

Able Seaman John Moshein Irvine V-90288



Photo: Ordinary Seaman John Moshein Irvine
Photo Credit: Earl Wurster on Ancestry.ca

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Bassano AB, 19 October 1926**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Tecumseh*, 27 June 1944**
- **Civilian Occupation: Truck Driver, Imperial Oil**
- **Death: Illness (tubercular meningitis) while serving in HMCS *Stadacona* on 21 February 1946**
- **Buried: Halifax (Fort Massey) Cemetery, Sec. E. Grave 306**
- **Commemorated: HMCS *Tecumseh* memorial plaque; the Naval Museum of Alberta plaque; the Calgary Field of Crosses; and the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 585 at the Centre Block, Houses of Parliament, Ottawa**

John Moshein Irvine was born on 19 October 1926 in Bassano, AB. His parents were Mitchell Irvine and Ida Gladys Mae (Wurster) Irvine. John had a younger brother Gordon Marvin Irvine (1928 - 2005) and a younger sister Rhona Elizabeth Irvine (1935 -).

John's father Mitchell, who was widely known as Scotty, was born in Scotland's Shetland Islands and immigrated to Canada in 1908. That year, he applied for a homestead in Saskatchewan. He farmed in several locations in Western Canada. In 1918, Mitchell was working on his uncle's farm near Garfield, Washington State. He received a US Army draft notice but decided to join the Canadian Expeditionary Force instead. He travelled to Winnipeg and was enrolled in the 13 Canadian Railway Corps of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. He served in Canada, England, and France, and was demobilized in April 1919.

Mitchell married Ida Wurster in Calgary in 1925. Ida was from Shell Brook, SK. The family farmed in the Bassano area, where John was born in 1926. They moved back to Calgary by 1936. Mitchell operated two service stations in the Inglewood area of Calgary, which is where the family also lived on 9th Ave SE. The family later moved to 2317 Macleod Trail.

John went to the Colonel Walker School, which was in his neighbourhood. He attended this school until the age of 16 when he completed Grade 9. In 1939, as a 13-year-old student, John was part

of a group of youth who travelled to Banff by train for a day-long introduction to skiing. He was also a Sea Cadet in Calgary. By 1944 John was working as a truck driver for Imperial Oil.

John joined the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) at HMCS *Tecumseh* on 27 June 1944. He was 17 years old. John was described as six feet tall with light brown hair, blue eyes, and a fair complexion. He expressed no interest in returning to his previous career as a truck driver but did show interest in farming or welding as a future career. He listed his religion as United Church.

Ordinary Seaman Irvine was called up to active service on 14 August 1944. He underwent initial training at HMCS *Tecumseh*. On completion in November 1944, he was posted to HMCS *Shelburne* in Nova Scotia.

HMCS *Shelburne* was a Navy-run ship repair and refit facility. It was one of the most important Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) bases during the war. At its peak, about 5,000 RCN sailors were stationed there. It was located in the community of Sandy Point, the southernmost point of Nova Scotia. Ordinary Seaman Irvine worked there until January 1945.



Naval recruits with fixed bayonets, HMCS Cornwallis, Deep Brook, Nova Scotia, June 1943.
Photo: Library and Archives Canada, MIKAN No. 3404668

He was sent to HMCS *Cornwallis* in January 1945. HMCS *Cornwallis* was in the Annapolis area of Nova Scotia and was the principal training base for the RCN. The base was best known for new entry training, and also offered several specialized technical courses. The new entry course lasted approximately six to eight weeks and covered seamanship, boat handling, drill, self-defence, ropework, and weapons training.

It is not clear whether Ordinary Seaman Irvine went through new entry training. He had already been on active service for several months. If he did, his class would have been among the last ones at HMCS *Cornwallis* as the base was closed as a training facility in February 1945. His posting at HMCS *Cornwallis* continued until July 1945. The assignment included a week aboard HMCS *Acadia*, which was a training ship based at HMCS *Cornwallis*.

While the war had ended in Europe, there was still a need to employ thousands of soldiers, sailors and aircrew because starved European populations needed food, shelter and security. Additionally, equipment, machinery, and fighting men needed to be returned to North America; this took many months to organize. Therefore, it is not surprising that Ordinary Seaman Irvine's next posting in July 1945 was to HMCS *Niobe*, the RCN's UK manning depot in Greenock, Scotland. This assignment continued until January 1946.

John was promoted to Able Seaman on 14 August 1945. During every assignment with the RCN his Character Assessment was rated as "Very Good" and his Efficiency rating was "Satisfactory". With only a Grade 9 education, he was not being considered for advancement. With three

assignments to major land bases, it seems likely that John was employed as a motor transport driver or in a similar occupation.

In January 1946, Able Seaman Irvine started the RCN discharge process. He travelled back to Halifax on the RMS *Mauretania* and was posted to HMCS *Peregrine*. HMCS *Peregrine* was a base in Halifax where sailors had their discharges from the RCN processed. John was expecting his discharge but became ill. He was transferred to the RCN Hospital at HMCS *Stadacona* on 15 February 1946. He was diagnosed with tuberculous meningitis, a rare bacteria-based infection of the tissues covering the brain and spinal cord and he died on 21 February 1946. Able Seaman Irvine was 19 years old when he died.

A Board of Inquiry into Able Seaman Irvine's death was held and was chaired by Lieutenant-Commander T.C. Pullen. It confirmed the cause of death, and that the disease was likely contracted during John's service with the RCN.

Able Seaman John Irvine was given a military funeral and is buried at Section 306 of Fort Massey Cemetery in Halifax. His grave marker reads "Rest in Peace." The marker also reads "RCNR", at the time of his death the RCNVR and RCNR had been merged into one Naval Reserve called RCN (R).

For his service, Able Seaman John Irvine was awarded: the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother, Ida, received the Canadian Memorial Cross.

Able Seaman John Irvine is commemorated on 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 585 Centre Block, Houses of Parliament, Ottawa.



Prepared By:

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Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission – profile for John Moshein Irvine
- Library and Archives Canada Service via Ancestry for RCNVR service records
- Ancestry for family immigration, BMD, and census records
- Calgary Herald archives
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial website

CITIZEN SAILORS VIRTUAL CENOTAPH - CÉNOTAPHE VIRTUEL DES MARINS CITOYENS

- Peels Henderson's Directories
- Wikipedia
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission website
- For Posterity's Sake website
- Government of Canada RCN History website
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial