

Ordinary Seaman David Alexander MacArthur V-76456



Ordinary Seaman David Alexander MacArthur. Photo Credit: Canadian Virtual War Memorial

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Alliance AB, 9 December 1925**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Nonsuch*, 4 January 1944**
- **Civilian Occupation: Bottle washer, Red Deer Bottling Company**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Shawinigan* was torpedoed and sunk on 25 November 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 11; HMCS *Shawinigan* Memorial; HMCS *Nonsuch* Memorial, Naval Museum of Alberta memorial plaque; Red Deer Memorial Centre; St Luke's Anglican Church (Red Deer); and Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School (Red Deer)**

David Alexander MacArthur was born in Alliance, AB on 9 December 1925. He was the son of a Canadian father and Welsh mother – Malcolm Archie MacArthur (1878 – 1966) and Lillias (Lil) G. MacArthur (nee Henderson) (1887 – 1979) of Red Deer, AB. His father was born in Ripley, ON and was the descendant of Scots who immigrated to Canada in 1851, many of whom pioneered in Western Canada. Malcolm MacArthur initially worked with his two brothers as building contractors in Edmonton, AB. After his marriage, he enlisted in the Alberta Provincial Police and later worked as an employee of the provincial government. David's mother, Lillias MacArthur, was born in Llansadwell, Pembrokeshire, Wales and immigrated to Canada in 1914. She was a homemaker. The MacArthurs were married in Edmonton in 1915 and had a large family. David had six siblings: Daphne, Edith, Gwendoline, Arthur, Malcolm, and Donald. The MacArthur family were members of the Church of England, and their address was recorded as Box 451, Red Deer, AB in 1944.

David MacArthur completed Grade 9 and four months of Grade 10 before leaving school to work at the Red Deer Bottling Company, where he was employed as a bottle washer. His enlistment papers indicated that he was interested in working as a salesman for a fruit and wholesale company after the war. His brother Malcolm J. MacArthur (V-44933) also enlisted and was serving as a telegraphist at Wireless Telegraph (W/T) Station HMCS *Avalon*, St John's, Newfoundland at the time of his brother's death.

At the beginning of the Second World War, the population of Red Deer was 2,500. By the time the war ended, 1,214 men and women had served and of those, 53 had died. David MacArthur was 18 years old when he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) at HMCS *Nonsuch* on 4 January 1944. The enlistment documents described David as 6' 1" tall, with black hair, brown eyes, and a fresh complexion. Ordinary Seaman MacArthur began basic training at



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

HMCS *Nonsuch* from January to February 1944 before being deployed to the naval training facility at HMCS *Cornwallis* in Nova Scotia, where he continued seamanship training until late May 1944. His training included a brief period aboard the armed yacht HMCS *Caribou*, which the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) used as a patrol and training vessel. Upon completion of his training on 26 May 1944, Ordinary Seaman MacArthur spent a brief period at HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax, NS before being transferred to his first sea-going ship, HMCS *Shawinigan*, on 12 June 1944.

HMCS *Shawinigan* was a Flower-class corvette that was constructed at Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing Company Ltd. in Lauzon, QC in 1941. Over the course of the ship's short life, *Shawinigan* underwent two refits. Ordinary Seaman MacArthur joined *Shawinigan* shortly after the second refit. The ship sailed for Bermuda for workups and then proceeded to take up escort duties on the east coast of Canada. While serving in *Shawinigan*, Ordinary Seaman MacArthur was assessed to be of "Good Character" and rated "Superior Efficiency" as a Seaman.

It was during the escort of the ferry *Burgeo*, on the Sydney to Port aux Basques crossing that the ship was lost.

"*Shawinigan* and the US Coast Guard cutter *Sassafras* were ordered to escort the ferry *Burgeo* from Sydney, Nova Scotia to Port aux Basques, Newfoundland. Since the tragic loss of the ferry *Caribou*, ferries on this route were always escorted. The three ships made an uneventful crossing to Port aux Basques on November 24, at which time *Shawinigan* detached to continue anti-submarine patrols in the area. *Shawinigan* was scheduled to rendezvous with the *Burgeo* the following morning for the return to Cape Breton. But the corvette never made it.

