

Leading Seaman Gordon Lee De Armond V-11568



LS De Armond. Photo: Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Demaine SK, 17 July 1921**
- **Enlisted: Saskatoon Division RCNVR, 9 December 1940**
- **Civilian Occupation: Butcher trainee, Nutana Meat Market**
- **Death: Died when HMCS Athabaskan was torpedoed on 29 April 1944. Age: 22**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 11; City of Saskatoon Book of Remembrance and De Armond Lake (56° 01' N 105°27'W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory**

Gordon was the youngest of four children born to Mary and John De Armond on a farm about two miles from Demaine Saskatchewan, on 17 July 1921. Demaine was a hamlet about 100 miles southwest of Saskatoon. Sisters Muriel and Margaret were born in 1919, and 1920. Brother Robert Ira was born in 1918. Mary and John were from Nova Scotia, were married in 1915 in British Columbia and came to Saskatchewan shortly afterwards to homestead. By 1926 the 160-acre homestead was sufficiently developed to have the title granted to them. The children attended Demaine School, a typical one-room school house, on the edge of Demaine. The family remained on the farm as Mary and John worked hard to improve it in the 1920s and persevered in the 1930s as the Great Depression and its accompanying drought knocked them back. In July 1934 John died at the age of 52 forcing Mary and the family to leave the farm and move to Saskatoon. Gordon was 14 years old. There the family lived in two modest houses one after the other on the same street. Gordon had left school upon completing Grade 8 and remained unemployed. Meanwhile brother Robert found work as a butcher at Nutana Meats in 1938. In the summer of 1940, Gordon joined him perhaps half-heartedly. In completing the Occupational History Form upon enrolment in the Navy, Gordon stated that his employment preference after the War was to remain in the Navy.

Gordon enrolled on 9 December 1940 at the Saskatoon Division (HMCS *Unicorn*) of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve. His rank on enrollment was Ordinary Seaman (Temporary). Sometime after, his brother joined the armed forces as well. Which branch is not known. Gordon was single, 19 years old, 5 feet 5 inches tall and weighed 128 pounds. He had black hair, green eyes and a dark complexion.

Gordon remained in *Unicorn* for almost six months. For the first two months he spent his time waiting for appointments and undertaking various administrative steps. His active service began

on 30 April when basic training began in earnest. On 17 June 1941 he was on a train bound for Esquimalt, British Columbia and HMCS *Naden*. There he underwent more training in seamanship, drill, and small arms as well as gunnery. On 11 November he boarded another train for the transcontinental trip to Halifax, Nova Scotia. On arrival he was drafted to the corvette HMCS *Rimouski* based in St John's Newfoundland.

Ordinary Seaman De Armond would sail in 26 convoys during the 288 days he spent in *Rimouski*. Some of these convoys traveled to the UK, in other cases, the convoys travelled on shorter routes between Boston, Cape Cod and Portland, Maine and Halifax. He rarely saw any port though because *Rimouski* and other escorts were constantly at sea protecting merchant shipping because the threat of U-Boat attacks was ever-present.



HMCS Rimouski Covered Ice – St. John's Harbour.
Photo: From the collection of Lt Reginald Pickford,
RCNVR (forposterity sake.ca)

On 30 April 1942 Gordon was promoted to Able Seaman.

On 2 September 1942 Gordon was drafted to the manning pool in HMCS *Stadacona* from which he was drafted to HMCS *Niobe* in Scotland on 5 November. *Niobe* was the administrative establishment in the United Kingdom responsible for Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) personnel not permanently drafted to a ship. Under *Niobe's* direction he underwent gunnery training until 2 February 1943 when he was drafted to HMCS *Athabaskan*

After the commissioning ceremony on 3 February 1943, *Athabaskan* was assigned to the British Home Fleet. But first, the ship underwent trials, and her crew underwent work-ups. On 29 March *Athabaskan* sailed to patrol the Iceland-Faeroes Island Gap. The seas were so heavy that *Athabaskan's* hull was severely damaged necessitating her to undergo five weeks of repair in the dockyard in South Shields on the Tyne. Next, they joined the heavy cruiser, HMS *Cumberland*, the light cruiser, HMS *Bermuda*, and another destroyer, HMS *Eclipse*, to resupply the Norwegian garrison on Spitsbergen Island in the Arctic in early June. On their return the task force called at Scapa Flow where *Athabaskan* collided with the boom defence vessel on 18 June necessitating a month's long repair job in Devonport. Once repaired she was based in Plymouth to carry out anti-submarine patrols in the Bay of Biscay.

On 27 August 1943 *Athabaskan* was attacked by eighteen Dornier-217 bombers and hit by a glide bomb (an air-launched radio-controlled missile with a rocket engine and a speed of 400 mph) near B gun. The bomb pierced the ship before the 650-pound warhead exploded a few feet beyond the starboard side crushing and buckling *Athabaskan's* hull plates and damaging the superstructure. The B gun's crew suffered two killed with the remainder suffering burns; the crew of A gun also suffered burns; the bridge lookout died the next day and two officers on the bridge suffered severe wounds. Able Seaman De Armond was not injured. Despite the chaos, *Athabaskan's* crew managed to rescue 35 survivors from HMS *Egret* which had been sunk by another glide bomb. At the same time *Athabaskan's* damage control parties, working chest deep in seawater and fuel oil, fought tenaciously to correct a severe list caused by the bomb damage. They managed to reach Devonport again for repairs which took until November to complete. On 1 September Gordon was promoted to Leading Seaman. In December 1943 she escorted a convoy through bitter winter storms to Archangel in the Soviet Arctic.



In February 1944, *Athabaskan* returned to Plymouth to join the newly formed 10th Destroyer Flotilla and carry out patrol operations off the coast of France. On 25-26 April, she assisted in the destruction of the German torpedo boat *T-29*. Then on 29 April 1944 at about 0300 she was patrolling with her sister Tribal-class destroyer HMCS *Haida*. Responding to orders to intercept German warships near Ile de Bas the Canadian ships engaged *T-24* and *T-27*. During the engagement, *Athabaskan*, unlike *Haida*, was not using flashless powder in her shells, thus the flashes associated with firing her guns made her an easy target for a torpedo fired by *T-24*. *Haida* drove off *T-24* in flames and then drove *T-27* ashore before returning to her sister's last position only to find that she had sunk. 128 men including Leading Seaman De Armond were lost, 44 were rescued by *Haida*, and 6 by *Haida's* motor work boat. At dawn, after the departure of *Haida*, 83 men were taken prisoner by three German minesweepers.

Gordon like most of the others killed has no known grave. However, the wreckage of their ship was located in 2002 in 50 fathoms of water. She and those who may be entombed in her are under the protection of the French Heritage Code. Gordon is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 11. Additionally, De Armond Lake (Lat 56°01' N Long 104° 27' W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory

For his service, Leading Seaman Gordon Lee De Armond was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother, Mary De Armond, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

Gordon stated in his enrollment documents that he would like to remain in the Navy after the war. Given his service in the thick of events and his record of promotion it is likely that he would have had a successful career.

Prepared By:

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