

## Cook (S) Desmond Bert William Cook V-51070



- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Renton Washington USA, 12 September 1924**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Discovery*, 20 November 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Butterman, Fraser Valley Milk Producers Association**
- **Death: Drowned when HMCS *Skeena* was beached in a storm on 25 October 1944**
- **Commemorated: HMCS *Discovery* Memorial Plaque, Fossvogur Cemetery Grave C49.31, Reykjavik and on page 278 of the Second World War Book of Remembrance**

Desmond Bert William Cook joined the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve on 20 Nov 1942 when he was 18 years and 2 months old. Son of Bert Cook (father) and Lillie Cook (mother), his family moved frequently between Canada and the United States, and he was born in the USA while some of his siblings were born in Canada. His parents were married in Nanaimo, BC on 12 June 1917 and Desmond had an older sister, Norma Irene (married to Edward Koch) who was 23 when he enrolled and a younger sister Dorothy Elaine who was only 16 at that time.

A lanky 5'11" at 150 lbs Desmond Cook had blue eyes and brown hair. He also had a scar on his right knee according to his medical records. In his attestation papers he listed himself as a member of the Pentecostal Holiness faith. He attended public school for eight years and worked as a butterman for three months with the Fraser Milk Producers Association in Vancouver, BC. Before enrolling into the RCNVR he tried to sign on with the Royal Canadian Air Force but was rejected due to his failing the IQ test.

Upon enrollment he was taken on divisional strength as an Assistant Cook, RCNVR, at HMCS *Discovery*. Desmond was finally placed on Active Service in Feb 1943 and he was sent to HMCS

*Tecumseh* on 1 March 1943. On completion of basic training Desmond reported to HMCS *Naden* in Esquimalt, BC on 26 April 1943 for cook's training. Once he was fully trained, Desmond was ordered to HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax, NS on 2 July 1943. At *Stadacona* Desmond was assigned to work on Motor Launch (M.L.) Q059 between 31 July and 2 September. M.L. Q059 was part of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Flotilla, Sydney Force. Motor Launches were also known as Fairmile Launches; their role was to provide for the defence of the waters off the east coast including anti-submarine patrols.



Fairmile ML Q059.  
Photo from the Flickr photo collection of Don Gorham  
([www.forposteritysake.ca](http://www.forposteritysake.ca))

Desmond returned to *Stadacona* for a short time 3 – 23 September 1943 before he was assigned to HMCS *Assiniboine* on 24 September. HMCS *Assiniboine* was assigned to M.O.E.F. (Mid-Ocean Escort Force) at that time. It was not certain whether Desmond Cook was at sea on her as he returned to HMCS *Avalon* on 31 October (the assignment depot in St. John's, Newfoundland) where he was rated as a Cook on 24 November 1943.



HMCS Skeena grounded on Videy Island in Iceland near Reykjavik  
Photo Credit: [www.forposterityssake.ca](http://www.forposterityssake.ca)

From *Avalon*, Desmond was drafted to HMCS *Skeena* in January 1944 where he served until he drowned on 25 October 1944. HMCS *Skeena* was not a new ship, she had been commissioned in 1931. *Skeena* served on both the west and east coast of Canada before the outbreak of WW2. During the war, she was used primarily as a convoy escort. One noteworthy achievement: in July 1942, she shared with HMCS *Wetaskiwin* in the sinking of U-588.

When Cook(S) Desmond Cook joined *Skeena* in Jan 1944, she was assigned to convoy duties, but was sent for refit in February 1944 after she was nominated to participate in Operation NEPTUNE: the naval component of the D-Day landings. In early June 1944, *Skeena* was deployed for anti-submarine operations in Bay of Biscay. This was intended to deny the Germans any access to the English Channel where the Allies' invasion convoys and assemblies were being formed. In July 1944, as the Allies moved through France, *Skeena* was

assigned to interception patrols in French coastal waters to prevent the use of these ports for enemy military operations. Of note, on 5 July 1944, *Skeena* carried out an attack on U-Boat escorts, sinking three patrol vessels. Then on 11 July, *Skeena* was involved in a collision with HMCS *Qu'Appelle* during an engagement with enemy ships in Audierne Bay. Fourteen of the ship's company were injured and the ship sustained some structural damage.

After another month of successful interception patrols, *Skeena* was reassigned in September 1944 to conduct anti-submarine operations to intercept U-Boats in transit between the North-West Approaches (UK) and bases in Norway.

HMCS *Skeena* was lost in a storm on the night of 24 October 1944. She was anchored off at Hvalfjörð, Iceland whilst taking shelter in adverse weather near Reykjavik, Iceland. She dragged her anchor and grounded in 50-foot (15 m) waves off Viðey Island with the loss of 15 crew members, one of them was the ship's cook – Desmond Bert Williams Cook. His body was recovered.

In a condolence letter sent by his commanding officer, it described the incident as:

“On the nights on (sic) the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> October 1944 HMCS *Skeena* stranded on the rocks during a very severe gale. Your son was one of those who lost his life while trying to get a line ashore from the ship and thus permit the remainder of his shipmates to leave from the ship in safety. The example of heroism and sacrifice he gave us is an inspiration to carry on to the end – and may it be so to you also.

During the recent months it has been my privilege to have your son serving under my command in several actions with the enemy forces. He has been a great credit to you, himself and his country.

Desmond was interred in a military cemetery with full military honours by his shipmates and friends from other ships of the Flotilla. Photographs of the possession and service will be sent to you as soon as they are ready.

A parcel containing some personal effects will be sent to you separately.

I should also like you to know that those of us in *Skeena* and other Canadian ships of our flotilla will send a contribution to financially assist you. There is so very little we can do to help you in your great loss, but this we hope you will accept as a token in honour of your son.

Sincerely.”

A military funeral service was held on 28 October 1944 at the FOSSVOGUR cemetery in Reykjavik which lies south of the town on the road to Hafnarfjörður. Reykjavik is in the south-western part of the island and the cemetery.

On 1 May 1945 his mother wrote to the navy asking for his belongings (wristwatch, ID bracelet, wallet, 2 broaches) as he was their only son and they meant a lot to her due to their sentimental values. It was not known whether these items were recovered from the wreck and returned to her.

For his service Desmond Bert William Cook was awarded the 1939-45 Star; Atlantic Star; France & Germany Star & Clasp; and Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp. His mother, Lillie Cook, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

As there was no Will, the estate was equally distributed \$294.03 each to his parents: Bert Cook and Lillie M. Cook. His mother also applied for Dependent's Allowance but was rejected by the Dependents' Allowance Board under the War Service Grant Act of 1944.



HMCS *Skeena*, funeral at Fossaburg Cemetery, Reykjavik, Iceland.  
Photo credit:  
<https://militaryhistorynow.com/> (NAC R/V8/269)

Desmond Bert Cook is remembered on the Honour Roll at HMCS *Discovery* in Vancouver, BC; Fossvogur Cemetery Grave C49.31, Reykjavik and on page 278 of the Second World War Book of Remembrance.

**Prepared By:**

Commander (Ret'd) King Wan (HMCS *Discovery* 1972 – 1992) Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Research Team.



**Sources:**

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**Additional photos:**



<https://militaryhistorynow.com/>



[https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/21463255/desmond-bert\\_william-cook](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/21463255/desmond-bert_william-cook)



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