

Motor Mechanic Ronald Ewing Dunlop V-57236



- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Saint John NB, 7 August 1907**
- **Enlisted: Calgary Division RCNVR, 22 March 1943**
- **Civilian Occupation: Machinist, Canadian Pacific Railway (Munitions Department)**
- **Death: Killed when HMCS *Esquimalt* was torpedoed and sank on 16 April 1945**
- **Commemorated: Calgary (Burnsland) Cemetery, Lot 140. Block 9. Sec. G; HMCS *Esquimalt* Memorial; Naval Museum of Alberta Memorial Plaque and HMCS *Tecumseh* Memorial Plaque**

Motor Mechanic Ronald Ewing Dunlop.
Photo: www.forposteritysake.ca

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Ronald Ewing Dunlop was born on 7 August 1907, his mother's birthday, in Saint John, NB and he spent his first five years living in that town. He was the seventh and last child of his parents William George Dunlop, who had a Scottish background, and Hannah Matilda Dunlop, nee Ewing, who was of English heritage. Ronald's siblings included Esther Irene, Madeline, Douglas Wilfred, Eola, Wilson Kidd, and Kenneth George Lincoln. The last public record of his sister Madeline was in the 1901 Census when she was 6 years old. The other children were 5 to 14 years older than the youngest, Ronald.

Ronald's father worked as a general/grain merchant and as a grocery clerk. He died of arterial problems after a short illness in 1914 at the age of 51. Ronald's mother remarried in 1919 to Andrew Thompson of Calgary who adopted the children. The family originally declared themselves to be Unitarians but in Calgary they stated that they attended the United Church of Canada.

While in Calgary, Ronald completed his education at Haultain School at 225 - 13th Ave SW which was built in 1894. He finished Grade 9 and did a year of high school in an apprenticeship, leaving at age 15. Prior to joining the navy, Ronald worked as a machinist for a year-and-a-half at the Canadian Pacific Railways Munitions Department in the Ogden Shops. Some of their work is presently on display at The Military Museums in Calgary. Ronald's ambition was to operate his own garage.

Ronald lived at 2005 - 2nd Street West in Calgary when he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) at HMCS *Tecumseh*. The date was 22 March 1943, and he was 36 years old. Medical records describe Ronald as 5' 4 ½" tall, 159 pounds with brown hair, blue eyes, and a fair complexion. It was noted by the physician that there was a history of a severe injury to the left knee. The dislocated medial cartilage meant that Ronald was unable to play any strenuous sports, however, he could carry on his job as a machinist. He was considered medically fit for Shore Branch duty. He had scars on both knees.

As a result of his years of experience as a machinist, Ronald Dunlop was seen as a candidate for entry as an Acting/Motor Mechanic (A/MM), he was initially brought on strength as a Stoker 1st Class, one who tends to a marine steam boiler, and he was reclassified to a Motor Mechanic the next day. He began his Active Service on 1 April 1943. A/MM Dunlop was drafted to HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax, NS on 22 April 1943 for basic naval training. It was here that he earned his Anti-gas qualification on 23 June.

On 13 July 1943, Ronald was shipped to HMCS *Fort Ramsay*, the naval base in Gaspé, QC. This was a fully self-contained facility whose main tasks were to provide facilities for refitting the Fairmile-B motor launches. Fairmiles were employed in protecting sea lines of communication in adjacent coastal waters, detecting and destroying enemy submarine and surface craft in adjacent coastal waters, as well as providing a defended anchorage. There would have been much to do as a Motor Mechanic there, but more training was required so A/MM Dunlop was transferred back to HMCS *Stadacona* on 21 December 1943. His promotion to Motor Mechanic, equivalent to a Petty Officer, was confirmed 1 April 1944. He spent less than a month at HMCS *Peregrine*, formally HMCS *Stadacona II*, before being posted on an active ship, HMCS *Esquimalt* on 4 December 1944.

Although his medical papers stipulated MM Dunlop was only considered fit for Shore Branches of service, it is likely there was a need for a sailor with his particular skills onboard the mechanically troubled *Esquimalt*. He joined the ship part way through a three-month refit.

