

Leading Seaman Richard Partington V-11325



- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Saskatoon, SK, 10 October 1919**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Unicorn*, 3 May 1939**
- **Civilian Occupation: Labourer, Casual labourer**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Esquimalt* was torpedoed and sank on 16 April 1945**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 13; HMCS *Unicorn* Memorial & Lake Partington in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his honour.**

Leading Seaman Richard Partington.
Photo: For Posterity Sake

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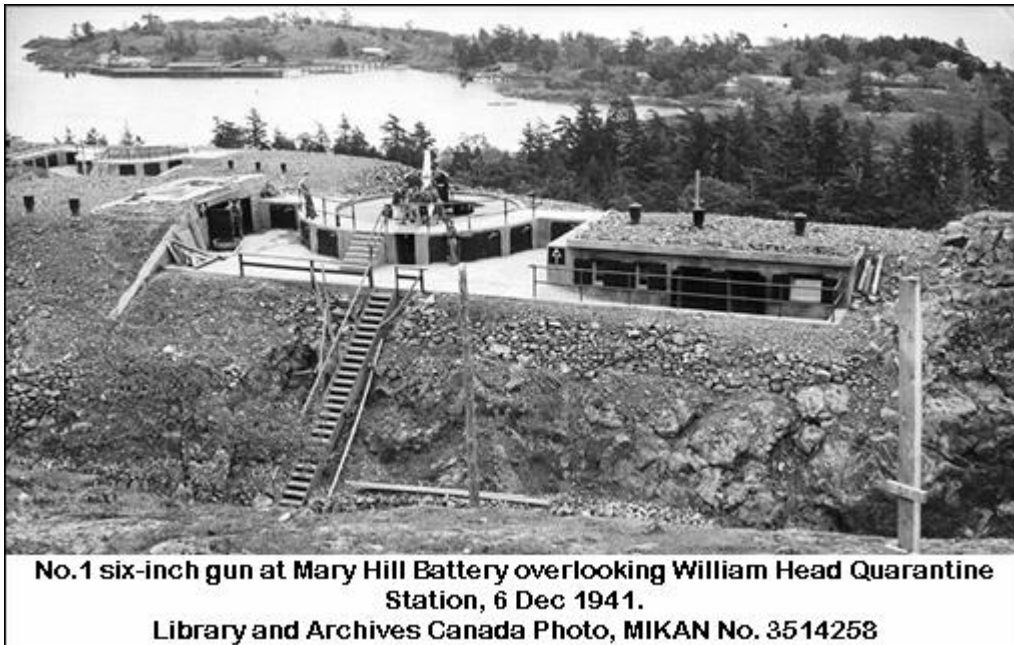
Note: Leading Seaman Partington's personnel file is incomplete. Among other documents, it is missing the Occupational History Form, which contains information about education and civilian employment, training results, and Form P. 64, which contains information about family background. Consequently, some of the information in this Sailor Story will, by necessity, be speculative.

Richard Partington, born on 10 October 1919 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, was the sixth of the seven children of Jessie and Willian Partington. His sisters Phyllis, Lillian and May were born in 1909, 1910 and 1913, respectively. His brothers Joseph, John and Thomas were born in 1916, 1917 and 1922. William and Jessie were both born in the United Kingdom in 1876 and 1890, respectively and emigrated to Canada in 1910 with Phyllis and Lillian. Upon arrival in Canada, they settled in Saskatoon, where, thanks to a booming economy, William quickly found work as a gardener – an occupation he maintained his entire working life. Using the Canada Census and Henderson's Directory, it can be determined that as the family grew, they lived in four rental houses until 1926, when they settled into the Nutana neighbourhood on the southern outskirts of Saskatoon. Sadly, Jessie died in December 1930. It is likely that Richard was enrolled in Haultain Public School and attended there until completing grade 8 in 1933. It could not be determined if Richard attended high school.

In November 1938, Richard approached the Saskatoon Division Royal Canadian Naval Reserve (RCNVR) regarding enlistment, was medically examined in April 1939 and sworn in on 3 May 1939 as an Ordinary Seaman. Upon enrollment, Richard stated that he was a labourer, single and living with his family. He was 5 feet 10 1/2 inches tall and weighed 128 pounds. He had brown eyes, light brown hair, and a fair complexion. His older brother John enlisted in the RCNVR as well and became the brother-in-law of Able Seaman (Radar) Clifford Eadie, also from Saskatoon, with whom Richard would serve in HMCS *Chatham* and HMCS *Esquimalt*.

