

Steward Roy Norman Peddie V-91648



- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Hudson Heights QC, 8 June 1925**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Unicorn*, 19 July 1944**
- **Civilian Occupation: Farm Labourer, Uncle's farm**
- **Death: Killed when HMCS *Esquimalt* was torpedoed and sank on 16 April 1945**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 13; Halifax Memorial; HMCS *Unicorn* Memorial; and Peddie Lake (Lat 59° 22'N Long 106° 41'W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory**

Steward Roy N. Peddie. Photo: For
Posterity Sake website

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Roy Norman Peddie, known as Roy, was born in Hudson Heights, Quebec (about 35 kilometres west of Montreal) on 8 June 1925. He was the eldest of three children born to Annie Olivia Peddie (nee Norum) and William Norman Peddie. His sister Violet was born in 1931, and his brother Morris was born in 1932. Annie was born in Saskatchewan in 1905, shortly after her parents emigrated from Minnesota. William was born in Hudson Heights in 1897. They met and were married in Regina in 1923 and moved back to Quebec shortly after their wedding. Perhaps because Annie's extended family had settled in the area, Norman purchased a farm at Connell Creek, Saskatchewan, in 1929. Connell Creek is about 24 kilometres east of Arborfield, Saskatchewan, which, in turn, is about 320 kilometres northeast of Saskatoon by present-day roads. This is the area where the Great Plains meet the Boreal Forest. Annie and Roy joined Norman there in 1931, and Violet and Morris were soon added to the family.

In general, the timing to establish a farm could not have been worse. The Great Depression and the severe drought which devastated the Saskatchewan economy were beginning. In 1928, net farming income in Saskatchewan was \$363 million; by 1933, it dropped to \$11 million; and by 1937, two-thirds of the farm population of Saskatchewan was destitute. Relief costs, now referred to as social assistance, borne by the Saskatchewan government escalated to \$62 million, which was higher than the government's total revenues. The economies of towns and cities closely linked to the agriculture sector likewise suffered. Unemployment grew to 30% even as about 250,000 people left the Prairies for greener pastures in British Columbia and Ontario. While those

were the Saskatchewan-wide economic indicators, the northern agricultural region of the province was spared, and consequently, Roy's extended family was able to make a modest living.

Sadly, Annie died three weeks after giving birth to Morris. As was common at the time, when faced with a parental loss, the children were split up among other married family members. Roy went to live with one uncle, Morris was adopted by another, and Violet went to live with her grandparents. At the beginning of the War, William moved to Toronto to work in defence production, but he returned in 1946 and reunited with Violet. Roy, on the other hand, left school in 1941 at the age of 16 after completing Grade 9. He then focused on farming with his uncle before enlisting.

Roy was sworn into the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) in Saskatoon at HMCS *Unicorn* as a Probationary Steward (Temporary) on 19 July 1944. He was 19 years old, single, 5 feet 7 inches tall, and weighed 115 pounds with red hair, brown eyes and a fair, freckled complexion.

HMCS *Unicorn* was a brand-new facility having been officially opened in May 1944. Referred to as a "Recruiting and Training Center" or "Naval Barracks", it was built at the cost of \$100,000 – approximately \$1,796,000 in 2023 dollars. It housed complete recruiting and medical/dental facilities, large classrooms, an 8,400 square foot drill deck, a galley, a weapons bay, and accommodations for 100 men who slept in hammocks. Gone was the \$70 per week lodging and compensation allowance by which a trainee could pay his landlady or, more likely for the Saskatoon residents, his mother, to provide meals, do his laundry, and press his uniform. All the trainees now lived "onboard" and were subject to 24-hour-per-day naval discipline and standing watches around the clock as they would on a ship. The Commanding Officer even had a parrot named Polly, of course, with red and green plumage reminiscent of port and starboard running lights.

Once sworn in, Roy remained under training at *Unicorn*, taking initial training until 9 October 1944, when he was drafted to HMCS *Cornwallis* at Deep Cove, Nova Scotia. There, he underwent basic and trade training until 16 November, when he was drafted to HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax and employed there while awaiting an operational draft.

On 17 January 1945, Roy was drafted to HMCS *Esquimalt*.

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 Roy 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.

U-190 sailed from her base in occupied Norway on 21 February 1945 bound for the coast of Nova Scotia under the command of Kapitänleutnant Hans-Edwin Reith 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. However, they succeeded 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 Carly float towards the Halifax East Light Vessel waving a white shirt. They closed the distance to a half mile before the light ship, and *Sarnia* finally noticed them. The six were picked up by the light ship's boat.

By now, the authorities ashore had concluded that *Esquimalt* was indeed missing. Another aircraft, sent out to search, sighted the remaining Carly 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. In total, twenty-seven men survived, and forty-four died. The remaining 28 whose bodies were not recovered were considered MPK (Missing Presumed Killed). Steward Roy Peddie was one of the missing.

Additional ships were subsequently dispatched to search for *U-190*, but after five days, the search was called off. *U-190* had moved close into 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.

Roy has no known grave. He is commemorated on page 553 of the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa; on panel 13 of the Halifax Memorial, Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial; on the Cenotaph in Arborfield, Saskatchewan and on the memorial at HMCS *Unicorn* in Saskatoon. Peddie Lake (Lat 59° 22'N Long 106° 41'W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory.

For his service, Steward Roy Norman Peddie was awarded the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal.

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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