

Lieutenant John Edmund Diamond O-19524

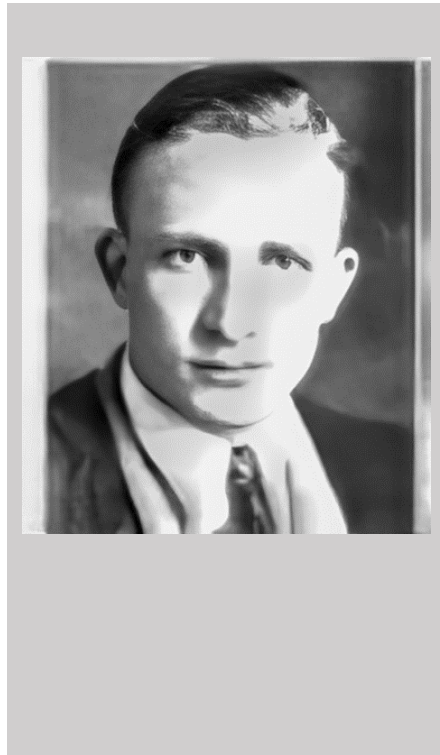


Photo: John (Jack) Diamond
Photo Credit: The University of Alberta
Yearbook 1935

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Anaconda, Montana, USA, 12 May 1916**
- **Enlisted: Calgary Division RCNVR, 18 July 1940**
- **Civilian Occupation: Student, University of Alberta**
- **Death: Killed when the aircraft he was piloting from HMS *Condor* crashed into the North Sea on 10 July 1942**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 8; Trail Cenotaph in Trail, BC; HMCS *Tecumseh* memorial plaque; the Naval Museum of Alberta plaque; and in the Calgary Field of Crosses**

John Edmund Diamond was born in Anaconda, Montana, USA on 12 May 1916. His father was Randolph William Diamond, and his mother was Nellie Emily (Little) Diamond. He had two younger sisters, Elizabeth Jane Diamond (1919 - 1998) and Barbara Isabel Diamond (1921 - 2001); and a younger brother, Ralph William Diamond (1926 -).

His parents were both born in Ontario. His father, Randolph, had Honours degrees in mining and metallurgy. After graduating from the University of Toronto, he took a job at the Anaconda Copper Mining Company in Montana. During his time there he developed new mining processes that greatly increased the ore yield. This led to a job with Consolidated Mining (later Cominco Ltd.) in Trail, BC. Using Randolph's new process, production at the Trail mine "skyrocketed" and Cominco Mining became a prominent company. Randolph was awarded honorary degrees, professional medals, and many other awards.

The family moved to Trail in 1918 and stayed in the area for many years. John lived there until about 1934 when he enrolled at the University of Alberta. He signed up for the U of A's Canadian Officers Training Corps (COTC). He was in the U of A yearbook as a freshman in 1934-1935. He was a student in Ontario for a year and then studied at the University of Utah for two years. He also studied for short intervals in Idaho and Illinois.

John travelled from Trail to Calgary and enlisted as an Ordinary Seaman on 18 July 1940 in the Calgary Division of the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR). He was described as being 5 foot 9 inches, with fair hair and blue eyes. His religion was listed as the Church of England.

He completed the Oath of Allegiance to His Britannic Majesty. Being born in the USA, this process seemed to be quite important to John. Ordinary Seaman Diamond went on Active Service on 3 August 1940. He travelled to HMCS *Stadacona*, the main Navy operations and training base in Halifax, NS. It was there that he was accepted for flight training in the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm. The Royal Canadian Navy did not have an air branch, so sailors interested (and qualified) in flight duty were loaned to the RN.

John was part of a draft of about 70 recently recruited RCNVR Ordinary Seamen who travelled to Montreal and then sailed to England for training. At this stage, he was considered an Officer Cadet rating. He wore the standard sailor's "square rig" uniform with bell-bottom trousers, and a white band in place of a cap tally designated him as an officer cadet rating.

His first stage of training was new entry training at HMS *Raleigh*, an RN shore establishment in Torpoint, Cornwall. Upon completion, he was promoted to Acting Leading Airman.

The second stage of training was the ten-week Initial Training School which started on 6 January 1941 at HMS *St. Vincent* in Hampshire, England. This course covered academics, basic air navigation, meteorology, principles of flight, engineering, and Morse code. As *St. Vincent* was a naval establishment, the training also included courses in firefighting, damage control, ship recognition, and seamanship. The RN took great pains to emphasize that the Fleet Air Arm was just one branch of the Navy. As one historian wrote: "One aim of *St Vincent* was to instill in all Royal Navy aircrew the over-riding doctrine that an airman is first and last a seaman".

