

## Shipwright 4th Class Ralph Bradford Pool V-87252



Shipwright 4<sup>th</sup> Class Ralph Pool. Photo: For Posterity Sake website

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Taupa, Oklahoma, USA, 31 August 1908**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Nonsuch*, 16 May 1944**
- **Civilian Occupation: Carpenter, Aircraft Repair Ltd**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Esquimalt* was torpedoed and sank on 16 April 1945**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 13; HMCS *Nonsuch* Memorial plaque, Edmonton; and Naval Museum of Alberta Memorial Plaque, Calgary**

Ralph Bradford Pool was born in Taupa, Oklahoma, on August 31, 1908, the eldest child of Clarence Orion Pool (an American) and his wife Mina Radina Pool (nee Johnson), a native of Norway. Shortly after Pool's birth in 1909, the family moved near Beaverlodge, Alberta, in Canada. Beaverlodge is approximately 500 kilometres west-north-west of Edmonton, near the border with British Columbia. Ralph's father was a farmer and a farrier, a craftsman who trims horses' hooves and puts shoes on horses. Over the next eleven years, the Pools would welcome six additional children (three boys and three girls).

In 1926, at the age of 17, Ralph was selected to attend the Alberta Farmers Conference as a young delegate at the University of Alberta. Ralph completed Grade 8 and left school at age 18. entered into an apprenticeship as a carpenter and would eventually become a skilled craftsman in that trade. During this time, he moved to the Edmonton area, which was very different than it is today. The rich oil discoveries in nearby Leduc had not yet happened, and the small city was the provincial capital, a major railway centre and a hub for local agriculture and the meat packing industry. It was also the jumping-off point for bush pilot flights into the North. The Declaration of War meant a significant uptick in economic activity in Edmonton, which included construction and support to the nearby Commonwealth Air Training Plan Centre, the construction of the Alaska Highway and the Canol pipeline.

On April 28, 1932, Ralph married Kathleen Enid Clarke, a native of Manchester, England, who had moved as a child with her family to Edmonton in 1902. They had two children: Harry Bradford Pool in 1933 and Mona Sally Pool in 1938. Ralph worked for Aircraft Repair Ltd. during the war

years, and he also joined the Army Reserve in November 1942, serving in the 4th Armoured Division (Reserve) as part of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps (RCASC).

Ralph lost his job in late March of 1944, so at the age of 35, he applied to join the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR). At that time, his two younger brothers were already serving in the military: Sergeant Harold Pool in the Canadian Army and Able Seaman Clarence Pool in the RCNVR. To join the RCNVR, Ralph had to be released from the Army Reserve. This happened on May 2, 1944. He finally joined the RCNVR on May 16, 1944, at HMCS *Nonsuch* in Edmonton.

Ralph was enrolled as a Shipwright 4th Class. A shipwright is a sailor who specializes in the repair of ships' hulls and equipment, including battle damage. As a largely trained carpenter, the Navy quickly employed him in Active Service. He was initially sent to HMCS *York*, the RCNVR training and recruiting facility in Toronto, where he completed the Navy's New Entry training. In July 1944, the Navy transferred him to HMCS *Stadacona*, the Royal Canadian Navy's training and operations base in Halifax, Nova Scotia. At *Stadacona*, he likely completed some shipwright training at the Mechanical Training Establishment before being posted to HMCS *Scotian* – the ship repair unit – in the Halifax dockyard for several months.

On February 12, 1945, the Navy posted Shipwright Pool to HMCS *Esquimalt*, a Bangor class minesweeper. Bangor class ships were designed as coastal minesweepers and saw service as minesweepers in Canadian and UK waters. However, their primary role during the war was as convoy escorts with local escort groups, escorting convoys to or from ports to meet up with the larger escort further out at sea. At the time of his posting, *Esquimalt* was part of the Halifax escort force, escorting smaller local convoys up and down the east coast of North America and conducting minesweeping operations around Halifax. Although these ships were initially intended to be crewed by approximately 60 personnel, additions to their weapons and sensors often led to larger crews of 70 or more, resulting in cramped conditions onboard.



HMCS *Esquimalt*, circa 1944.  
Photo: National Defense

On the evening of April 15 1945, *Esquimalt* sailed from Halifax on an anti-submarine patrol in the harbour approaches and subsequently intended to rendezvous with HMCS *Sarnia*. In the early morning of April 16th, *Esquimalt* was attacked by U-190, a German U-boat that had been operating around Halifax since early April. U-190's homing torpedo struck *Esquimalt's* starboard side near the engine room. The explosion knocked out the onboard power instantly, preventing any distress signal from being sent. *Esquimalt* then started to list heavily to starboard, pushing

the lifeboat underwater, but the crew managed to get four Carley floats clear of the ship. Carley floats are open, cork-based flotation devices which offer little shelter from the sea.

*Esquimalt* sank in less than five minutes, within sight of shore and well within Canadian waters. Because of the lack of distress calls or signals from *Esquimalt* and the unfortunate timing of the attack itself, very near to when Allied forces expected hostilities to cease, rescue efforts were substantially delayed, resulting in many men losing their lives to exposure. With only light clothing, the surviving crew drifted on the Carley floats in frigid waters for about six hours. Sixteen men died during the attack, and another 28 more died from the exposure that followed. The remaining 24 crew members were rescued with the arrival of *Sarnia*, which unsuccessfully attacked U-190 after making contact with the submarine. News of the sinking was not released because of wartime restrictions until Victory in Europe Day on May 7, 1945.



**Memorial marker for Shipwright Ralph Pool at Beaverlodge cemetery, Beaverlodge, AB.  
Source: Find A Grave website**

Subsequent survivor reports indicate that Ralph Pool was trapped below decks and never entered the water. He was 35 years old at the time of his death, leaving a wife and two children as well as his parents and six siblings. His remains were not recovered, but a gravestone was installed in the Beaverlodge Cemetery in Beaverlodge, Alberta. Additionally, Shipwright 4th Class Pool is commemorated on the HMCS *Nonsuch* Memorial Plaque, on the Naval Museum of Alberta Memorial Plaque, in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, page 555 at the Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, in Ottawa, and on the Halifax Memorial Panel 13.

For his service, Shipwright Ralph Pool was awarded the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp and the War Medal. His wife, Kathleen, and his mother, Mina, were awarded the Memorial Cross.

#### Prepared By\*:

Lieutenant-Commander Derek L Carroll, RCN, CD (Ret'd), HMCS *Tecumseh*,  
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.



#### Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database – profile for Ralph Bradford Pool
- Library and Archives Canada – military record for Ralph Bradford Pool
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- [wikipedia.com](http://wikipedia.com)

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