

Leading Seaman Dugald Leitch V-35138



Leading Seaman Dugald Leitch. Photo:
ForPosteritySake.ca

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Greenock Scotland, 23 November 1923**
- **Enlisted: Calgary Division RCNVR, 11 August 1941**
- **Civilian Occupation: Student**
- **Death: Killed when HMCS *Saskatchewan* engaged with German surface vessels near Brest, France on 6 July 1944**
- **Commemorated: Plymouth (Weston Mill) Cemetery, Sec. C. Cons. Grave 18174; the Scottish National War Memorial, Calgary Field of Crosses, and Memorial plaques at HMCS *Tecumseh*, and Naval Museum of Alberta, Calgary**

Dugald Leitch was born in Greenock, Scotland in 1923. His parents were Alexander Leitch and Jessie Morrison (Lyle) Leitch. He had an older sister, May Morrison Leitch (later Boucher). The family immigrated to Canada in 1925, settling in Calgary, Alberta. His father was in the British Merchant Marine during WW1 and worked as the Chief Engineer at the Hudson's Bay store in Calgary.

Dugald attended Mount Royal School in Calgary. In 1933, when he was nine, an article in the Calgary Herald describes him winning his school's crab race. Dugald listed his religion as United Church. Funerals for family members in Calgary were at Wesley United Church.

Dugald was orphaned in 1937 at the age of 13 when both of his parents died within six weeks of each other. His sister Mary was his only family listed in any of his Navy records. Later in 1937 he returned to the UK to live with his uncle, Neil Leitch, in Ruislip, London, England. There was a party in Calgary on the eve of his departure that was attended by 15 of his friends.

Adding to the tragedies that Dugald had already experienced, Neil Leitch passed away in 1939. Dugald then went to live with his namesake uncle, Dugald Leitch in Glasgow, Scotland. He was in a tool-maker apprenticeship during his time in Scotland. He returned to Canada in 1940. He completed Grade 10 in June 1941, in Calgary.

Dugald enrolled in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve on 11 August 1941 at the Calgary Division RCNVR. His documentation lists him as being 5'7" and 135 pounds with brown hair and blue eyes. Ordinary Seaman Leitch was placed on active service on 1 Oct 1941. He did his basic training at HMCS *Tecumseh* in Calgary (which was commissioned as an RCN ship on

1 Nov 1941) and four weeks later was sent for further training to HMCS *Naden*, a major training base in Esquimalt, BC. Towards the end of this training, he did have a difference of opinion with the Navy. Perhaps he didn't remember that in wartime letters were subject to censorship. His commanding officer took exception to certain statements made in a letter regarding His Majesty's Canadian Naval Service. The CO thought they were misleading. Seven days of extra duty seems to have sorted everything out as he earned a Very Good rating for character on every posting.

On 28 April 1942 he was transferred to HMCS *Malaspina* for almost a year. HMCS *Malaspina* was a patrol and examination vessel based at Esquimalt; later in the war she was a training vessel assigned to Royal Roads. During his service on HMCS *Malaspina* he was promoted to Able Seaman on 1 October 1942.

He left HMCS *Malaspina* on 02 April 1943 and after a short stay on HMCS *Givenchy* (an accommodation ship in Esquimalt, BC) he traveled to HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax, Nova Scotia and then overseas. He arrived at HMCS *Niobe* on 3 May 1943. HMCS *Niobe* was the RCN overseas manning depot. It was in Greenock, Scotland, which just happened to be where Able Seaman Leitch was born.



HMCS Saskatchewan.
Photo: collection of James Robertson,
www.forposteritysake.ca

His stay at HMCS *Niobe* was brief, and on 31 May 1943 he reported to HMCS *Saskatchewan*, a River Class destroyer. He joined *Saskatchewan* on the day that she was commissioned into the RCN. The ship was originally in the Royal Navy as HMS *Fortune* and was transferred to the RCN after being in refit for several months.

