

Petty Officer Stoker Albert John Hodgson V-13798



Petty Officer Stoker Albert Hodgson.
Photo: Rick Hodgson Collection

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Kelliher SK, 26 October 1915**
- **Enlisted: Calgary Division RCNVR, 5 May 1941**
- **Civilian Occupation: Carpenter & Mechanic, Poole Construction Company, Edmonton**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *St. Croix* was torpedoed and sank on 20 September 1943**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 10; HMCS *Tecumseh* Memorial Plaque, Alberta Naval Museum Memorial Plaque, and Field of Crosses in Calgary**

Albert John Hodgson was born on 26 October 1915 in Kelliher, SK. He was a twin; his brother was James Gerty Hodgson. They were born to Richard Walker Hodgson and Mary Hodgson nee Murray. Richard Hodgson was born in Tynemouth, Northumberland, England in 1877. Mary Murray was born in Blyth, Northumberland, England in 1879. They were married in Tynemouth in 1901. In 1903 they immigrated to Canada and their first stop was in Maple Creek, SK. Albert's father was a steam engineer, and his work took him to many different locations throughout Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The Hodgson family never settled in one location for any length of time and Richard was particularly busy during the harvest season. Between 1906 and 1920 they had eight children.

Albert had three older sisters, Helen, Mary and Norah; one older brother Richard; his twin brother James (Jim); and two younger brothers, Edwin and Frederick. Birth and census records show them living in Jasmin, Kelliher, Last Mountain, and Govan in Saskatchewan; as well as Minnedosa in Manitoba. Although they moved often, their mother Mary would still take them on trips during the summer months to a lake in southern Saskatchewan. These trips made them all very strong swimmers and Albert had earned lifesaving certificates. In 1936 the family moved to Blue Ridge, AB. The attraction in Blue Ridge was a large lumber mill that provided the father and his sons with regular employment opportunities. Blue Ridge is located midway between Mayerthorpe and Whitecourt and is about 160 kms northwest of Edmonton.

Although Albert had only attended school for eight years, he was able to enter into a mechanics apprenticeship and started working as a mechanic in 1933-34 at Riverside Motors in Minnedosa, MB. He also worked as a mechanic at the Blue Ridge Garage, the Western Construction Company of Whitecourt, and Poole Construction of Edmonton.

In December 1940, Albert moved to Calgary. He started taking courses at the Dominion Provincial Training School. These training schools were set up across the country to give young people an opportunity to train in military trades before actually enlisting. He was living at 223 – 12th Avenue East at the time, which was close to the Calgary Division of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) (later named HMCS *Tecumseh*). On 5 May 1941, Albert enlisted in the RCNVR.



By the time he enlisted, his four brothers had also enlisted in the services. All four of his brothers served on the front lines in Europe. His twin brother James had enlisted in the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps (RCASC), where he reached the rank of Corporal and was injured while serving in France. His brother Edwin had joined the RCMP in 1940 and went overseas with the RCMP Provost Company in April 1942. Albert's youngest brother Frederick was a signalman in the Canadian Army and was wounded twice while serving in Italy. His oldest brother Flying Officer Richard Hodgson was a Navigation Officer in the 419 Bomber Squadron. Richard was killed when his

plane was hit with flak after a bombing raid in Germany on 3 February 1945.

Given his mechanical background, Albert enlisted as a Stoker 1st Class on 5 May 1941, and he was rated as an Acting Leading Stoker on 6 May 1941. His attestation and medical documents show him to be 6'1/2" and 168 pounds, with red hair and blue eyes. His religion was shown to be the Church of England. He enlisted "for the duration of the hostilities" and he stated that he wanted to be a carpenter after the war.

In May and June 1941, Albert underwent initial training in Calgary. He was drafted to HMCS *Naden* on 29 June 1941. *Naden* was the training base at Esquimalt near Victoria, BC. There he received a 30-day Stoker training course as well as a gunnery course. He scored well and was rated Leading Seaman. He continued training at *Naden* until he was drafted to his first ship HMCS *Quatsino* on 31 October 1941.

HMCS *Quatsino* was a Bangor-class minesweeper. Minesweepers were usually used to clear mines from harbour entrances, but the *Quatsino* was assigned duty on the Western Patrol, which consisted of patrolling the west coast as far north as Alaska searching for enemy activity. LS Albert Hodgson spent a total of 309 days assigned to the *Quatsino*. He was rated as an Acting

Petty Officer in June 1942 and was landed ashore in September 1942 for additional training and employment in *Naden*. On 25 May 1943, Albert was dispatched to the east coast. He was briefly stationed at HMCS *Stadacona*, the training base in Halifax, NS where he was given a quick leadership training course and rated as a Petty Officer. On 2 July 1943, he joined the crew of HMCS *St. Croix*, which was in Halifax for repairs at that time.

HMCS *St. Croix* was a destroyer that had originally been the USS *McCook* in the US Navy. Although built in 1919, the *St. Croix* was still very seaworthy and had been very successful in escorting convoys in the North Atlantic. Just before Albert joined the crew, the ship had been engaged in the United Kingdom to Gibraltar convoys, which were convoys that escorted merchant ships from the United Kingdom along the west coast of France and Spain, then through the Straits of Gibraltar ending in Gibraltar. HMCS *St. Croix* had been on the UK-Gibraltar convoys from February until the end of March 1943. *St. Croix* had just returned from a Londonderry to Newfoundland convoy.

HMCS *St. Croix* had serious equipment breakdowns throughout the convoy and came into Halifax for repairs. The repairs had been mostly completed by the time Albert joined the ship and had resumed the Newfoundland to Londonderry, Ireland convoys. In early August 1943, Albert had mailed a letter home in which he told of life aboard the *St. Croix*. He described a canteen where they could purchase items like gum and chocolate bars. There was also a pet cat that they named "Oscar" and it was the ship's mascot. They had a movie projector and had just finished watching "Casablanca." Several of the crew had musical instruments and there were often singalongs in the mess.



HMCS *St. Croix* was in Plymouth Harbour, England taking on supplies in early September 1943 when they were dispatched to the Bay of Biscay to help the frigate HMS *Itchen* and several other ships conduct a U-boat sweep and escort the slow convoy SG9 to Gibraltar. They had just reached the Bay of Biscay when they were redirected to the northwest. A large "Wolfpack" of German U-boats was tracking a slow west-bound convoy. Two convoys, ON 202 and OSN 18, had combined for better escort coverage and the escort ships that had been assigned to SG9 were being sent to assist. On 19 September 1943, the U-Boats came in sight of the convoy and on 20 September the conflict began. At 2200 hours HMCS *St. Croix* was hit in the stern by an acoustic torpedo, this was quickly followed by a second hit. *St. Croix* did not sink immediately but the order was given to abandon ship. Less than an hour later a third torpedo struck and HMCS *St. Croix* sank in less than three minutes. A total of 81 men survived this attack and HMS *Itchen* attempted to rescue the survivors. The U-boats were still in the area and when the corvette HMS *Polyanthus* was also sunk, the *Itchen* was forced to abort the rescue. On 21 September HMS *Itchen* was able to return and pickup one survivor from *Polyanthus* and 81 from *St. Croix*. The survivors had been in the water for 13 hours by this time. Unfortunately, very early on 23 September 1943, HMS *Itchen* was struck with a torpedo and sank; only two men from *Itchen* and one from HMCS *St. Croix* survived. In total 146 Canadians died in this battle. Four of the lost

crew had enlisted at HMCS *Tecumseh* as well as the lone *St. Croix* survivor, PO Stoker William Fisher of Black Diamond, AB. Petty Officer Albert John Hodgson was 27 years old when he died.

For his service, Petty Officer Stoker Albert John Hodgson was awarded: the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother was awarded the Memorial Cross.

He is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 10 of the Halifax Memorial in Point Pleasant Park, Halifax, NS; the HMCS *Tecumseh* Memorial Plaque; the Naval Museum of Alberta Memorial Plaque; the Field of Crosses in Calgary; and the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 171 at the Centre Block Houses of Parliament, Ottawa

Prepared By:

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Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database – Profile for Albert J Hodgson
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial//PO Stoker AJ Hodgson
- Library and Archives Canada// Service file for PO AJ Hodgson //Service file for F/O Richard Hodgson
- Last Post RCMP Veterans.ca< Sgt. Edwin Hodgson
- “Deadly Seas: The Duel Between the *St Croix* and *U305*” by Bercuson, David Jay & Herwig, Holger
- Canadian Military History, “The End of HMCS *St. Croix*” a survivor’s story by Fisher, William
- A Veteran Memoir of PO AJ Hodgson by Annie Hodgson (Albert’s sister-in-law)
- Telephone and e-mail conversations with Richard and Glen Hodgson (nephews of Albert Hodgson)