

## Leading Seaman Ewen Morrison V-30386



Leading Seaman Ewen Morrison. Photo:  
Canadian Virtual War Memorial

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Stornoway SK, 19 April 1922**
- **Enlisted: Naden Division RCNVR, 17 September 1940**
- **Civilian Occupation: Student; Land Surveyor, Sinclair Land Surveyors**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Shawinigan* was torpedoed and sank on 25 November 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 11; Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial and Morrison Island in Davin Lake (Lat 56° 49'N Long 103° 44'W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his honour.**

Ewen Morrison was the second child of four children born to Kate and Malcolm Morrison on 19 April 1922 in Stornoway, Saskatchewan. Brother William was born in 1921, sister Rebecca in 1925 and sister Nora after 1926. Both parents were born on the Scottish Island of Harris – Malcolm in 1878 and Kate in 1892. Malcolm emigrated to Canada in 1887 – information concerning where and with whom is not available. However, the 1921 Canadian Census records Malcolm, Kate and William living in the Rural Municipality of Wallace which contains the village of Stornoway about 20 miles east of the town of Yorkton. Malcolm's occupation is recorded as labourer. Ewen's naval personnel file indicates that Malcolm married Kate on the Island of Harris in November 1919 and returned to Canada with her in 1920.

In the mid 1930s the family moved to Yorkton. Between 1911 and 1921 Yorkton grew rapidly from a population of 2,309 to 5,151 before growth slowed. In comparison the population in 1941 was 5,586. It is evident that Ewen was a bright, active youth as indicated on his application to join the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) dated 22 April 1940. He applied to be a writer and stated that he had completed Grade 11 at Yorkton Collegiate Institute, and had studied typing, short hand, accounting and French. As well, it appears that he was an accomplished illustrator and saw himself pursuing a career in that field after the War. He enrolled in the 64<sup>th</sup> (Yorkton) Field Battery, Royal Canadian Artillery (Non-Permanent Army Militia) in May 1938 and was still serving at the time of his RCN application. He further noted that he worked as a surveyor in Yorkton in the summer of 1940.

The practice of direct recruiting into the RCN was abandoned early in the War and not resumed until May 1944 on a minimal basis. Whether or not Ewen was informed of this change of policy

is not known although he was medically examined in Regina before travelling to Esquimalt, British Columbia in the fall of 1940. There he enrolled in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve as an Ordinary Seaman on 17 September at HMCS *Naden*. Upon enrollment he was single, 6 feet and ¼ inches tall, weighed 135 pounds, and had brown hair, hazel eyes, and a medium complexion.

Ewen was immediately drafted to HMCS *Naden* for training and employment where he remained until 20 October 1941. That may seem like an inordinate period of time to receive basic training. It is important to remember, however, that when war was declared the Royal Canadian Navy consisted of six destroyers, five minesweepers, two training ships, and a mobilized strength of 366 officers and 3,477 ratings including reservists and that it counted on the seventeen naval reserve divisions then operating across Canada to recruit and initially train men. This training, however, was not standardized and divisions were short of training equipment, accommodations, and instructors. Once Canada was committed to its policy of naval expansion, HMCS *Naden* and HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax were soon overcrowded with recruits being largely retrained because of the inadequacies of the system.

In addition to training issues, the production of warships was fraught with difficulties. The ambitious program to build 122 vessels (including 64 corvettes) ranging from motor launches to destroyers announced in 1940 failed to deliver on schedule. This failure was due to the unprecedented expansion in shipbuilding taking place at a time when similar expansion in other fields such as the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan created competition for resources. The building of naval ships and the manufacture of their equipment was a new experience for most Canadian firms and skilled labour was difficult to find. As well, ships' components rapidly became scarce – especially those imported from Britain. Consequently, large numbers of “retrained” recruits had fewer than the anticipated number of ships to man.

