

Steward John Anderson V-13860



Steward John Anderson. Photo: Anderson family Collection

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Seven Persons AB, 20 May 1917**
- **Enlisted: Calgary Division RCNVR, 17 May 1941**
- **Civilian Occupation: waiter, Picardy Candy Company of Alberta**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Spikenard* was torpedoed and sunk on 10 February 1942**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 9, on the memorial plaque at HMCS *Tecumseh* in Calgary and on the Honour Roll at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch #156 in Eckville, AB**

John Anderson was born in Seven Persons Alberta (just west of Medicine Hat) on May 20, 1917. John was the fourth of eight children born to Simon and Agonda Anderson. He had 3 sisters and 4 brothers. John's father, Simon Christian Anderson, immigrated to Canada from Denmark in 1908 and applied for a homestead farm near Seven Persons. John's mother, Agonda Van Marrion, was from Rotterdam, Netherlands. They were married in Medicine Hat in 1912. Between 1914 and 1922 they had eight children, 5 boys and 3 girls, 2 of the boys were twins. In 1925, in an effort to find better farmland the family relocated to Chedderville Alberta, 40 kilometers south of Rocky Mountain House. They found this area to be difficult to grow crops, so in 1928 they relocated back to Eckville, Alberta, 45 kilometers west of Red Deer.

They established a farm 8 kilometers southeast of Eckville. Soil conditions were excellent here and they made this their permanent home. The oldest son Christian eventually bought the farm from his father and later Christian's son Richard bought the property from him. Richard Anderson still owns and operates this farm today.

John attended school at Diamond Valley Public School, located south of Eckville. He left school at the age of fifteen and worked on the farm until 1940 when he relocated to Calgary. He enlisted in the Royal Canadian Engineers Volunteer Militia. 13th Field Division R.C.E and served from August to November 1940. He was discharged "In Good Standing". John was then employed as a waiter with the Picardy Candy Company in Calgary, a job he held until he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR).

John enlisted at the Calgary Division RCNVR (later named HMCS *Tecumseh*) on 17 May 1941. On his enlistment form he stated he was of Presbyterian religion and only fluent in English. He requested to be trained either as a Steward or a Barber stating that upon finishing his military service he planned to become a barber. He listed his existing skills as farming equipment operator and hair dressing. His medical record shows him as being 6' ¾" tall. 143 pounds, blue eyed and blond hair, slim build, and fair complexion.

John was given credit for his training in the R.C.E. and the day after his enlistment he was on a train bound for Halifax for his training as a Steward at HMCS *Stadacona*.

In August of 1941 John's mother sent a letter to Navy Command requesting John be discharged on compassionate grounds. John's father was 56 years old and had a bad leg. Three of their other sons: William, Charlie and Carl were serving with the R.C.A.F. The three daughters were married and living in Calgary. The family had been requested by the government to grow less wheat and instead grow more barley and oats, and to raise pigs. This change in crops involved much more labour and there was a lack of labourers in the area. This was happening quite a bit on the prairies in 1941, there was so much enlistment in the services that there was drastic shortage of manpower especially on farms.



Steward John Anderson on course in Halifax, Jul 1941. Photo credit: Canadian Virtual War memorial

John did not want to be released; he felt a loyalty to serve his country but also wished to help his family. The Navy was only granting discharge in very severe cases, so John was not discharged but was given compassionate leave to help with the harvest. His records show him as being sent to the Edmonton Division RCNVR (later HMCS *Nonsuch*) from 21 August 1941 to 6 November 1941. After the harvest he was drafted back to HMCS *Stadacona* to finish his training. In late November 1941, he was assigned to the HMCS *Spikenard* as a Probationary Steward.

HMCS *Spikenard* was a "Flower Class Corvette" built in Lauzon Quebec for the British Navy. The British were short on manpower, so *Spikenard* became a Royal Canadian Navy ship. When Steward John Anderson joined *Spikenard*, the ship was assigned to the Newfoundland Escort Force (N.E.F.). The purpose of this force was to escort Merchant convoys from Newfoundland to a point in the mid- Atlantic, where the Royal Navy would take over the escort eventually ending in Ireland. The Newfoundland-based ships would "pick-up" west-bound convoys at this mid-Atlantic point and escort the ships to North America.

The first of these convoys was SC-67. SC meant slow convoy, and a slow convoy traveled at speeds between 6-9 knots (11- 17 km/hr). The convoy left North Sydney Nova Scotia on the morning of 2 February 1942 and picked up its escort later that day. HMCS *Spikenard* was the lead escort of the convoy which included 6 other Canadian corvettes.

All went well until 10 February 1942, the last night of their escort. At approximately 2230 on a dark moonless night the convoy was attacked by two German submarines (U-boats), *U-591* and *U-136*. Torpedoes from *U-136* struck the Norwegian Tanker *Heina* and HMCS *Spikenard*. The damage to HMCS *Spikenard* was so severe that she sank within five minutes. The other corvettes were busy searching for the U-boats and rescuing the survivors of the *Heina* and because the *Spikenard* had been 2000 yards ahead of the tanker's position, they did not realize she had been hit. They assumed that she had gone ahead to alert the Royal Navy of the U-boats presence and it was not until the morning of 11 February 1942 when the escort reached the rendez-vous point that they realized *Spikenard* was missing. A British corvette was dispatched to the area and found eight survivors in a life raft. A total of fifty-seven Canadian sailors had been lost, including Steward John Anderson. He was 24 years old.

John Anderson's family was informed by letter that he was lost at sea. After receiving a letter from John's father, the Navy responded with more details, the names of the survivors and a picture of HMCS *Spikenard*. The Anderson family suffered further hardship when their son William Anderson was killed on a flight over Germany on 24 March 1945 while serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

For his service John was awarded the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, the 1939-45 Star and the War Medal. His mother, Agonda Anderson, was awarded the Canadian Memorial Cross

John is remembered at the Halifax Memorial, Panel 9 and the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 54. He is remembered on the memorial plaque at HMCS *Tecumseh* in Calgary Alberta and on the Honour Roll at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch #156 in Eckville, Alberta

Prepared By:

Ross Anderson, HMCS *Tecumseh* 1971-74 and Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Researcher



Sources:

- Library and Archives Canada- Service file for Steward John Anderson and Flight Officer William Anderson
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database – profile for Steward John Anderson
- https://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_SPIKENARD. Retrieved 20 Feb 2022
- Trident Navy Newspaper, February 3, 2022. CPO1 (Ret'd) Patrick Devenish
- The Canadian Virtual War Memorial: Steward John Anderson
- Discussion with John Anderson's nephew - Richard Anderson of Eckville Alberta