

Lieutenant John Alan Schwarz O-65400



John (Jack) Alan Schwarz. Photo: For Posterity Sake

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Edmonton AB, 25 June 1921**
- **Enlisted: Edmonton Division RCNVR, 15 September 1939**
- **Civilian Occupation: Student**
- **Death: Killed when HMS *Whitaker* was torpedoed on 1 November 1944**
- **Buried: Belfast City Cemetery, Glenalina Extn. Sec. B.S. Grave 24**
- **Commemorated: HMCS *Nonsuch* Memorial; Naval Museum of Alberta Memorial; and the Second World War Book of Remembrance, page 438 at the Centre Block House of Parliament, in Ottawa**

John Alan Schwarz “Jack” was born in Edmonton, Alberta on 25 June 1921 to Edward R. and Mary Letitia Schwarz (nee Gilland). Jack’s father was originally from Germany but immigrated to Wisconsin in the United States as a child in 1888 and then to Canada in 1919. His mother was born in Ontario and moved to Alberta where she and her husband were married in January 1920. Mary Schwarz died on 1 August 1925 when Jack was four years of age. On 18 February 1927, his father was re-married to Helga Amelia Schwarz (nee Ecklund) and they had two children, a daughter Marie Anne and a second son Edward Richard.

Jack Schwarz enlisted in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) on 10 October 1939, at the Edmonton Division, RCNVR (later named HMCS *Nonsuch*). Jack’s religion was noted on his records as being Baptist and his interests included basketball, swimming and football. At the time of his enrolment, he listed his address as 9160 Jasper Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta. He was 18 years of age.

Ordinary Seaman Schwarz remained on Divisional Strength in Edmonton for nearly 10 months. This long wait may have been due to his young age or a lack of training space on the coasts. During this period Jack would have attended to appointments and trained several evenings per week at the Reserve Division. Finally, on 26 July 1940, Jack was placed on active service.

After completing his basic entry course in Edmonton, Ordinary Seaman Schwarz was posted to HMCS *Naden* (Canada’s west coast training and operations base in Esquimalt, BC) in Sep 1940. At *Naden*, he completed seven weeks of Seamanship training before being re-assigned for Visual Signalling (V/S) duties. Signalmen (V.S.) were trained to communicate without the use of a radio. They learned to read Morse code sent by flashing light, they sent and received messages by

semaphore flags and they learned how to send and receive messages by signal flag hoist. These methods of communication were vital during periods of radio silence – which was the norm at sea.

After several more weeks of training, Jack was rated as an Ordinary Signaller and he worked ashore at HMCS *Naden* for 20 months during which time he was rated as a trained Signaller.

In Sep 1942, Signaller Schwarz was drafted to his first ship, a Flower-class corvette called HMCS *Timmins* for a few weeks before receiving a longer-term posting onboard another Flower-class corvette called HMCS *Edmundston* on 12 September 1942. (Flower class corvettes were relatively small, agile, and lightly armed vessels principally used in convoy escort duties.)



On 13 September 1942, *Edmundston* was reassigned to the Atlantic Ocean. To do so she had to transit to the east coast of Canada via the Panama Canal which was hazardous due to increased submarine activity. She arrived at Halifax in October 1942 and upon arrival, she was assigned to the Western Local Escort Force (WLEF). Between Oct and Dec 1942, Signaller Schwarz and his shipmates protected eight merchant ship convoys in the North Atlantic. In early Jan 1943, *Edmundston* was taken out of service for a refit. On 27 Feb 1943, Jack challenged and passed the Officer Selection Board and on 30 April 1943,

Signaller Jack Schwarz left the ship in order to accept a commission as a Sub-Lieutenant, RCNVR.

Becoming a naval officer involved more training. Over the next few months, Jack received additional training at HMCS *Kings*, HMCS *Cornwallis* and HMCS *Stadacona* which was Canada's east coast naval training and operations base in Halifax, Nova Scotia. In early Oct 1943, Jack was about to head to the UK for training and employment when he received emergency leave to return to Edmonton upon hearing that his stepmother was gravely ill. Unfortunately, he was unable to get home in time; he arrived the day after his stepmother died on 5 October 1943.

Jack quickly returned to the navy base in Halifax and crossed the Atlantic to join his next ship. In November 1943 he joined HMS *Nimrod*, which was a shore establishment at Campbeltown, Argyll, Scotland. It was the main ASDIC training school for officers and men from early 1940 onwards (ASDIC was the initial term for 'sonar' in the commonwealth navies). In Dec 1943, this training was followed by a training consolidation period in HMS *Blackwood*, a Royal Navy frigate (a frigate is slightly larger than a corvette and better armed) and HMS *Mourne* (another frigate). Both these ships were involved in escort duties in the North Atlantic.

On 11 Mar 1944, Jack was posted to his final ship, another Royal Navy frigate called HMS *Whitaker*. This was a newly commissioned ship with the latest in sensors and weaponry. For the next several months, *Whitaker's* crew prepared for Operation NEPTUNE and OVERLORD; the landing of troops at Normandy. Jack was promoted to Lieutenant on 24 May 1944. In late summer 1944, once the patrol duties at Normandy were complete, *Whitaker* was assigned to convoy escort duties. The safe and timely arrival of the war material was urgently needed by the Allies as they advanced through Continental Europe. The German U-boats knew this as well; - cut off supplies and the Allies cannot advance.



**HMS Whitaker (undated) showing some of the horrific damage she suffered. In the foreground is a group of her survivors.
Photo: navsource.org, contributed by Bob Hurst**

On 1 Nov 1944, *Whitaker* was one of eleven warships escorting a 63-ship convoy (SC-159) to Liverpool, UK when she was torpedoed by U-483 off Malin Head on the north coast of Ireland at position 55°30'00"N 007°39'00"W. The forward magazine exploded destroying the bridge. Damage control measures brought the resultant fires under control by 0320 hours but not before the ship had lost much of her bow

and suffered 79 dead including all of the officers. Lieutenant Schwarz was 23 at the time of his death.

The next day all 63 merchant ships arrived safely in Liverpool.

Subsequent correspondence between Jack's father and Royal Canadian Naval headquarters in Ottawa revealed that Jack's remains were recovered, and he is buried in the Belfast City Cemetery, Belfast, Northern Ireland. (Glenalina Extension, Section BS, Grave 24). His headstone bears the inscription:

"He died for freedom and honour."

RCN records indicate that Lieutenant Schwarz received the following medals posthumously (all were sent to his father in Edmonton): the 1939-1945 Star, the Atlantic Star (w/clasp), Canadian Volunteer Service Medal (w/clasp) and the War Medal.

Postscript: As a measure of the ferocity of the Battle of Atlantic in 1944, it should be noted that HM ships *Blackwood*, *Mourne* and *Whitaker* were all lost in battle before the end of the war.

Prepared By:

Lieutenant-Commander Derek L Carroll, RCN, CD (Retired), HMCS *Tecumseh*, Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Research team



Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database – profile for John Alan Schwarz

- [Library and Archives Canada](#) – record for John Alan Schwarz
- [Ancestry.com](#)
- [findagrave.com](#)
- [Wikipedia.com](#)
- [U-boat.net](#) – HMS *Whitaker*
- [Convoyweb.org](#) – details of SC-159
- Tucker, G.N. (1952). THE NAVAL SERVICE OF CANADA. Its Official History Volume 2: ACTIVITIES ON SHORE DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR
- [Navsource.org](#) – photo of HMS *Whitaker* damage