

Lieutenant Joseph (Joe) Cannon Dwyer O-21430



Lieutenant Joe Dwyer. Photo: Globe and Mail

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- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Toronto ON, 16 January 1907**
- **Enlisted: Edmonton Division RCNVR, 7 October 1940**
- **Civilian Occupation: Journalist, Edmonton Journal**
- **Death: Lost at sea in HMS *Veteran* (torpedoed and sank with all hands, on 26 September 1942) while taking passage to join HMCS *Iroquois* in the UK**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 8; the Second World War Book of Remembrance, page 71, Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa; HMCS *Nonsuch* Memorial; Naval Museum of Alberta Memorial; and Canadian Virtual War Memorial**

Joseph Cannon Dwyer ("Joe") was born in Toronto, Ontario on January 16, 1907 to Patrick Joseph and Celia Genieve Dwyer (nee Cannon). He was the 7th of 8 children of the Dwyer family. His father was born in Albion, Ontario in 1866 and his mother was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1867. Joe's father was listed in his enrolment documentation as a miner and his parents were married in Chicago on August 18, 1889.

The Dwyers were a Roman Catholic family and Joe had two brothers with military service. Private Raymond Michael Dwyer of the 2nd Central Ontario Regiment was killed in action near Courcellette, France on September 20, 1916, during the battle of the Somme (World War I) when Joe was just nine years old. Flight Lieutenant Paul Michael Dwyer was an ordained Roman Catholic priest and served as a chaplain in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) base in Calgary, Alberta during World War Two.

Joe attended elementary school at St Cecilia's Catholic School in Toronto and later matriculated at De La Salle College (Toronto). After completing his formal education Joe had various jobs that included working as a journalist for some American newspapers but later returned to Canada and worked at the Oshawa Times and the Regina Leader-Post before settling in Edmonton. Joe's final civilian occupation was as the Sports Editor for the Edmonton Journal where he was well-known and admired. Joe listed football, golf and handball as his favourite sports. While in Edmonton Joe completed one year of studies at the University of Alberta.

Joe enrolled in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) on October 7, 1940, at the Edmonton Division RCNVR (later named HMCS *Nonsuch*). As a relatively older recruit (33 years old) with 10 years of work experience, he was initially accepted as a Lieutenant RCNVR. In

January 1941 Joe was sent to HMCS *Stadacona* (Canada's east coast training and operations base) and over the next four months, he received training as a naval officer. In May 1941 he was assigned to the Naval Control of Shipping (NCS) organization responsible for coordinating and organizing merchant shipping to and from Halifax harbour. His primary role at this time was as a boarding officer wherein he interviewed merchant ship captains, ascertained their cargo and destination, and assigned them to an appropriate convoy.

In May 1942 he was then transferred to Sydney, Nova Scotia to work as the NCS Officer there. Joe, however, longed for a sea appointment and using his skills as a journalist managed to gain an appointment to the brand-new destroyer HMCS *Iroquois*. The problem for Joe was that *Iroquois* was being built in the United Kingdom; he needed a "ride" to the UK and his boss in the NCS organization didn't want to let him go. In his book "In All Respects Ready" Commander Frederick Watt, RCNR described the situation as follows:

"Following on this good news was Joe Dwyer's announcement that he had been appointed to the Iroquois, a new Canadian Tribal class destroyer completing in a British yard. Not wanting to lose him, I told Joe I was sure, in view of his now proven gifts as a boarding officer, that Officer Appointments could be persuaded to change the assignment. But Joe told me he had requested a seagoing appointment, and that he knew I would understand.

I did understand. But Banyard (ed. the senior NCS Officer), equally conscious of Dwyer's value to his staff, was less flexible. He had the seagoing appointment stopped. Joe, however, was a match for him. How he worked it I never knew, but one day he reported to the British destroyer Veteran for passage overseas and his berth in Iroquois."

HMS *Veteran* was a British destroyer and sailed on September 16, 1942 escorting the "special" convoy designated RB1. Lieutenant Dwyer likely joined the ship in Halifax just before departure.

On 23 September 1942, Convoy RB1 was sighted by U-380 and three different U-Boat groups were directed against RB1. On the 25th the SS *Boston* and SS *New York* (merchant ships in convoy) were sunk and the convoy scattered. On 26 September the convoy was ordered to re-form and *Veteran* came across the survivors of the SS *New York*. While she was picking up some of the survivors *Veteran* was hit by two torpedoes from U-404. She sank quickly in position 54.51N 23.04W (south of Iceland) after an explosion. All hands (210), as well as a number of survivors from the SS *New York*, were lost. Other survivors from SS *New York* were later rescued.



HMS Veteran 1942. Photo: V & W Destroyer Association

Later, on 26 September 1942, a third merchant ship from this convoy – SS *Yorkton* - was lost with all hands. The Dwyer family was informed of Joe's loss in October 1942 but rumours persisted that perhaps some of the crew had been rescued and interned as Prisoners of War. In April 1943,

Ethel (Joe's sister) wrote to the Admiralty in London requesting any further information and in particular noting that some of the crew of the SS New York had been rescued.

She wrote (in part):

"My father is a man well into his seventies, and the lack of information is extremely trying on him, as well as on Joe's family, as a whole."

Later that same month a response was received confirming that there were (so far as could be determined) no survivors from HMS *Veteran*. Naval records indicate that Joseph received the following decorations (all were sent to his father in Toronto):

1939-45 Star
Canadian Volunteer Service Medal (CVSM)
War Medal

Joseph Cannon Dwyer is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 8; on the HMCS *Nonsuch* Memorial plaque, Edmonton; the Naval Museum of Alberta Memorial Plaque, Calgary; and in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, page 71 at the Centre Block, House of Parliaments, in Ottawa.

Prepared By:

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Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database – profile for Joseph Cannon Dwyer
- Library and Archives Canada - record for Joseph Cannon Dwyer
- Ancestry.com
- findagrave.com
- wikipedia.com
- In All Respects Ready, Cdr Frederick Watt, RCNR Pp,173