

Sub-Lieutenant William Fisher Page O-57117



Sub-Lieutenant William Page. Photo credit:
Canadian Virtual War Museum

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Yorkton SK, 24 April 1919**
- **Enlisted: Saskatoon Division RCNVR, 24 April 1940**
- **Civilian Occupation: Student**
- **Death: Killed during German aircraft attack that damaged HMS *Naiad* on 22 May 1941**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 8; Page Island (53° 18' N 108°18'W) in Northern Saskatchewan and Yorkton Cenotaph**

William Fisher Page, known as Billy, was the first of three children born to Anne and (Ernest) Bruce Page in Yorkton, Saskatchewan on 24 April 1919. Two sisters, Anne and Betty, were born in 1922 and 1924 respectively. Billy's father, Bruce, was born in 1875 in England and emigrated to Canada in 1914. Billy's mother, Ann, was born in Nova Scotia in 1890 and came West as an adult. They met and were married in Yorkton in July 1918. Yorkton is a marketing hub about 300 miles northwest of Winnipeg and 200 miles southeast of Saskatoon.

Between 1911 and 1921 the community grew rapidly from a population of 2,309 to 5,151 before growth slowed, reaching only 5,586 by 1941. The growth was attributable to the Dominion Government's immigration policy which saw thousands of Europeans actively recruited to settle the West. Billy's father prospered by this growth as the manager of a lumber/building supply business.

It is evident that Billy was a bright, active youth. He attended Simpson School (grade 1-8) and Yorkton Collegiate Institute (grade 9-12). He was a King Scout and participated in sports. Soon after his seventeenth birthday in 1936 he joined the 64th (Yorkton) Field Battery, Royal Canadian Artillery (Non-Permanent) and qualified as a Sergeant by June 1938. He then transferred to the Canadian Officer Training Corps as a Second Lieutenant on completion of his second year at the University of Saskatchewan. In the spring of 1940, he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Engineering Physics. He also was granted permission to transfer to the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR).

Billy was sworn into the RCNVR in Saskatoon as an Acting Sub-Lieutenant (Special Branch) on his twenty-first birthday, 24 April 1940, by Lieutenant Commander Harold Balfour. (*Lieutenant*

Commander Balfour would go on to become the Captain of the Port of St. John's and be appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire for his service). On enrollment Billy was single, 5 feet 6 inches tall, weighed 140 pounds and was in excellent condition. He had blond hair, blue eyes and a light complexion.

Special Branch was introduced to the Royal Canadian Navy as a way of recruiting men to perform maintenance on radar, radio and asdic equipment. Its original purpose was broadened as the Navy grew to include intelligence, legal and even art classifications among others. Radar specialists went straight from university to the Royal Navy under the Canloan program while other Special Branch occupations were required to take basic officer training first. Later in the war radar candidates were provided with training in radio theory at the University of Toronto and, later, at HMCS *St. Hyacinthe*. (*The Canloan program originated in World War One and provided Canadian officers to the British armed forces.*)

Following attestation Billy boarded a train for Halifax, Nova Scotia to join HMCS *Stadacona*. Upon arrival he was provided passage to the United Kingdom where he joined HMS *Naiad*, a *Dido* Class light cruiser, on 8 July 1940 at Hebburn-on-Tyne. There she was commissioned on 24 July.

On completion of acceptance trials and work-ups, *Naiad* initially joined the Home Fleet and was assigned to convoy protection from as far north as the Arctic Circle to as far south as Sierra Leone. As part of the 15th Cruiser Squadron she took part in operations against German raiders following the sinking of the armed merchant cruiser HMS *Jervis Bay* in November 1940. By May 1941 *Naiad* was part of Force H, the British naval force in the Mediterranean formed to replace the French Navy after the fall of France. *Naiad* repeatedly saw intense action against Axis forces. In particular, she was involved with the defence of the Island of Crete which had



been attacked by successful German airborne assaults commencing on 20 May 1941. These attacks were followed by a number of seaborne assaults. *Naiad* was one of three cruisers and four destroyers making up Force C which was tasked with intercepting the Axis seaborne forces on 22 May. Force C was counterattacked by Luftwaffe bombers. During the engagement *Naiad* was the target of 181 bombs which either hit her or were near misses. Consequently, she was very badly damaged with two-gun turrets out of action, her speed reduced and serious flooding occurring. Six members of *Naiad's* ship's company, including Billy, lost their lives. He was buried at sea the next evening.

For his service, Sub-Lieutenant William Page was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Africa Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother, Mrs. Anne Page, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 8. Additionally, Page Island (53° 18' N 108°18'W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory, and he is remembered on the Yorkton Cenotaph.

William Page came to the Navy with a bright future ahead of him. He was well educated in a promising field still in its infancy and he had demonstrated his leadership ability. Sadly, after just 393 days of naval service, his promising life was cut short.

Prepared By:

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