

Petty Officer Stoker Dirk Cornelius Swart V-13834



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- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Amsterdam The Netherlands, 9 May 1921**
- **Enlisted: Calgary Division RCNVR, 8 May 1941**
- **Civilian Occupation: Dairyman, Palm Dairy**
- **Death: Lost at sea while serving in HMCS *Shawinigan* on 24 November 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 12; the Granite Memorial, Shawinigan, Quebec; Crescent Heights High School Memorial Plaque; HMCS *Tecumseh* Memorial Plaque; Naval Museum of Alberta Memorial Plaque; Calgary Field of Crosses**

Dirk Cornelius Swart was born in Amsterdam, The Netherlands on 9 May 1921. He was the only son of Dutch born Dirk Cornelius Swart and Johanna (Boh) Swart. He came to Canada as a six-year-old along with his mother and his older sister Johanna Alida Swart aboard the SS *Nieuw Amsterdam*. They arrived in Halifax, NS where they joined his father who was already in Canada and working on Cheney Island, near Grand Manan Island, NB. His father was a baker. They were United Church members. At some point in Dirk's childhood, the family relocated to Calgary, AB. He attended Stanley Jones School and then Crescent Heights High School. Dirk played fastball, junior football with the North Side Junior Football team, and junior hockey with the Calgary Broncs. He had some experience in farming before a year's employment as a dairyman with Palm Dairy in Calgary. When he joined the Navy, he was living at 329 – 9 ½ Street NW, Calgary.

Swart enlisted in the Calgary Division Royal Canadian Volunteer Naval Reserve on 8 May 1941 as a level II Stoker (Stoker 2nd class). Stokers worked in the Engine Room of ships. He did his basic training in Calgary, followed by a posting on 12 August 1941 to HMCS *Naden* in Esquimalt, BC for further training. In December 1941, he completed advanced training in HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax where he was judged to be of "Very Good Character" and earned a "Superior Efficiency" rating. In January 1942, he was posted to the Royal Naval Barracks Chatham (HMS *Pembrook*) in England for two months before being posted to HMS *Partridge*. This ship was a newly commissioned British P-class destroyer. This was the first of many sea going postings in which he saw considerable wartime action in the Mediterranean, North Atlantic, and in Canadian waters.

After the ship's commissioning and workups, Stoker Swart and the crew of *Partridge* quickly saw action when they were deployed to Gibraltar for Operation CALENDAR in April 1942. The objective of CALENDAR was to deliver Supermarine Spitfire fighter aircraft to Malta. *Partridge* acted as an escort to the American aircraft carrier USS *Wasp* which carried the 47 spitfires to



**RAF Supermarine Spitfires of 603 Squadron
RAF on the deck of the aircraft carrier USS
Wasp on 19 April 1942
Photo: U.S. Navy National Museum of Naval
Aviation**

Malta; the spitfires were then flown off *Wasp* on 20 April 1942. The mission was a success with 46 of 47 spitfires being successfully delivered. Buoyed by this success, the allies conducted several more missions to deliver spitfire aircraft in this manner. *Partridge* worked as an escort for three more aircraft carrier-spitfire deliveries to Malta before being reassigned.

On 12 June 1942, *Partridge* was tasked as an escort for Operation HARPOON, one of two supply convoys planned to be run to Malta simultaneously from the west and east. *Partridge* departed with a convoy from Gibraltar and on 14 June 1942 the convoy came under heavy air attack from Italian and German aircraft. The following day, two Italian cruisers and five Italian destroyers joined in the attack on

the convoy. The British escorts attacked the more powerful Italian force while the convoy steered away from the hostilities. *Partridge* was hit three times by shells and was temporarily dead-in-the-water by steam leaks in the engine room, where Stoker Swart was working. A second escort, HMS *Bedouin*, was also heavily hit and immobilized, but the ships managed to drive off the Italian attack. *Partridge* and *Bedouin* could not keep up with the convoy and were ordered to return to Gibraltar. *Partridge* managed to restore some power and took *Bedouin* under tow. Later that day, however, the Italian cruisers again approached, forcing *Partridge* to abandon the attempt to tow *Bedouin*, which was sunk by an Italian torpedo bomber. *Partridge* was further damaged by air attacks but managed to survive and reached Gibraltar on 17 June 1942.

Partridge eventually returned to England where she underwent repairs until August 1942. Afterwards, she then returned to Gibraltar where she escorted convoys to Freetown in Sierra Leone. By the time she returned to the United Kingdom in October 1942 for maintenance and repair, Stoker Swart had earned his Auxiliary Watchkeeping Certificate, had met all qualifications for the rank of Stoker Petty Officer (actual promotion would come later), and he was transferred ashore. Initially, he was drafted to Royal Naval Barracks Devonport and then to HMCS *Niobe*, the shore base in Greenock, Scotland that housed Canadian sailors awaiting assignment to sea going vessels.

In April 1943 Stoker Swart was posted to the newly commissioned HMCS *Kootenay*. *Kootenay* was the former British D-class destroyer named HMS *Decoy* that had seen heavy action in the Mediterranean before being handed over to the Royal Canadian Navy. She went through refit as HMCS *Kootenay* with Stoker Swart aboard, followed by workups near Tobermory, Scotland before being assigned to the Mid Ocean Escort Force, Escort Group C-5. Stoker Swart was only

there for a month before being landed at HMCS *Stadacona*, Halifax, NS. There he earned his Stoker 1st Class rating.

In July 1943, he was posted to a Flower-class corvette, HMCS *Cobalt*, where he was rated Leading Stoker. During his time aboard, *Cobalt* was part of the Western Local Escort Force (WLEF), Escort Group EG-W-6. This involved escorting convoys to and from Canadian ports but also Boston and New York ports. Upon promotion to Petty Officer Stoker in June 1944, Swart was drafted to his final ship, HMCS *Shawinigan*. This ship was part of Escort Group - W3 on Atlantic convoy escort duty. It was on 24 November 1944 while on an escort of the ferry *Burgeo*, on the Sydney, NS - Port Aux Basques, Newfoundland crossings 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, Frederick-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 were 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 Uboat's reports the Shawinigan should lay at 47 degrees-34 minutes north-Latitude, 59 degrees-11 minutes West-Longitude." (Naval Museum of Manitoba)

Petty Officer Dirk Swart was 23 years old.

For his Service, Stoker Petty Officer Swart was awarded: the 1939-45 Star, Atlantic Star and Clasp, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother, Mrs. D.C. Swart was awarded the Memorial Cross.

Petty Office Swart is remembered on Panel 12 of the Halifax Memorial; the Granite Memorial in Shawinigan, QC; Crescent Heights High School Memorial Plaque; HMCS *Tecumseh* Memorial Plaque; Naval Museum of Alberta Memorial Plaque; Calgary Field of Crosses; and the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 456 at the Centre Block Houses of Parliament, Ottawa

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Sources:

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