

Petty Officer Stoker Mekkel George Lind V-13918



Petty Officer Stoker Mekkel Lind. Photo:
www.forposteritysake.ca

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Nordegg AB, 6 May 1915**
- **Enlisted: Calgary Division RCNVR, 10 June 1941**
- **Civilian Occupation: Well Driller's Helper**
- **Lost at sea when HMCS *Athabaskan* was torpedoed and sunk on 29 April 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 12; Second World War Book of Remembrance p. 366; Calgary Field of Crosses, and memorial plaque at HMCS *Tecumseh*, in Calgary Alberta**

Mekkel George Lind was the son of Norwegian born parents Jorgen Lind and Helga Amelia Rasmussen. He was the eighth of nine children: 6 boys and 3 girls. Mekkel was born in Nordegg, Alberta but grew up in nearby Red Deer, and later moved to Innisfail, Alberta; a prosperous farming area one hour north of Calgary. It is also an area that saw homesteading by many Scandinavian families.

Mekkel lived at RR2, Innisfail, Alberta at the time of his enlistment, but attended North Red Deer School in his early grades where he was an excellent student skipping Grade 3. According to the Red Deer News, Mekkel won the three-legged race at the Annual School Sports Day when in Grade 2. He had four years high school education, likely at Red Deer's Central HS. Mekkel and his family were members of the Lutheran Church. Before enlisting for war service, he was a Well Driller's helper working in the Red Deer area and he had some farming experience as well. He could read and write Norwegian as well as English.

Three of Mekkel's brothers joined the Army.

Mekkel Lind enlisted as a Stoker II at the Calgary Division RCNVR on the 10 June 1941. Enlistment documents describe Mekkel as 5 feet 5 ¾ inches tall, with blonde hair, grey eyes and a 'fresh' complexion. A week after enlistment, he was sent to HMCS *Naden* the training establishment in Esquimalt BC. There he underwent three months of training before being sent to HMCS *Stadacona*, the Navy base in Halifax NS to join his first ship. Near the end of October 1941, Stoker II Lind was drafted to HMCS *Minas*. A ship he served in for almost one year. *Minas* was a steam-driven Bangor Class Minesweeper with a complement of 6 officers and 77 crew

members. She was employed in escort duties as part of the Sydney then Newfoundland Escort Force. Mekkel was promoted to Stoker 1st Class in March 1942 while serving in *Minas* and completed his Auxillary Machinery watch-keeping course in late July of the same year.

Mekkel was a very competent Stoker and was sent for advance training ashore at HMCS *Cornwallis* from August to October 1942. On completion of that course, he was qualified as a Stoker Petty Officer, and he was assessed as having a “very good power of command”.

On 10 Nov 1942, Mekkel was posted to the destroyer HMCS *Saguenay*. *Saguenay* was part of the Newfoundland Escort Force, and Stoker Petty Officer Lind was familiar with the routine of escorting convoys of ships. However, five days after joining the ship, *Saguenay* was in a collision with the merchant ship *Azara*. The collision caused the *Saguenay*'s depth charges to explode and the stern of the ship was ripped open. *Saguenay* was taken to Saint John, NB where her stern was repaired. She remained in Saint John until she was towed to the new home of HMCS *Cornwallis* in Deep Brook, NS, in October 1943.



HMCS *Saguenay* after being rammed by SS *Azra* on 15 Nov 1942. She lost her stern when her depth charges exploded.

Photo: Rose family collection at www.forposteritysake.ca

Stoker Petty Officer (SPO) Lind left *Saguenay* in March 1943. He was once again ashore and into barracks routine and work party details, some of which he led. He also continued his training where on 3 December 1943 he completed his Engine Room Artificer (ERA) course and was recommended for accelerated advancement to ERA 3rd Class. Artificers were highly skilled technicians who had received extensive training usually within the Navy. For example, an Engine Room Artificer often spent nine months at a civilian technical college and then one year in a naval engineering training facility before qualifying. Upon graduation artificers changed from the square rig of ratings to the round rig uniforms of petty officers. They enjoyed the pay and privileges of petty officers although they were not actually petty officers. Their pay and status compensated them for what they knew not where they were in the chain of command. Only the most senior artificers exercised authority over junior artificers and ratings - a Chief Engine Room Artificer of a ship for example.

On 16 January 1944, SPO Lind arrived in Plymouth, England at HMS *Niobe* the shore establishment that housed Canadians awaiting deployment to nearby ships. On 7 March 1944 SPO Lind was assigned to one of Canada's most storied wartime ships, the Tribal Class destroyer HMCS *Athabaskan*. *Athabaskan* had recently returned to Plymouth to join the newly formed 10th Destroyer Flotilla where she conducted operations off the coast of France. On 25-26 April, she assisted in the destruction of the German torpedo boat *T-29*. Then on 29 April 1944 at about 0300 she was patrolling with her sister Tribal-class destroyer HMCS *Haida*. Responding to orders to intercept German warships near Ile de Bas the Canadian ships engaged *T-24* and *T-27*. During the *engagement*, *Athabaskan*, unlike *Haida*, was not using flashless powder in her shells, thus the flashes associated with firing her guns made her an easy target for a torpedo fired by *T-24*. *Haida* drove off *T-24* in flames and then drove *T-27* ashore before returning to her sister's last

position only to find that she had sunk. One hundred and twenty-eight (128) men including Stoker Petty Officer Lind were lost, 44 were rescued by *Haida*, and six by *Haida's* motor work boat. At dawn, after the departure of *Haida*, 83 men were later taken prisoner by three German minesweepers. Mekkel was 28 years old.

Mekkel and most of the others killed have no known graves. However, in 2002 the wreckage of their ship was located in 50 fathoms of water. She and those who may be entombed in her are under the protection of the French Heritage Code.

For his service, Stoker Petty Officer Lind was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. Mekkel's mother, Helga Lind, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

Stoker Petty Officer Lind is remembered on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 12, and Commonwealth War Graves Panel 41; the Second World War Book of Remembrance, p.366, the Calgary Field of Crosses, and the memorial plaque at HMCS *Tecumseh*, in Calgary Alberta.

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Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database - p. 76
- Second World War Book of Remembrance, p.366.
- Library and Archives Canada - Service file for Petty Officer Mekkel George Lind
- Red Deer New 2 July 1924 p. 3
- Red Deer News 1 Oct 1923 p. 1
- Red Deer News 1 July 1924 p. 4
- <https://www.canada.ca/en/navy/services/history/ships-histories/saguenay.html>
- http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_ATHABASKAN_G07.htm
- Discussion with CSVC Researcher Captain (N) (Ret'd) John Dalzell