HMCS *Esquimalt* was a Bangor-class minesweeper, but enemy mines were laid only once in Canadian waters in 1943, so the Bangors were used primarily as escorts to coastal shipping or as local escorts to ocean convoys. *Esquimalt* operated primarily as an anti-submarine escort and was armed with a 12- and a 2-



pounder gun, two 20-millimeter Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns, and she carried seventy depth charges. In May 1944, after a month in refit, the ship joined the Newfoundland Force until September 1944. During that tour of duty, *Esquimalt* engaged with a submarine, in a fog, and presumably sunk it as no further reports of such activity occurred after the conflict.

HMCS *Esquimalt* was reassigned to the Halifax Local Defense Force and, after three months of refit, was back at sea. On the evening of 15/16 April 1945, *Esquimalt* conducted a routine anti-submarine patrol in consort with HMCS *Sarnia*. Both ships were tasked to carry out sweeps outside of Halifax Harbour, then rendezvous the following morning off Chebucto Head, the southern entrance to the harbour. *Esquimalt* was crisscrossing an area five miles off Chebucto Head, using its ASDIC (Anti-Submarine Division Investigating Committee) supersonics, the first sonar to find enemy submarines. None were detected. As the ship abruptly changed course towards U-190, which was idling below the surface, the U-boat believed it had been discovered and fired an acoustic torpedo which punctured the starboard side of *Esquimalt's* engine room. The explosion occurred just moments after the ship's routine radio transmission to shore at 0627. The ship listed heavily, putting the seaboard under water and flooding it before it could be released. HMCS *Esquimalt* sank stern first in four minutes, too fast to send out a distress signal. It was believed that 28 men went down with *Esquimalt*. The remaining 43 scrambled onto four Carley floats (flotation devices consisting of knotted ropes and planks of wood) or clung to the sides of the floats. "In spite of the rapidity with which the ship heeled over and slid under the surface there was no panic or confusion," a surviving officer reported. Everyone he had seen had been calmly and quickly abandoning ship.

Aboard the floats, the men first sang to keep their spirits up, then one lead them in prayer. Gradually, numbed by the cold, the numbers dwindled as the hours passed. One Carley float had started out with 13 men, but they died one-by-one from exposure until only six were left. The six survivors paddled their float towards the Halifax East Light Vessel waving a white shirt. They had closed the distance to a half mile when the light ship and *Sarnia* noticed them. A boat from the light ship picked them up and they directed the minesweeper to the position of the other Carley floats.

Finally spotted by an aircraft, the location was also flashed to *Sarnia* by a signal lamp. The floats were retrieved by *Sarnia* six hours after the *Esquimalt* sank. Many who had reached the floats safely had died of exposure. Of the 71 crew members, only 27 survived the sinking. The bodies of 16 crew members were recovered, one of those sailors was MM Dunlop. Ronald Ewing Dunlop was 37 years old when he died. His body was transported to Calgary for burial.



**MM Dunlop's grave marker,
Burnsland Cemetery,
Calgary.
Photo: findagrave.com**

The Second World War ended a mere three weeks later; HMCS *Esquimalt* was the last Canadian ship lost during the conflict.

For his service, Motor Mechanic Ronald Ewing Dunlop was awarded: the 1939-45 Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother, Hanna Matilda Thompson, living at 2526 East 455th Ave. Vancouver, BC, was awarded the Memorial Cross. It is unclear if Ronald's mother ever received any of these medals. There is a note in the service file, "medals returned undelivered, returned to stock".

Motor Mechanic Ronald Ewing Dunlop is buried at Calgary's Burnsland Cemetery in the Field of Honour, Lot 140, Block 9, Section G. He is remembered on the HMCS *Esquimalt* Memorial, in Esquimalt, BC; the Field of Crosses Memorial in Calgary; the HMCS *Tecumseh* and Naval Museum of Alberta Memorial Plaques; and the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 511 at the Centre Block Houses of Parliament, Ottawa.

Prepared By:

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Sources:

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- Library and Archives Canada - Service file for Motor Mechanic Ronald Ewing Dunlop
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- Obituary April 23, 1945 (page 18 of 18). (1945, Apr 23), *Calgary Herald* (1939-2010) Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/april-23-1945-page-18/docview/2253017160/se-2?accountid=46584>
- Picture *Vancouver Sun*, May 9, 1945
- Second World War Book of Remembrance
- Headstone, findagrave.com
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- “Within Sight of Shore - The Sinking of the HMCS *Esquimalt*” from CFB Esquimalt Naval & Military Museum, Ship Histories