

Sub-Lieutenant William Leonard Page O-57120



- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Moose Jaw SK, 14 January 1922**
- **Enlisted: Regina Division RCNVR, 21 April 1941**
- **Civilian Occupation: Filing Clerk, John Deere Plow Company**
- **Death: Killed when HMCS *St. Croix* was torpedoed and sank on 20 September 1943**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 9; Honour Roll St. Peter's Cathedral, Regina; Page Creek in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his honour.**

Sub-Lieutenant Bill Page. Source:
Regina Leader Post

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William (known as Bill) Leonard Page, the only child of Pamela and William Page, was born on 14 January 1922 in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. Pamela was born in Portsmouth, Hampshire, in 1893 and emigrated to Canada in 1913. No information could be found regarding her maiden name or with whom she came to Canada. William was born in Leicester, Leicestershire, in 1892 and emigrated with his parents and four siblings in 1907.

Pamela and William were married in Regina in January 1920 and moved to Moose Jaw shortly after. No information about their time in Moose Jaw was found except that they returned to Regina in 1922, six months after Bill's birth. According to subsequent censuses and Regina Henderson's Directories, William quickly found a well-paying job in Regina as a shipping clerk with Campbell Willson & Strathdee, a large grocery wholesaler. The job, which William held until his retirement, provided the family with a steady income and the opportunity to purchase the home in which Bill grew up. Thus, they avoided the devastating effects of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Bill was enrolled in nearby Albert Public School, where he completed grade 8; Scott Collegiate, where he completed grade 12; and Balfour Technical School, where he completed a ten-month commercial course. It is likely that while at Balfour, he gained work experience with Chrysler Corporation of Canada (Sales) Ltd. Upon graduation, he found a job with John Deere Plow Co. Ltd. as a filing clerk and held the position until he enlisted.

On 21 April 1941, Bill was sworn in at the Regina Division (later HMCS *Queen*) Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) as an Ordinary Seaman (Temporary), Service Number V-10615. He was 19 years old, single, 5 feet 8 ¾ inches tall, and weighed 152 pounds with dark brown hair, hazel eyes, and a medium complexion.

About seven weeks after being sworn in, Bill commenced initial training at the Division, completing the course on 11 August 1941. During the waiting period, he attended further appointments and saw to administrative details. At this period of the War, the Navy counted on the seventeen naval reserve divisions then operating across Canada to recruit and initially train men. The training, however, was not standardized, and divisions were short of training equipment, accommodations, and instructors. So, on 12 August, he was on a train bound for Esquimalt, British Columbia and HMCS *Naden*. *Naden* and HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax, Nova Scotia, were the two principal training establishments where recruits like Bill were being largely retrained because of the system's inadequacies. There, he took New Entry training, the syllabus of which included naval discipline, squad drill, small arms familiarization, seamanship, damage control... the sort of things which equipped the graduates to be safe and useful members of the ship's company of a warship.

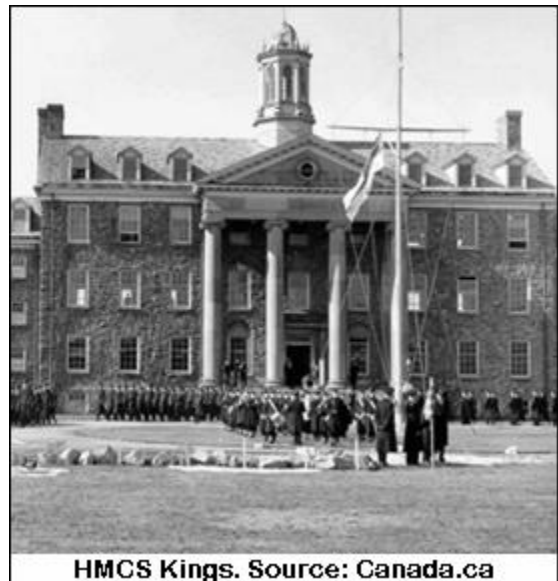
Upon completion, Bill was employed at *Naden* before being drafted to HMCS *Outarde* (J161) on 2 December 1941 as a member of her commissioning crew. *Outarde* (J161) was a Bangor-class minesweeper built by North Vancouver Ship Repairs Ltd. and commissioned on 4 December 1941. Assigned alternatively to the *Esquimalt Force* and the *Prince Rupert Force*, her primary task was to patrol the west coast of Vancouver Island as far north as the entrance to Queen Charlotte Strait. He remained in *Outarde* until 26 March 1942.