On 31 July 1939, Richard was drafted to HMCS *Naden*, the large naval base in Esquimalt, British Columbia, where he presumably underwent Basic and Seamanship training before being employed in some capacity until being drafted to HMCS *Sans Peur* on 11 March 1940. HMCS *San Peur* was a luxury yacht owned by the Duke of Sutherland. In 1939, the ship was in California waters when requisitioned by the British Admiralty. She proceeded to Esquimalt and was commissioned into the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) for patrol service on 5 March 1940. On 4 April Richard was rated Able Seaman.

On 15 April 1940, Richard was drafted back to *Naden* for further training as a member of the Seaman Branch. Training in the Navy during the War fell into two parallel streams – substantive, which provided leadership, and non-substantive, which provided technical expertise. The Seaman Branch included the substantive ratings of ordinary, able, and leading seaman, petty officer, and chief petty officer. In addition, the branch was further subdivided into specialized non-substantive ratings. Gunnery to which Richard was apparently assigned was one of these specialties, which, in turn, was divided into five sub-specialties – DEMS (Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships), which provided gun crews for merchant ships; Anti-aircraft which included all close-range weapons; and Main Armament, which contained three distinct ratings with three classes in each: Control Rating (CR), principally concerned with determining the range of a target; Quarters Rating (QR), responsible for the stowage and supply of ammunition and breech operation; and Layer Rating (LR), responsible for the movements of the gun as it was brought to bear on a target. These three ratings, in turn, were divided into 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Class, with 1st Class being the most skilled.



In the absence of any training documents in his file, it is assumed that Richard specialized in Main Armament because, on 15 August, he was drafted to Mary Hill Battery on a height of land near and above William Head overlooking the Strait of

Juan de Fuca about seven nautical miles west of Esquimalt Harbour. The battery was one of ten defending the approaches to Esquimalt and Victoria harbours. It comprised three 6-inch guns, an observation post, an anti-aircraft battery and a searchlight. Two additional searchlights were located on William Head itself.

Richard remained at Mary Hill until 11 October 1940, when he was drafted to HMCS *Prince Robert* (F56). *Prince Robert* and her sisters, *Prince David* and *Prince Henry*, were

passenger/refrigerated cargo ships built in Britain for the Canadian National Railway in the 1930s for operation along the British Columbia Coast. The Great Depression, however, impaired their economic success. At the onset of the War, they were re-acquired by the RCN and converted into armed merchant cruisers. Work on *Prince Robert* began on 9 February 1940 at Burrard Dry Dock in Esquimalt and was completed in July. Extensive work was done to ready these ships for naval combat. This included the installation of four six-inch guns, two three-inch guns, two depth charge shoots, and an assortment of lighter anti-aircraft guns on *Prince Robert*. She was capable of 22 knots and had a complement of 241 officers and ratings.



Immediately before Richard joined *Prince Robert*, she captured the German freighter *Weser* off Manzanillo, Mexico, and brought her back to Esquimalt before sailing south again, this time with Richard onboard. *Weser* was intended to support the German raider *Orion*. On 15 December 1940, *Prince Robert* left Callao, Peru for Australia to escort a Canada-bound troop convoy carrying Australian and New Zealand troops. In May 1941, she returned to the South Pacific for three months of escort and patrol duties on the New Zealand Station under Royal Navy control.



She left Auckland on 28 July 1941 for Easter Island to investigate reports of a Japanese supply ship in the area, then returned to Esquimalt on 24 August 1941 for a short refit.

According to the Nauticapedia article, *Some Reflections on HMCS Prince Robert 1941-42* by George MacFarlane, service on board *Prince Robert* was difficult, with the source of the difficulty being placed at the feet

of the Executive Officer, Commander Jefferey Hope, a former Royal Navy officer and veteran of World War I:

“My observation was that the management and organization of the ship was different from other RCN ships and operated more like a ship of the First World War era than that of the Second World War...The main theme in ship life was obedience and punctuality. We always moved at the double and there were highly restrictive dress regulations. We shaved daily regardless of the weather. Uniform dress was the only permitted dress above deck even during painting of ship when working blue or white uniforms were required... The teak decks were holy-stoned every morning.... Anyone who was tardy was put on report. More serious infractions were dealt with harshly and the cells in the fore peak were occupied from time to time...High level professional performance was demanded at all

times. Constant exercises and practices were the norm. Failure to measure up to predetermined standards was considered to be a chargeable offence...A man who made a serious technical mistake could expect to be reduced in rank. Those of the crew who were interested in promotion probably lived under a large degree of apprehension of running afoul of Commander Hope."

