

Leading Sick Berth Attendant Frederick George Oke V-44790



Fred and Florence, March 1943. Photo: Cheryl Lean

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Moncton NB, 10 January 1921**
- **Enlisted: HMCS Brunswicker, 1 August 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Stenographic clerk, Canadian National Railway**
- **Death: Died when HMCS Valleyfield sank on 7 May 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 12; and Elmwood Cemetery, Moncton, NB**

Frederick George Oke was born in Moncton, New Brunswick in 1921 to Maud and George Oke. His mother, originally from Burin, Newfoundland, had been raised by an aunt in St John's after her father and brother were lost at sea in a storm while fishing. In 1913, she married George, the son of a prominent St John's carriage-making family. A machinist by trade, George had initially found work as an engineer on the SS *Bruce* ferry running between Port-aux-Basques, NL and Sydney, NS until he was shipwrecked on it in a grounding incident off the coast of Cape Breton.

Maud and George moved first to New Glasgow, NS where George worked in a munitions factory during the First World War. By the time of Fred's birth in 1921, the family had settled in Moncton where George established New Brunswick's first Ford dealership (the second dealership, opened in Saint John a few years later, was established by family acquaintance K.C. Irving). Fred joined the growing family with two sisters and a brother and was joined by two more sisters in the years soon after. Tragically, George died in 1927 when small cut on his shoulder became infected with motor oil, leaving the family destitute.

With George's life insurance, Maud opened a boarding house that her daughters and sons helped run. Fred left school after grade 9 at the height of the depression to aid the family by working as a stenographic clerk for the Canadian National Railway office in Moncton. When the Second World War began, Fred joined the militia with the New Brunswick Regiment (Tank) on 10 December 1941. Determined to see active duty, a few months later on 1 August 1942 he enlisted in the RCNVR as a Probationary Sick Berth Attendant at HMCS *Brunswicker*.

He completed basic training at HMCS *Montreal* (later *Donnacona*) in Montreal and trained at HMCS *Cornwallis* before qualifying as a substantive Sick Berth Attendant at HMCS *Stadacona* on 1 April 1943. During this time, he became engaged to his fiancé Florence. In November of that year, he was posted to HMCS *Hochelaga II* back in Montreal to await assignment to the River-

class frigate HMCS *Valleyfield*, which was then being built in Quebec City. He joined *Valleyfield* upon her commissioning on 8 December 1943 and participated in her work-ups in Bermuda.

In February 1944, *Valleyfield* joined her first trans-Atlantic escort, convoy SC.154 bound for Londonderry, but was detached mid-ocean to escort the damaged HMCS *Regina* under tow to the Azores. While in the Azores, Fred was rated Leading Sick Berth Attendant on 1 March 1944. Later that month, *Valleyfield* escorted the damaged HMCS *Mulgrave* from the Azores to Clyde before returning to Newfoundland.

On 7 May 1944, on the return leg of her third round-trip of the Atlantic, at the rear of an escort group recently detached from convoy ONM.234, on a clear night 58 nautical miles southeast of Cape Race, NL *Valleyfield* was struck amidships by a torpedo fired by U-548 on its maiden cruise. The torpedo having hit her boilers, *Valleyfield* broke in two and sank in under four minutes. Rescue efforts recovered only 43 crew members, and Fred along with 124 shipmates joined his grandfather and uncle in the cold north Atlantic. He was 23 years old.

Maud was posthumously presented with his 1939-45 Star, 1945 War Medal and Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with overseas clasp, along with a Memorial Cross.

Leading Sick Berth Attendant Frederick George Oke is commemorated on panel 12 of the Halifax Memorial, and in Elmwood Cemetery, Moncton, NB.

Prepared By:

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Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Record for Leading SBA Frederick George Oke
- Library and Archives Canada Service Record for Leading Sick Berth Attendant Frederick George Oke
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial – Profile page for Leading Sick Berth Attendant Frederick George Oke
- Royal Canadian Navy ship's history for HMCS *Valleyfield*