Notwithstanding the teething problems, training in the Navy during the War fell into two parallel streams – *substantive* which provided leadership, and *non-substantive* which provided technical expertise. As well there were three stages of training - initial, advanced, and operational. Let's deal with the stages first. All recruits took Initial training. It aided the recruit in adapting to living as a member of a ship's company and made him physically fit for strenuous duties. Advanced training covered technical and leadership issues while operational training was conducted by combat units and organizations such as ships, flotillas, or groups. In initial training Ewen was housed in a barracks with a nautical artificial construct in order to inculcate in him the language, discipline, and basic procedures of the Navy. Floors were decks, hallways were flats, the main entrance to a major building was called the quarter deck, the group or class to which he was assigned was called a division. He was assigned to a duty watch requiring him to be on duty at night on a rotational basis with specific duties to perform, and he was assigned to a “part ship” where he was responsible for a cleaning station and maintenance routines. He was also instructed in maintaining his kit and how to sling a hammock. Further, emphasis was placed on rifle and squad drill, and more than half the instruction time was devoted to seamanship, including ship layout, knots and splices, and boat pulling.

Ewen was assigned to the Seaman Branch which included the substantive ratings of Ordinary, Able, Leading Seaman, Petty Officer, and Chief Petty Officer. In addition, the branch was further subdivided into specialized non-substantive ratings. Gunnery to which Ewen was assigned was one of these specialties which in turn was divided into five sub-specialties – DEMS (Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships) which provided gun crews for merchant ships; Anti-Aircraft which included all close-range weapons; and Main Armament which contained three distinct ratings with three classes in each: Control Rating (C.R.), principally concerned with determining the range of

a target; Layer Rating (L.R.), responsible for the movements of the gun as it was brought to bear on a target; and Ewen's assignment, Quarters Rating (Q.R), responsible for the stowage and supply of ammunition and breech operation. These three ratings in turn were divided into 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Class with 1<sup>st</sup> Class being the most skilled.

On 17 September 1941 Ewen was promoted to Acting Able Seaman. His duties did not alter appreciably except that he found himself supervising groups of Ordinary Seamen.

On 21 October 1941 Ewen was drafted to HMCS *Prince Robert* (F56). *Prince Robert* and her sisters, *Prince David* and *Prince Henry*, were passenger/refrigerated cargo ships build in Britain for the Canadian National Railway in the 1930s for operation along the British Columbia Coast. The Great Depression, however, impaired their economic success. At the onset of the War, they

were acquired by the RCN and converted into armed merchant cruisers. Work on *Prince*

*Robert* began on 9 February 1940 at Burrard Dry Dock in Esquimalt and was completed in July. Extensive work was done to ready



CNSS Prince Robert in Vancouver, BC.

Source: CN images of Canada Gallery, image No.: CN001580 on Wikipedia

these ships for naval combat. This included the installation of four six-inch guns, two three-inch guns, two depth charge shoots, and an assortment of lighter anti-aircraft guns. She was capable

of 22 knots and had a complement of 241 officers and ratings.



HMCS Prince Robert, Armed Merchant Cruiser.

Source: RCN photon on For Posterity's Sake

On 27 October 1941, shortly after Ewen had joined the ship,

*Prince Robert* and the troop ship *Awatea* embarked 1,973 Canadian troops of the Winnipeg Grenadiers and the Royal Rifles and two nursing sisters in Vancouver and transported them to Hong Kong, arriving there on 16 November. On 19 November, *Prince Robert* sailed for Manila to refuel, then sailed to Pearl Harbour, leaving Pearl Harbour for Esquimalt on 4 December 1941.

Three days later, on 7 December, Japan attacked both Pearl Harbour and Hong Kong. The Canadian troops in Hong Kong engaged in bloody combat which lasted until Christmas Day during which 290 Canadians were killed. The survivors were subjected to atrocious conditions as prisoners of war leading to the death of an additional 264. Also on 7 December *Prince Robert*, now at sea, was ordered to search for the United States Army Transport Ship *Cynthia Olsen*.

*Prince Robert* found nothing. It was later determined that *Cynthia Olsen* was sunk by a Japanese submarine making her the first American ship sunk in the War.

After returning to Canada, *Prince Robert* resumed coastal patrols as part of Esquimalt Force. Ewen was confirmed as an Able Seaman on 19 February 1942. From August to October 1942, Able Seaman Morrison and the crew of *Prince Robert* were joined by *Prince Henry* (F70), *Prince David* (F89) and two corvettes. This group of ships was assigned to the United States Navy based in Kodiak, Alaska. In Alaska they were engaged in convoy escort duties between Kodiak and Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians. Able Seaman Morrison and the Canadian ships returned to Esquimalt in October.