In July 1943 HMCS *Saskatchewan* completed her workups and was assigned to the 3 Canadian Escort Group, part of the Mid Ocean Escort Force. More notably, this group (along with the 5 Canadian

Escort Group) was known as the Barber Pole Brigade. Squadron ships sported 'barber pole' stripes around the funnel as an informal squadron identifier and to show esprit de corps. HMCS *Saskatchewan* escorted convoys between Londonderry, Northern Ireland and St Johns, Newfoundland. HMCS *Saskatchewan* escorted 15 convoys during her time with the MOEF. The Squadron faced harsh north Atlantic weather and U-Boat attacks on the many convoys escorted. On several occasions HMCS *Saskatchewan* and other ships in her group participated in anti-submarine exercises against RN submarines. These exercises took place in Lough Foyle, near Londonderry as ship's companies honed their anti-submarine warfare skills.

Dugald wrote the Leading Seaman exam on 28 December 1943. He did very well, scoring Very Good (85% or higher). He was promoted to Leading Seaman on 8 January 1944.

HMCS *Saskatchewan* continued her duties with the 3 Escort Group through until May 1944, when she was transferred to 12 Escort Group based in Plymouth, England. Here she joined HMCS *Qu'Appelle*, HMCS *Restigouche* and HMCS *Skeena* for anti-submarine duty. This all-Canadian group's objective was to prevent U-boats from interfering with the D-Day landings. On 07 Jun 1944, HMCS *Saskatchewan* was attacked by U-984, but fortunately the acoustic torpedo struck her towed noise maker and exploded harmlessly.

On 6 July 1944 HMCS *Saskatchewan* – along with HMCS *Skeena*, HMCS *Restigouche* and HMCS *Qu'Appelle* – was taking part in Operation Dredger. Their goal was to disrupt German patrol vessels who were accompanying U-boats coming in and out of Brest, France. The Canadian ships attacked a group of four German patrol boats and two U-boats. Leading Seaman Leitch was on the Oerlikon gun crew on the bridge wing. One of the German boats – V715 – was sunk in the action, but before she sank, there was an intense 40-minute gun battle between the ships. In his letter to Leitch's sister, the ship's Captain explained that early in the engagement "*Dugald was loading a large machine gun when he was hit by shrapnel from an enemy shell which exploded near him.*" Despite rapid treatment by the medical officer, he died within minutes. Dugald Leitch was 20 years old.



A full military funeral was held for Leading Seaman Leitch at Plymouth, and in keeping with tradition a sale of his personal effects took place. The money collected was given to his family. Petty Officer Gustave Guay purchased Leading Seaman Leitch's Seamanship Manual. He kept the manual over the years in remembrance of a lost friend.

Leading Seaman Dugald Leitch is buried in the Plymouth (Weston Mill) Cemetery, grave 18174, in a section maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The inscription on his grave reads "*Rest in Peace*". For his service Leading Seaman Dugald Leitch was awarded the 1939-1945 Star, Atlantic Star & Clasp, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal.

He is remembered on the Halifax Memorial, Commonwealth War Graves (p 101); the Second World War Book of Remembrance, p.364, at the Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa; the Calgary Field of Crosses; the Scottish National War Memorial in Edinburgh, Scotland, and the memorial plaques at HMCS *Tecumseh* and the Naval Museum of Alberta.

Prepared By:

David Mitchell, former Able Seaman, HMCS *Tecumseh*, Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Research team



Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission profile for Dugald Leitch

- Library and Archives Canada Service via Ancestry.com – record for Dugald Leitch
- Ancestry.com for family information
- Ancestry.com for article “Death of Dugald Leitch”
- ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Calgary Herald
- For Posterity Sake website
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial website
- Naval History Net website
- Uboat.net naval history website
- A Blue Water Navy by W.A. Douglas et al
- Canadians in the Battle of the Atlantic by Larry Gray
- Peel’s Henderson Directories