On 8 July 1941, while in Auckland, New Zealand, Richard was charged with being absent without leave for 1 hour and 35 minutes. Found guilty, his leave was stopped for one day, and he forfeited one day's pay. On 27 August 1941, in Esquimalt, he was again charged with being absent without leave for 1 hour and 45 minutes and received the same punishment as before. On 9 September, he was charged a third time with being absent without leave, although no details of the offence can be found in any of his records – just the two above. Nevertheless, a warrant for detention was drawn up by Commander Hope, seeking 60 days of detention at Work Point. The Commanding Officer, Commander Frederick Hart, amended the sentence as typed on the warrant by hand to read 30 days detention.

Richard was released from detention two days early, drafted to *Naden* on 8 October and quickly drafted to HMCS *Armentieres* on 30 October 1941. *Armentieres* was a Battle Class Trawler built during World War I, and the ship led a long and varied career. By the time Richard was drafted to her, *Armentieres* was an examination vessel based in Prince Rupert. An examination vessel was responsible for examining and verifying all merchant ships and small craft entering or departing a port.

Richard was subsequently drafted to Derrick Barge DB 6 on 1 April 1942, where he remained until 28 May 1944. The barge worked in Prince Rupert, providing heavy lift services to ships in the harbour. While the work may not have been exciting, it afforded Richard the opportunity to advance his career. In August 1942, he passed the Professional Examination for Leading Seaman and was promoted to Acting Leading Seaman on 1 September. In October 1943, he was awarded his first Good Conduct Badge, and on 1 September 1943, he was confirmed as a Leading Seaman. Then, on 3 February 1944, he passed the Professional Board for Petty Officer, which made him eligible for promotion to that rank. It is also likely that he was married during this time as well.

Notwithstanding his professional progress, Richard did set his reputation back when he pleaded guilty to assaulting a female staff member of a local hotel on 18 June 1943. As a result, he was fined \$20 by the civilian authority and forfeited one day's pay of \$3.83 - the time he missed to attend court. The total amount of \$23.83 in 2023 dollars is \$410.55.

Richard was next drafted to HMCS *Courteney* (J 262) on 29 May 1944, based in Prince Rupert. *Courteney* was a Bangor class minesweeper built by the Prince Rupert Dry Dock and Shipyards Co. and commissioned on 21 March 1942. He remained on board when *Courteney* was transferred to Esquimalt on June 20, 1944. He was then drafted to HMCS *Cornwallis* in Deep Cove, Nova Scotia, in August 1944. From August 1944 to 29 January 1945, Richard was drafted six times from one short-term billet to another, all in the Halifax area. What he did in these positions is not clear from his file. Then, finally, he was drafted to HMCS *Esquimalt* on 30 January 1945.

HMCS *Esquimalt* (J-272), a Bangor class minesweeper, was built by Marine Industries Ltd at Sorel, Quebec. Commissioned on 26 October 1942, she was named for the City of Esquimalt, British Columbia. Bangor-class minesweepers, as the name implies, were designed to operate in coastal waters to sweep mines. However, since enemy mines were laid only once in Canadian waters in 1943, the Bangors were used primarily to escort coastal convoys. Like all Bangors,

Esquimalt had extremely poor habitability. They were designed to accommodate a crew of 40, but her ship's company grew to 71 to cover an increasing spectrum of equipment and the men to operate and maintain it. The Bangors had a shallow draft to enable them to operate in shallow coastal waters that made them very unstable in the swells of the open ocean, and their short length caused them to bury their bows when steaming into the sea. Further, *Esquimalt's* engines were particularly unreliable.

When Richard joined *Esquimalt*, she was part of the Halifax Local Defence Force, conducting largely uneventful routine patrols and escort work in the Halifax area when not in the hands of the dockyard.



HMCS Esquimalt, circa 1944.
Photo: National Defense

U-190 sailed from her base in occupied Norway on 21 February 1945, bound for Nova Scotia's coast under Kapitänleutnant Hans-Edwin Reith's command, proceeding submerged using a schnorkel to evade detection. Reith intended to operate in the approaches to Halifax, where other U-boats had met with success. Poor sonar conditions off Halifax made the detection of submerged or bottomed U-boats difficult at the best of times. *U-190* arrived off Nova Scotia in early April, sighted two merchant ships on the 12th and made unsuccessful attacks on both vessels. Then, on the night of the 15/16 April, Reith

audaciously took *U-190* to within 15 nautical miles of Halifax Harbour in search of more targets.

That same evening, HMCS *Esquimalt* sailed from Halifax unaccompanied to conduct a routine anti-submarine patrol in the harbour approaches overnight and then rendezvous with HMCS *Sarnia* off Chebucto Head the following morning. Naval intelligence reports indicated that a U-boat was lurking in the area.

What would follow was a series of events which would demonstrate inaction, indecision, inattention, cunning, and luck- both good and bad.

Towards dawn, Kapitänleutnant Reith heard the pinging of *Esquimalt's* sonar and listened intently as *Esquimalt* circled above. When no attack followed, Reith took *U-190* to periscope depth for a quick look and observed *Esquimalt* at a range of about 1,500 metres. *Esquimalt* suddenly turned towards *U-190* and closed rapidly, prompting Reith to fire an acoustic homing torpedo. While *Esquimalt* carried a homing torpedo decoy, known as CAT gear, it had not been engaged. The torpedo hit *Esquimalt* at 0630, ripping a gaping hole in the starboard quarter and knocking out electrical power, preventing *Esquimalt* from transmitting a distress signal. The resultant heavy list pushed the ship's boat underwater before the ship's company could release it from the davits. They did, however, succeed in getting four Carley floats clear of the ship and plunged into the icy

water after them. (Carley floats were 9 feet x 14 feet oblong doughnut-shaped rafts, which theoretically held eight men but could support many more clinging to ropes fastened to the sides.)

Within about 4 minutes, *Esquimalt* sank at 44° 28'N 63° 10'W about 20 nautical miles southeast of Point Pleasant Park in Halifax. The survivors huddled together, fourteen or fifteen to a raft. An aircraft flew overhead ten minutes later and sighted the Carley floats, but the aircrew thought the rafts were fishing boats and made no report. *The Port War Signal Station had contacted Esquimalt* at 0627, a few minutes before the torpedoing. The station could not raise her by radio at 0741 or again at 0901, but no action was taken. On their daily sweep, two minesweepers closed to within two miles of the Carley floats at 0930 but moved on without seeing the survivors or hearing their desperate calls for help.

When *Esquimalt* did not appear at the rendezvous off Chebucto Head at 0800, *Sarnia* radioed her absence to shore authorities at 0950, then began a search on the assumption that *Esquimalt* had been sunk. At 1002, *Sarnia* made a sonar contact, which, according to doctrine, took priority over the search for survivors about 9.5 nautical miles west of the position where *Esquimalt* sank. *Sarnia* carried out two depth charge attacks on the contact without effect. At 1125, she gave up the hunt and resumed the search for *Esquimalt*.

Aboard the rafts, the numbers dwindled as the hours passed. One Carley float had initially held thirteen men, but over the morning, seven died from exposure one by one. The six survivors paddled the Carley float towards the Halifax East Light Vessel waving a white shirt. They closed the distance to a half mile before the lightship, and *Sarnia* finally noticed them. The six were picked up by the light ship's boat.



Survivors of the minesweeper HMCS *Esquimalt* awaiting rescue at sea off Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, 16 April 1945.

Photo: Lt Richard G. Arless, Library and Archives Canada / PA-157029

By now, the authorities ashore had concluded that *Esquimalt* was indeed missing. Another aircraft, sent out to search, sighted the remaining Carley floats and informed *Sarnia*, who reached them at 1230, six hours after *Esquimalt* had been torpedoed. In all, *Sarnia* rescued twenty-one men and recovered the bodies of sixteen others, including that of Cliff Eadie. In total, twenty-seven men survived, and forty-four died. The remaining 28 whose bodies were not recovered were considered MPK (Missing Presumed Killed). Leading Seaman Richard Partington was among them. He was 25 years old.

Additional ships were dispatched to search for *U-190*, but the search was called off after five days. *U-190* had moved close to shore and remained submerged or on the bottom at a depth of about 25 metres for seven days after the attack. Reith correctly assumed that the Canadians would not

suspect that he would remain in the area in such shallow water. Nor did they consider he could take advantage of the degraded sonar effectiveness caused by the rocky bottom and the pronounced water temperature layering.

U-190 headed for home on 29 April but never reached her base in Norway. Like all U-boats then at sea, she received Kriegsmarine Headquarters instructions to surrender on 11 May 1945 by surfacing and broadcasting their position in plain language. Two Canadian warships intercepted *U-190* and escorted her to Bay Bulls, Newfoundland. The RCN commissioned *U-190* a few days after her surrender, and she served for two years before being sunk in a live fire exercise on 21 October 1947 near the position where she had sunk *Esquimalt*. HMCS *Esquimalt* was the last Canadian warship to be lost in the War.

Richard has no known grave. He is commemorated in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, page 553, at the Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa, and on the memorial at HMCS *Unicorn* in Saskatoon. Partington Lake (Lat 56° 11' N Long 104° 12'W) in Northern Saskatchewan is also named in his memory.

For his service, Leading Seaman Richard Partington was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. His widow, Laura Partington, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

Prepared By*:

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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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