthur Neufeld was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp, and the War Medal. These medals were sent to the family on 23 November 1949. His mother was also awarded the Memorial Cross on 5 June 1945.

Stoker First Class Arthur Neufeld is commemorated on Panel 13 of the Halifax Memorial at Point Pleasant Park, Halifax, NS; the Honour Roll plaque at HMCS *Discovery*; and the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 549, at the Centre Block Houses of Parliament, Ottawa.

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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.

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