

## Leading Sick Berth Attendant Arnold Douglas Hedstrom V-35221



- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Calgary AB, 24 February 1923**
- **Enlisted: Calgary Division RCNVR, 5 January 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Junior Clerk, Canadian Pacific Railway**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Esquimalt* was torpedoed and sank on 16 April 1945**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 13; HMCS *Tecumseh* Memorial Plaque; Second World War Memory Book in the Revelstoke Museum & Archives; and HMCS *Esquimalt* (J272) memorial in the town of Esquimalt BC.**

Leading Sick Berth Attendant Arnold Hedstrom. Photo: [www.forposteritysake.ca](http://www.forposteritysake.ca)  
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Although his parents, Douglas Gustive Hedstrom and Anne Elizabeth Hedstrom (nee McDermott), often lived in Revelstoke and were married in Smithers, BC their first child, Arnold Douglas, was born in Calgary on 24 February 1923. Arnold was a typical Canadian with a mixed heritage as his father was Swedish and his mother was of Irish decent. The family's religion was noted to be the Church of England. It was not long before Arnold had a sister, Lillian Yvonne, born in 1924. She was followed by a brother, Ronald Eugene, in 1926; and finally, another sister, Elaine, was born in 1927.

Arnold Hedstrom lived in Calgary until 1929 and then moved with his family to Revelstoke, BC until 1939 when the family moved back to Calgary. He completed his high school, graduating from Western Canada High School at age 17 and found employment with Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). He was a telegraph operator and his specific occupation was called Junior Clerk.

Arnold's initial military service was with the 102<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, Rocky Mountain Rangers. He joined the militia on the 7 March 1939 in Revelstoke, BC before moving back to Calgary later that year. Arnold was not the first member of his family to join the military. During the First World War, Arnold's father had joined the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force, claiming he was two years older than his actual age. Douglas Gustive Hedstrom served with the 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Canadian Infantry in France from 1915 to 1919. In the Second World War, he re-enlisted and served in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps overseas.

Arnold continued working at CPR until he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) on 5 January 1942 at the Calgary Division, later called HMCS *Tecumseh*. He was described as 5' 6 1/2" tall, 125 pounds with black hair, blue eyes, and a fresh complexion. At the time Arnold was living at 326-9 Ave North East, Calgary.

Two of Arnold's siblings also had military service. Lillian was with the Woman's Division Royal Canadian Air Force as an Aircraftwoman 2<sup>nd</sup> class. His brother Ronald (V-79272) also joined the RCNVR and was an Able Seaman at HMCS *Protector*, also known as Point Edward Naval Base, near Sydney, NS.

On his occupational history form for the navy, Arnold wrote that his ambition was to become a doctor, perhaps that is why he was signed up as a Probationary Sick Berth Attendant, and he began his active service nine days later. He was transferred to the RCNVR Division in Vancouver, HMCS *Discovery*, for two months of Basic Training and then to the facility at HMCS *Naden* in Esquimalt, BC where he earned his Sick Berth Attendant rating on 18 May 1942.

After three months of work at the base, he was posted to the armed merchant cruiser HMCS *Prince Henry*, which served with the Esquimalt Force briefly. In September and October 1942, *Prince Henry* served with the United States Navy in the Aleutian Islands. She returned to serve with the Esquimalt Force until March 1943 when the ship commenced rebuilding to an infantry landing ship. On 1 May 1943, Arnold was transferred to the accommodation vessel HMCS *Givenchy* until he returned for more training at *Naden*. It was here that he was promoted to Leading SBA (L/SBA) on 15 July 1943. Shortly after, L/SBA Hedstrom took leave to return to Calgary for his sister's wedding. As his father was serving overseas, his sister Lillian was given in marriage by Arnold on 2 August 1943.

On 24 November 1943, L/SBA Hedstrom was transferred to HMCS *Stadacona*, a shore base in Halifax, NS until his next posting. On 21 December 1943, he was posted to HMCS *Nipigon*, a Bangor-class minesweeper, which was in major refit. He stayed with the ship for almost three months and then returned to *Stadacona* until his posting to HMCS *Esquimalt*.

L/SBA Hedstrom was drafted to the Bangor-class minesweeper HMCS *Esquimalt* on 6 April 1944. Although the ship was designed as a minesweeper, 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.



Following a month in refit, in May 1944, the ship joined the Newfoundland Force until September 1944. During that period of duty, HMCS *Esquimalt* engaged with a submarine, in fog, and presumably sunk it as no further reports

of such activity occurred after the encounter. On 14 January 1945, while serving in *Esquimalt*, L/SBA Hedstrom was awarded a Good Conduct Badge, which recognized three years of service with good conduct.

In September 1944, *Esquimalt* was reassigned to the Halifax Local Defense Force and later that month went into a refit lasting three months. Following the refit, *Esquimalt* was back at sea, once again with the Halifax Local Defence Force. On the evening of 15/16 April 1945, *Esquimalt* conducted a routine anti-submarine patrol in consort with HMCS *Sarnia*. Both ships were ordered to carry out sweeps outside of Halifax Harbour, and then rendezvous the following morning off Chebucto Head, the southern entrance to the harbour.

HMCS *Esquimalt* was crisscrossing an area five miles off Chebucto Head using its ASDIC (Anti-Submarine Division Investigating Committee) supersonics, the first version of sonar used by the RCN, to find enemy submarines. None were detected. As the ship abruptly changed course towards U-190, idling below the surface, the U-boat believed it was discovered and fired an acoustic torpedo which penetrated the starboard side of HMCS *Esquimalt's* engine room. The explosion occurred just moments after the ship's routine radio transmission to shore at 6:27 A.M. The ship listed heavily, putting the seaboat 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. Finally spotted by an aircraft, the floats were retrieved by HMCS *Sarnia* six hours later. Many sailors who had reached the floats safely had died of exposure. Two officers and 24 ratings survived the sinking. Leading Sick Berth Attendant Arnold Hedstrom was lost at sea. Arnold was 22 years old when he died.

The Second World War ended a mere three weeks later and HMCS *Esquimalt* was the last Canadian warship lost to enemy action in the war.

It is noteworthy that in all his training, L/SBA Hedstrom was rated to be of "very good character" with "satisfactory efficiency", however, his records indicate that his efficiency on 16 April 1945 was rated as "superior".

For his service, Leading Sick Berth Attendant Arnold Hedstrom was awarded: the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Pacific Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother, Anne Elizabeth Hedstrom, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

Leading Sick Berth Attendant Arnold Hedstrom is remembered on Panel 13 of the Halifax Memorial, at Point Pleasant Park, Halifax, NS; the HMCS *Tecumseh* Memorial Plaque; the Second World War Memory Book in the Revelstoke Museum and Archives in BC; the HMCS *Esquimalt* (J272) memorial in the town of Esquimalt, BC; the Western Canada High School Honour Roll; and the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 523 at the Centre Block Houses of Parliament, Ottawa.

**Prepared By:**

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**Sources:**

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