On 27 March, Bill was promoted to Able Seaman and loaded on a Submarine Detector course in *Naden*. The course trained candidates in the use of ASDIC, the submarine detection system now referred to as sonar. To succeed, a knowledge of seamanship, a grasp of underwater tactics and sea conditions, and an acute sense of hearing were required. He qualified as a Submarine Detector 3rd Class on 6 June 1942.

Over a period of time, Bill Page took the necessary steps to become a commissioned officer. He successfully completed the Educational Test 1 on 8-9 July 1941, then he sat a Probationary Sub Lieutenant board on 26 June 1942 and passed a further medical examination on 3 August 1942. Bill successfully met the standard for Naval Officer training. He was discharged from the RCNVR as an Able Seaman on 9 August 1942 and attested as a Probationary Sub Lieutenant RCNVR on the same day.

Bill was then appointed to HMCS *Kings* in Halifax arriving there to begin officer training on 20 August.

The University of King's College was founded in 1789 by Royal Charter granted by King George III. The college was originally located in Windsor, Nova Scotia, but moved to Halifax after a fire and rebuilt on the campus of Dalhousie University. In May 1941, the Minister of Naval Services requested the use of King's College as a Naval Officers' Training School for the duration of the war. On 1 October, the establishment was commissioned as *HMCS Kings*.



Originally, Probationary Sub Lieutenants took a 12-week course in seamanship, gunnery, torpedo, navigation, and signals before proceeding to sea. Later, the course was lengthened to 20 weeks and modified with a view to placing greater emphasis on anti-submarine operations. Upon graduation, participants were promoted to Sub-Lieutenant and appointed to an operational ship. During its time in service, *Kings* graduated 96 classes, passing out 3,100 officers before it was decommissioned in May 1945.

Bill graduated on 16 December 1942 and was appointed to HMCS *St. Croix* via HMCS *Avalon*, the administrative establishment in St. John's, Newfoundland.

HMCS *St. Croix* was a Clemson class destroyer built by Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation in Quincy, Massachusetts and commissioned into the United States Navy (USN) as USS *McCook* (DD-252) on 30 April 1919. After a short period of service, she was laid up in Philadelphia in 1922. Recommissioned into the USN in December 1939, she was selected as one of 50 ships to be transferred to the Royal Navy under the *Destroyers for Bases Agreement* between the United Kingdom and the United States. Subsequently, she was transferred to the Royal Canadian Navy and re-commissioned in Halifax on 24 September 1940 as HMCS *St. Croix* – named after the river that marks the border between New Brunswick and Maine.

Thus began her eventful career. On 30 November 1940, she sailed from Halifax for the United Kingdom and encountered a hurricane en route. Heavily damaged, she returned to Halifax for repairs, which took until mid-March 1941. Then, she was assigned to convoy escort duty primarily in the North Atlantic and escorted 19 convoys. While doing so, she sank the U-boat *U-90* while escorting convoy ON.113 on 24 July 1942.

Bill arrived onboard *St. Croix* in St. John's, Newfoundland on 28 December 1942. His job as a young Sub-Lieutenant was to learn from other more seasoned officers about the ship's navigation, convoy navigation, hunting submarines, and anti-aircraft warfare tactics. Over time, he would



HMCS *St. Croix*. Source: RCN Photo

gain sufficient experience - and the trust of the ship's Captain - to be awarded his watchkeeping certificate. Then, he would be expected to sail the ship without supervision.