On 20 November 1942, after serving in *Prince Robert* for 393 days, Ewen was again drafted to *Naden* where he continued gunnery training. The course covered types of ammunition, hydraulics, breeches and mountings, and the principles of fire control, direction-finding, and sighting. On completion on 26 January 1943, Ewen received the non-substantive rating of Quarters Rating 3<sup>rd</sup> Class and a 10 cent per day pay raise.

In mid-February 1943, Ewen was drafted to HMCS *Courtenay* (J262), a Bangor-class minesweeper, for eleven days before returning to HMCS *Naden* where he passed the Leading Seaman examination and was promoted to Acting Leading Seaman on 1 April. Morrison's next tasking required travel across the country to HMCS *Stadacona*, Halifax, NS. There he would join HMCS *Chicoutimi* (K156) on 27 May 1943.

Built in Montreal and named for the City of Chicoutimi (now part of the City of Saguenay) which is located at the confluence of the Saguenay and Chicoutimi rivers, she was a Flower-class corvette commissioned on 12 May 1941. During the 162 days that Ewen served in her she was assigned to the Western Local Escort Force (WLEF). The WLEF escorted convoys from North American ports along the Atlantic Ocean to the Western Ocean Meeting Point (WOMP) off Newfoundland. There, a new group of escort ships from the Mid-Ocean Escort Force (MOEF) assumed responsibility for safely delivering the convoys to the British Isles. The WLEF reciprocated by safely delivering convoys turned over to them by the MOEF for delivery to North American ports.

On 17 September 1943, Ewen was awarded the first Good Conduct Badge which recognized three years of service with accompanying good conduct. In awarding him the badge, the Navy recognized 151 days of Ewen's service with the 64th (Yorkton) Field Battery, Royal Canadian Artillery. The badge entitled him to a pay raise of 5 cents per day.

#### Leading Seaman Pay per Diem 1944

Leading Seaman	\$2.10
Quarters Rating 3 <sup>rd</sup> Class	0.10
Good Conduct Badge	0.05
Kit Up Keep Allowance	0.12
Hard Lying Money (HLM) *	0.25
Grog Money (GM) **	0.06
Total	2.68

\*Hard Lying Money was paid to ratings serving in small vessels who had less than the standard Naval accommodations when compared with what the Navy offered as the norm.

\*\* Grog Money was paid to ratings over the age of 20 years who declined the daily rum issue and identified themselves to the Coxswain as "temperance".

In November 1943, Ewen joined his next ship HMCS *Ingonish*, she was another Bangor-class minesweeper and was named for the town of Ingonish, NS. A/Leading Seaman Morrison joined the ship as she entered a nine-week refit in Baltimore, Maryland. After seeing the ship through refit and workups, Ewen was confirmed as a Leading Seaman on 1 April 1944 and was drafted ashore to *Stadacona* and then to HMCS *Scotian* (the Halifax Naval Reserve Division) as an instructor until 1 September.

Finally, on 2 September 1944, Leading Seaman Ewen Morrison was drafted to HMCS *Shawinigan* (K136). She was a Flower-class corvette – a class of ship that was very familiar to Ewen. HMCS *Shawinigan* was named for the town of Shawinigan Falls located on the Saint Maurice River 22 miles upstream from the St. Lawrence River. Her service life was busy and varied. When Ewen joined her, *Shawinigan* was a member of Escort Group W-2 providing, among other services, anti-submarine escort to ferries sailing from Sydney, Nova Scotia.



HMCS Shawinigan. Source: Government of Canada

On 24 November 1944 *Shawinigan* and the USCGC *Sassafras* escorted the ferry *Burgeo*, from Sydney to Port aux Basques, Newfoundland. Enroute *Sassafras* was detached from the escort without relief. With *Burgeo* safely delivered, *Shawinigan* informed *Burgeo* that she would rendezvous with her in the morning and departed on an independent anti-submarine patrol. At 0230 on 25 November, *Shawinigan* was torpedoed by the German submarine *U-1228* in the Cabot Strait. Later that morning *Burgeo* left Port aux Basques on schedule in dense fog. Unable to find *Shawinigan* and keeping radio silence, *Burgeo* proceeded to Sydney unescorted. On arrival at 1800 it was evident that *Shawinigan* was missing. Over the next three days searchers looked for survivors and were only successful in finding flotsam and, eventually, the remains of five members of *Shawinigan's* ship's company. In all, the entire crew of ninety-one, including Leading Seaman Ewen Morrison, perished. He was 22 years old when he died.