For the third stage of training, Leading Airman Diamond was sent to RAF *Elmdon* for Elementary Flying Training School (EFTS) for about eight weeks of flight training, which included 50 hours of flying time in a de Havilland Tiger Moth aircraft. In this course he learned basic maneuvering: taking off, horizontal flight, approach, landing with the engine on or off, and simple aerobatics. An EFTS student pilot was expected to solo after eight to ten hours of dual instruction.



**Photo: A class of Fleet Air Arm Officer Cadet ratings showing off their newly awarded wings.
Photo Credit: Royal Navy Research Archives**

In the spring of 1941, John, like most Fleet Air Arm pilots, was drafted to the 31 Service Flying Training School (SFTS) near Kingston, ON, where the course provided advanced pilot training. The course included intermediate and advanced training, plus two weeks at the Bombing and Gunnery school.

At this early stage of the war, 31 SFTS was equipped with the Fairey Battle as its principal training aircraft. The course was supposed to be 16 to 19 weeks in length, but this goal was often elusive due to a shortage of serviceable aircraft. The school's Commanding Officer reported in March 1941 that serviceable

aircraft totaled: 39 Battles and 6 Yales; unserviceable: 51 Battles and 2 Yales.

Leading Airman Diamond graduated from SFTS on 1 December 1941 and was commissioned as a Sub-Lieutenant, RCNVR. The effective date was backdated to 31 December 1940.

Following graduation from SFTS, Sub-Lieutenant Diamond returned to England and was administratively posted to HMS *Daedalus*, also known as RNAS *Lee-on-Solent* in Hampshire.

The newly commissioned officer was ordered to attend RN College Greenwich for a two-week course to learn how to conduct oneself as an officer and the etiquette of the wardroom. This was euphemistically referred to as the “spoon and fork” course. It is not clear whether he had time for this course as he had to report for his next assignment by 24 January 1942.

The next assignment was to HMS *Jackdaws* near Anstruther, Scotland. This was to take the Torpedo, Spotter and Reconnaissance (TSR) pilots’ course. TSR refers to aircraft like the Fairey Swordfish and Fairey Albacore, which were aircraft carrier-borne torpedo planes. He reported to HMS *Jackdaw* on 26 January 1942 and was there for two months.



The Swordfish torpedo bomber was a single-engine biplane. It had an open cockpit and carried a crew of three: pilot, observer (navigator), and telegraphist–air gunner. It was armed with forward and rear-facing machine guns and could carry a torpedo, bombs, or depth charges. It had folding wings for storage on aircraft carriers. The Albacore was an updated design with similar armament and crew. It was also a biplane but featured such niceties as an enclosed cockpit with cockpit heating, a windshield wiper, and an emergency dinghy that was deployed automatically

on ditching. It had metal wings and fuselage covering. The Albacore was originally intended to replace the Swordfish, but with the availability of more advanced monoplane aircraft, both planes were considered obsolete before the end of the war.

The next assignment for Sub-Lieutenant Diamond was to Fleet Air Arm Squadron 767, which was located at HMS *Condor*, an RN Air Station near Arbroath, Scotland. 767 Squadron provided Deck Landing Training (DLT), also known as Airfield Dummy Deck Landing (ADDL), where pilots were taught how to land Swordfish and Albacore torpedo planes on aircraft carrier flight decks. The airbase had a runway painted to resemble a carrier’s flight deck. Many other aspects of aircraft carrier flying were also taught, including night flying, land and sea navigation, aerial photography, dropping depth charges, dive bombing, and formation flying. Plus, there was Night Airfield Dummy Deck Landing, which was undoubtedly among the most challenging exercise for new pilots.

On 12 May 1942, John was promoted to Lieutenant, although the paperwork did not come through until later. He was now a qualified Fleet Air Arm pilot. On the same day, Lieutenant Diamond was transferred to the 753 Squadron, which was also located at HMS *Condor* and was part of No. 2 Air Observer School. Its role was to train aircrew as observers (navigators) and telegraphists–air gunners. As a pilot, John would fly students as they worked on navigation, radiotelegraphy, and other exercises.

On 10 July 1942, John was flying a training mission with two students: Acting Leading Airmen Ronald Markland and William McCallum. They were flying in an Albacore. Their plane crashed

into the North Sea about 25 miles east of the air base. The wreckage and the floating dingy were recovered but there were no signs of the three crewmen. They were reported as Missing Presumed Killed and their remains were never found. No cause for the crash was ever determined. Lieutenant John Edmund Diamond was 26 years old when he died.

For his service, Lieutenant John Diamond was awarded: the Defence Medal, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother, Nellie, was awarded the Canadian Memorial Cross.

Lieutenant John Diamond is commemorated on Panel 8 of the Halifax Memorial at Point Pleasant Park, Halifax, NS; on the Trail Cenotaph in Trail, BC; the HMCS *Tecumseh* memorial plaque; the Naval Museum of Alberta plaque; in the Calgary Field of Crosses; and the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 69 at the Centre Block Houses of Parliament, Ottawa.

Prepared By:

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