On 11 January 1943, Bill sailed into harm's way in *St. Croix* as a member of Escort Group C1 to shepherd convoy HX 222 to Britain,

the first of nine more convoys *St. Croix* would escort. Along the way, one merchant ship was lost to a U-boat. Upon reaching United Kingdom waters, *St. Croix* put into Londonderry before proceeding to the Clyde on the west coast of Scotland where she and her escort group joined convoy KMS 10 on 28 February to escort it to the Mediterranean. En route, *St. Croix* and HMCS *Shediac* shared in the destruction of the German submarine *U-87* west of the Azores on 4 March

1943. *St. Croix* and her escort group then returned to the Clyde and escorted another convoy without incident. Their busy schedule and good luck prevailed as they escorted four more convoys back and forth across the North Atlantic between 20 April and 11 August 1943. On 19 September 1943, *St. Croix* was a member of Mid-Ocean Escort Group C-9, comprised of her sister ship, HMCS *St. Francis*, four corvettes: HMC ships *Chambly*, *Morden*, and *Sackville*, and the Royal Navy frigate, HMS *Itchen*. They were proceeding to the Bay of Biscay to conduct an offensive against U-boats transiting from five bases on the west coast of France to the Atlantic. En route, the Escort Group was diverted to assist two convoys under attack by what turned out to be a force of 21 U-boats in an area about 400 to 500 nautical miles southwest of Iceland.

On 20 September, as the diverted Escort force reached convoy ON.202, *St. Croix* was struck on the stern at 2151 by two acoustic torpedoes fired by *U-305*. Gravely damaged but still afloat, her ship's company began to abandon ship. Then, 53 minutes later, at 2244, she was struck by a third torpedo fired by *U-305* and sank within 6 minutes, leaving 81 officers and men clinging to two Carley floats and a swamped whaler.

HMS *Itchen* and HMS *Polyanthus*, an RN Flower Class corvette assigned to the convoy, attempted to conduct a rescue but broke it off after *Itchen* narrowly avoided a torpedo fired at her at 2253, also by *U-305*. Instead, *Itchen* went on the offensive to hunt down her attacker. At 0022 on 21 September, *Polyanthus* was sunk by another U-boat, *U-952*. After dawn, *Itchen* rescued the sole survivor from *Polyanthus* and the 81 survivors from *St. Croix*.

With her own ship's company of 230 officers and men, *Itchen* now had a total of 312 onboard when she was torpedoed and sunk by *U-666* at 0200 on 23 September 1943. Only three survived and were rescued by the Polish merchant ship *SS Wisla*. They were Stoker William Allan Fisher, RCNVR, from *St. Croix*, and two members of *Itchen's* ship's company.



River Class Frigate Similar to HMS *Itchen*.
Source: Uboat.net

While it is possible that Bill survived the sinking of *St. Croix* on 20 September and later died in the sinking of *Itchen* two days later, it was officially assumed that he died on 20 September 1943.

Bill, like the other 146 members of *St. Croix's* ship's company, has no known grave. He is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 9; on Page 200 of the Second World War Book of Remembrance at the Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa; and on the Honour Roll of St. Peter's Anglican Cathedral in Regina. As well, Page Creek (Lat 52° 57'N Long 108°07'W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory.

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

Post Script:

The battle which claimed Sub-Lieutenant Page's life pitted two westbound convoys, ONS.18, composed of 27 merchant ships and nine escorts, including a Merchant Aircraft Carrier (MAC), and ON.202, composed of 38 merchant ships and five escorts, against a concentration of U-boats. These two convoys were joined by Support Group 9, which included *St. Croix* south of

Iceland. They were detected by 21 U-boats forming Patrol Line *Leuthen* on 19 September. For the first time in the War, the U-boats were armed with the newly developed T-5 acoustic torpedo, which was attracted to its target by the sound of its propellers rather than being aimed visually. The plan was to attack the escort forces first with the T-5s and then attack the merchant ships. Over the course of the battle, the Allies lost three escorts and six merchant ships. Another merchant ship was damaged. The Kriegsmarine lost three U-boats while three others were damaged and forced to return to base.

Prepared By*:

John Dalzell, Capt(N) (retired), Commanding Officer HMCS UNICORN 1983-88 & Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Research Team.

*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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