Ewen, like most of the others who perished has no known grave. The exceptions are the five whose remains were recovered. They were returned to their families for burial in their home communities. The entire ship's company is remembered by a memorial in the City of Shawinigan and a stained-glass window in the chapel at Canadian Forces Base Halifax. Ewen is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 11 and in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 399 at the Centre Blocks of Parliament, Ottawa. Additionally, Morrison Island in Davin Lake (Lat 56° 49'N Long 103° 44'W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory.

For his service, Leading Seaman Ewen Morrison was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Pacific Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother, Mrs. Kate Morrison, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

**Prepared By:**

John Dalzell, Captain(N) (ret'd), Commanding Officer HMCS *UNICORN*  
1983-88 & Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Research Team.



**Sources:**

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission record for Leading Seaman Ewen Morrison
- Library and Archives Canada Service Record for Leading Seaman Ewen Morrison
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial – Profile page for Leading Seaman Ewen Morrison
- Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial -Profile page for Leading Seaman Ewen Morrison
- Library and Archives Canada 1916, 1921, 1926 Census
- Gilbert, Norman Tucker. *The Naval Service of Canada Its Official History Volume II*. Ottawa, Ontario: King's Printer, 1952
- For Posterity's Sake. HMCS *Prince Robert* F-56. Retrieved July 28, 2022 from [http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS\\_PRINCE\\_ROBERT\\_F56.htm](http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_PRINCE_ROBERT_F56.htm)
- Wikipedia (February 17, 2022). *HMCS Prince Robert*. Retrieved July 28, 2022 from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMCS\\_Prince\\_Robert](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMCS_Prince_Robert)
- Government of Canada, *Canadians in Hong Kong*, Retrieved July 29, 2022 from <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/second-world-war/canadians-hong-kong>
- Government of Canada, *HMCS Shawinigan*. Retrieved February 20, 2022 from <https://www.canada.ca/en/navy/services/history/ships-histories/Shawiniga.html>
- For Posterity's Sake. HMCS *Courtney* J 262. Retrieved July 28, 2022 from [http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS\\_COURTENAY\\_J262.htm](http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_COURTENAY_J262.htm)
- For Posterity's Sake. HMCS *Chicoutimi* K156. Retrieved July 28, 2022 from [http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS\\_CHICOUTIMI\\_K156.htm](http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_CHICOUTIMI_K156.htm)
- For Posterity's Sake. HMCS *Ingonish* J69. Retrieved July 28, 2022 from [http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS\\_INGONISH\\_J69.htm](http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_INGONISH_J69.htm)
- For Posterity's Sake. HMCS *Shawinigan* K-136. Retrieved February 20, 2022 from [http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS\\_Shawinigan\\_K136.htm](http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_Shawinigan_K136.htm)

- Wikipedia (December 6, 2021). HMCS *Shawinigan* (K-329). Retrieved February 20, 2022 from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMCS\\_Shawinigan\\_\(K136\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMCS_Shawinigan_(K136))
- u-boat.net. HMCS Shawinigan (K 136). Retrieved February 20, 2022 from <https://uboat.net/allies/merchants/ship/3379.html>
- Notes of a conversation between Lieutenant Commander David Freeman (Retired) and Captain. J. Dalzell (Retired), July 25, 2022
- Godfrey Dykes Info. Hard Lying Money. Retrieved July 28, 2022 from [http://www.godfreydykes.info/hard\\_lying\\_money\\_method\\_af\\_asses.htm#:~:text=1.,Navy%20offered%20as%20the%20norm.](http://www.godfreydykes.info/hard_lying_money_method_af_asses.htm#:~:text=1.,Navy%20offered%20as%20the%20norm.)
- University of Texas Repository. The Sailor's Grog. Retrieved July 25, 2022 from <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/35592/txu-oclc-35776857-1939-09-21-008-009.pdf?sequence=14&isAllowed=y>