

Leading Stoker Elmer Joseph Clinton V-1290



Leading Stoker Elmer J. Clinton,
Photo credit: Charlottetown Guardian
Newspaper

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Charlottetown PE, 22 March 1922**
- **Enlisted: Charlottetown Division RCNVR, 30 April 1940**
- **Civilian Occupation: Labourer - truck driver**
- **Death: Died when HMCS Alberni sunk on 21 August 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 12**

Elmer Joseph Clinton was born in Charlottetown PEI on 20 March 1920 to Luke and Sara Elizabeth Clinton. The Clinton's were a large family and lived at 343 Grafton St. in the heart of Charlottetown. Elmer had four brothers – James Arthur, Lorne William, Charles Earl, and Lloyd Patrick; there were five sisters Mary Eleanor, Dorothy Margaret, Iris Patricia, Jean Avis, and Gladys Ruth. Clinton attended school completing grade 6 and then became a general labourer. In his application information, Luke hoped to return to PEI after his service and become a farmer, working a mixed farm. He declared his religion to be Roman Catholic. With blond hair and blue eyes, Clinton was thin man of 162 lbs on enlistment, and stood 5 foot 9.5 inches tall.

Just after his 18th birthday, on 30 April 1940 Clinton enlisted as an Ordinary Seaman at the Charlottetown Division RCNVR. Ordinary Seaman Clinton completed his basic training in Charlottetown before he was transferred to HMCS *Stadacona* in Nov 1940 for training as a stoker. Stokers received specialized training to perform duties in a ship's engine room. Stoker 2nd Class Clinton joined HMCS *Sunbeam* on 17 January 1941. This ship was a fuel oil carrier that transported oil between the Oil Refinery and the naval ships in Halifax harbour. Clinton completed additional stoker training while serving in *Sunbeam* before he was transferred to his final ship, HMCS *Alberni* in late May 1941.

HMCS *Alberni* was a new ship, commissioned in Feb 1941. When Stoker 2nd Class Clinton joined *Alberni*, the ship had just been assigned to the newly created Newfoundland Escort Force where she operated as an Escort to merchant ships who traveled in Convoys between North America and Europe. *Alberni* had escorted 8 different convoys by Aug 1941 when Clinton was promoted to Stoker 1st class.

In Sep 1941, Stoker 1/c Clinton and his shipmates saw extended action against the enemy when the convoy they escorted was attacked by a U-Boat wolf pack. The convoy of 64 merchant vessels was attacked from 9 to 14 September during which time 16 ships were torpedoed. *Alberni* along with HMCS *Skeena* counter-attacked with depth charges damaging U-85. *Alberni* continued with escort duties until early May 1942, when she had a short refit in Liverpool, NS to replace her boilers.

After the refit, *Alberni* was sent to the UK as part of Operation *Torch* which was the Allied Invasion of North Africa. Clinton was promoted to Leading Stoker on 1 Oct 1942. From October 1942 until February 1943, she escorted convoys between Gibraltar and the UK. L/Stoker Clinton was part of several heroic efforts including the rescue of 12 survivors from the torpedoed American tanker *Gurney E. Newlin* and the rescue of 81 survivors from the torpedoed British whaling ship *Sourabaya* in October 1942.

In 1944, *Alberni* was one of 17 Royal Canadian Navy ships assigned to Operation *Neptune* which was the naval portion of the Normandy D-Day landings. In June and July of 1944, *Alberni* escorted merchant ships (between Southampton and the Beaches), as well as landing craft, floating piers (for Mulberry harbour), tugs and barges. On July 26, 1944, L/Stoker Clinton witnessed his ship shoot down a German aircraft (Junkers Ju 88) that reportedly struck the water approximately 100 yards from the ship.

After 32 Convoys, two major Combined Operations, and 1184 days of service in HMCS *Alberni*, L/Stoker Clinton was lost at sea when HMCS *Alberni* was torpedoed in the English Channel on 21 August 1944 by U-480.

“At 11:37 on August 21st/1944, the Alberni was steaming south along the Isle of Wight at fourteen knots when the “hands to dinner” pipe sounded. Four minutes later, with no warning, the German vessel U-480 fired an acoustic torpedo that struck the Alberni on the port side by the engine room and sunk below the water in about thirty seconds, with many sailors stuck in the mess halls and engine room (only one engine room worker escaped... Fifty-nine sailors of the ninety aboard the vessel lost their lives in the sinking, while the survivors had to rely on fallen debris and the RCN lifejackets (that helped reduce groin injuries) to stay afloat for forty-five minutes since there was no time to release the lifeboats. Investigations into the sudden sinking of the HMCS Alberni determined that the U-boat that torpedoed it was “invisible” to its radar and sonar, and it wasn’t until the torpedo was fired that the Alberni was notified of an incoming attack. It was determined that U-480, the U-boat that sunk the HMCS Alberni, was utilizing the brand new “Alberich” technology; an anechoic tile system developed by Nazi Germany that, when covering a submarine, will make it nearly invisible to radar and sonar technology. The HMCS Alberni was also determined to be the first allied vessel to be sunk by “Alberich” technology.” – Port Alberni Maritime Heritage website

**Reported Missing On
H. M. C. S. Alberni**



Fifty-nine officers and ratings are missing following the loss of the Royal Canadian Navy corvette, H.M.C.S. "ALBERNI", while on invasion duties, it was announced by Hon. Angus L. Macdonald, Minister of National Defence, for Naval Services.

One of the missing ratings, pictured above, is Leading Stoker, Elmer Joseph Clinton, R.C.N.V.R., Charlottetown. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Luke Clinton, reside at 343 Grafton Street, Charlottetown. They received word a few days ago that their son was missing.

L/S Clinton enlisted in the R.C.N.V.R. barracks in Charlottetown in March 1940 at the age of eighteen. He saw a good deal of active service, on one occasion receiving wounds in the leg from flying fragments of another ship. He took part in the invasion of North Africa in 1943.

He received his education at Queen Square School, and worked for a short while at Davis and Fraser Limited.

He has four brothers and five sisters living.

Newspaper Clipping from the
Charlottetown Guardian

All records indicate Clinton was a good rating, of very good character with exemplary service. The only fault recorded on his Conduct Sheet occurred on 27 January 1943 where he “Did remain absent over leave namely 20 minutes from 1800 to 1820.” Clinton was never married. Clinton was 22 years old at the time of his death. His name appears on panel 12 on the Halifax Naval Memorial in Point Pleasant Park (Nova Scotia).

For his service, Leading Stoker Elmer Joseph Clinton was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star with clasp, Africa Star and Clasp, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with clasp & the War medal. The Memorial Cross was presented to his mother, Elizabeth Clinton.

Prepared By:

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Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission file for Ldg/Sto Elmer Joseph Clinton
- Library and Archives Canada Service file for Ldg/Sto Elmer Joseph Clinton
- <https://www.portalbernimaritimeheritage.ca/post/2018/08/23/the-last-voyage-of-the-hmcs-alberni>
- picture credits – The Charlottetown Guardian