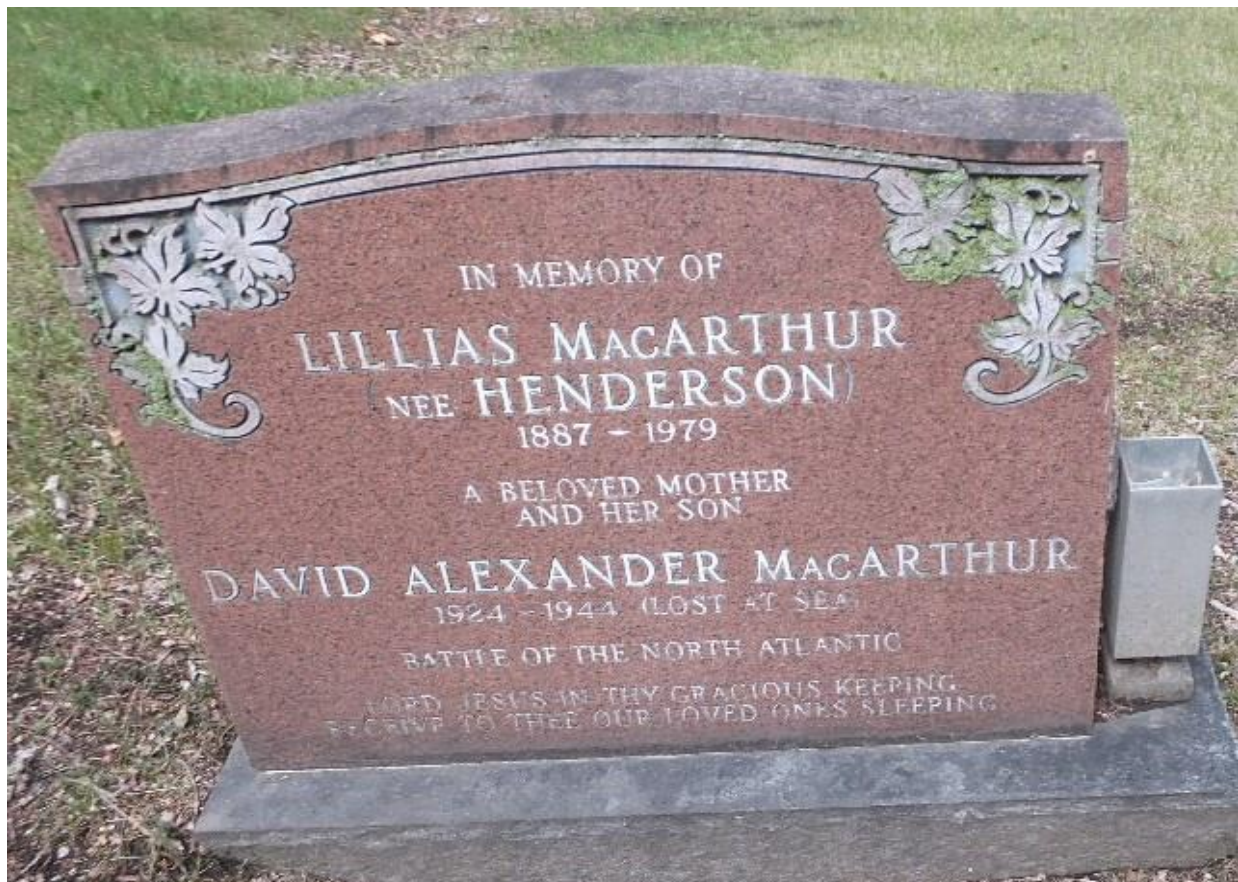
Nearby, U-1228, which had been ordered into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, was tarrying, trying to repair a faulty schnorkel. Without the tactical advantage that the device provided, its commander, Frederich-Wilhelm Marienfeld, feared his chances should he pass through the Cabot Strait. On the moonlit night of November 24, he tested his repairs, found them ineffective and decided to return to Germany. As he issued orders that would pilot his U-Boat back into the Atlantic, the *Shawinigan* was sighted. U-1228, which had not yet recorded an attack on enemy shipping, let loose a Gnat torpedo. Exactly four minutes later, HMCS *Shawinigan* disappeared in a plume of water and a shower of sparks. All 91 members of her crew were killed.

HMCS *Shawinigan* was one of three Canadian warships that have been lost with all hands. *Shawinigan's* final resting place is in the Cabot Strait, between Newfoundland and Cape Breton Island. Her precise location is not known, but by best estimates based on the U-boat's reports the *Shawinigan* should lay at 47 degrees-34 minutes north-Latitude, 59 degrees-11 minutes West-Longitude". (Naval Museum of Manitoba)

Ordinary Seaman David Alexander MacArthur was 18 years old when he died.

Immediately following receipt of the news that their son was missing and presumed dead, David's mother, Lillias, wrote a heartfelt letter to the RCN chain of command, requesting that David's brother Malcolm be granted leave from HMCS *Avalon* to spend time with the family in Red Deer. The letter's postscript is as poignant today as it was then: "I am proud my sons are fighting for Canada but hope Canada is worthy of the sacrifice." (14 December 1944) The Department of Estates paid a War Service Gratuity to David's father in the amount of \$125.79.

Malcolm and Lillias MacArthur are buried in Beechmount Cemetery, Edmonton, AB. David Alexander MacArthur is remembered on his mother's headstone. It is fitting that the MacArthurs chose Beechmount Cemetery as their resting place and to memorialize their son David. A second military Field of Honour was created there in Edmonton after the Second World War.



Beechmount's "Cross of Sacrifice" is a replica of those erected in the graveyards in Europe after the First World War. It overlooks this Field of Honour, which has no restrictions on dates of military service and includes men and women who have served as peacekeepers and in a variety of other conflicts since 1945.

For his service, Ordinary Seaman David Alexander MacArthur was awarded: the 1939-45 Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp, and the War Medal. The Memorial Cross was awarded to his mother Lillias.

Ordinary Seaman David Alexander MacArthur is commemorated on Panel 11 of the Halifax Memorial at Point Pleasant Park, Halifax, NS; on the memorial to HMCS *Shawinigan* in Shawinigan, QC; the Red Deer Memorial Centre; St Luke's Anglican Church Memorial (Red Deer); Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School Memorial (Red Deer); HMCS *Nonsuch* Memorial; the Naval Museum of Alberta memorial plaque; and the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 370, at the Centre Block Houses of Parliament, Ottawa.

Prepared By:

Lieutenant-Commander (Ret'd) Elizabeth Woodliffe, Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Research Team



Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database – David Alexander MacArthur
- Library and Archives Canada – Service file for Ordinary Seaman David Alexander MacArthur
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial – Photo of Ordinary Seaman David MacArthur
- http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_SHAWINIGAN_K136.htm
- *The Red Deer Advocate* Oct 5, 1966
- <https://naval-museum.mb.ca/battle-of-the-atlantic/hmcs-shawinigan/>
- <http://archive.artsrn.ualberta.ca/caradonn/>
- <http://cdli.ca/monuments/ab.htm>
- <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com> (MacArthur family records)
- <https://www.findagrave.com> (Lillias MacArthur, headstone)
- <http://www.veterans.gc.ca> (National Inventory Canadian Memorials Database)

