

## Radio Artificer 5th Class William Steven Tupkal V-44303



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- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Blairmore AB, 24 November 1921**
- **Enlisted: Calgary Division RCNVR, 31 July 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Switchboard Operator, BCATP Station, High River**
- **Death: Died of tubercular meningitis contracted on Naval Service on 19 July 1944**
- **Buried: High River (Highwood) Cemetery, Plot 43. Range R.**
- **Commemorated: Calgary Field of Crosses; the Highwood Memorial Centre at High River, AB; the memorial plaque at HMCS *Tecumseh*; and the Naval Museum of Alberta memorial plaque**

William Steven Tupkal was born in Blairmore, AB on 24 November 1921. His parents were Steve Tupkal (1889 - 1970) and Mary Ann (Kohout) Tupkal (1901 - 1989). Steve was probably born in the Czech Republic, but some documents place his birth in Romania and others in Yugoslavia. He arrived in Canada in 1907. In 1921, he was living in the Crowsnest Pass area in southwestern Alberta. The Crowsnest was a major coal-producing area, and it is likely that he was working in that industry. He often listed his profession as a carpenter, but he also worked as a teamster. Mary Ann Kohout was born in Prague, Czech Republic. The couple were married in Coleman, AB in 1921. William was born in November 1921 and his brother James was born in nearby Blairmore in 1924.

William was a gifted athlete and an intelligent young man. His brother, James Tupkal, was also in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) and was an equally talented athlete. There are dozens of *Calgary Herald* articles describing the hockey, rugby, softball, and baseball teams for which they played. The newspaper's style in identifying young athletes only used their surnames, so it is difficult to know about which brother was being written.

The family moved to High River in 1928 and this is where the boys attended school and played sports. Steve worked for the Town of High River and was the town's teamster. The family was Roman Catholic.

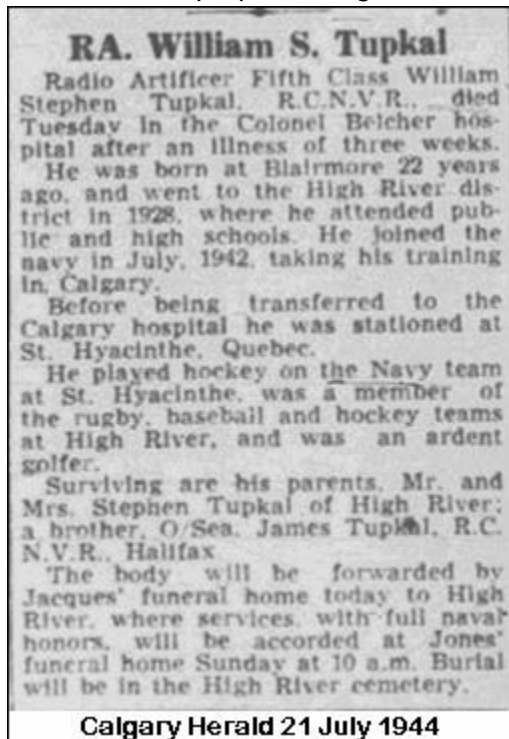
In addition to playing on the softball, rugby, and hockey teams, William was also an ardent golfer. He finished high school in 1939. He worked as an apprentice electrician for six months. Later he worked as the switchboard operator at the High River Flight Training School, part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Program (BCATP).

William enlisted in the RCNVR as an Ordinary Seaman at HMCS *Tecumseh* in Calgary on 31 July 1942. His physical description was 5 feet 7 inches tall, with brown hair, and blue eyes. He was signed up as "Hostilities Only". He was on Divisional strength at HMCS *Tecumseh* until November 1942, at which time he was called up to Active Service. Before he left HMCS *Tecumseh* he wrote the RCN Educational Test, scoring a mark good enough to academically qualify as a Petty Officer.

In January 1943, Ordinary Seaman Tupkal was sent to HMCS *York* in Toronto to take the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) Mechanical Training course. His next stop was Edmonton where he was attached to HMCS *Nonsuch*. The Navy had an educational agreement with the University of Alberta to provide radio theory and technical training to RCN personnel.

Ordinary Seaman Tupkal completed radio artificer training successfully and was designated a Radio Artificer 5<sup>th</sup> Class in July 1943. The Radio Artificer (RA) program was created in March 1943. A Radio Artificer's job was to maintain and repair radio and radar equipment. Prior to this, the sailors who operated this equipment were expected to also do the maintenance work. Artificers received better pay and allowance for their highly technical knowledge. Radio Artificer Class 5 equated to a Leading Seaman rank; Classes 3 and 4 equated to the Petty Officer rank, while Classes 1 and 2 were equivalents to the Chief Petty Officer rank.

In August 1943, Radio Artificer Tupkal was sent to Ottawa. He was attached to HMCS *Bytown*, which was an administrative command. RCN personnel assigned to HMCS *Bytown* for pay and administrative purposes might be working at Naval Service Headquarters (NSHQ), another Navy facility or taking courses at civilian schools in the area.



Radio Artificer Tupkal was transferred to HMCS *St Hyacinthe* in October 1943. The base was about 50 km east of Montreal. HMCS *St Hyacinthe* was established as the RCN's school for the communications trades: Visual Signalmen, Wireless Telegraphists, Coders, Radar Operators, and Radio Artificers. The training for Radio Artificers was transferred to HMCS *St Hyacinthe* from the civilian schools. With the introduction of more advanced radio and radar equipment into an ever-expanding fleet, the Navy's target was to train 500 Radio Artificers. Instruction took place day and night.

It is not clear from his service records if Radio Artificer Tupkal was taking courses or helping to instruct new Radio Artificers. He was there until June 1944, which would seem to make it more likely that he was in an instructing or support role. He played on the base's hockey team.

On 25 June 1944, Radio Artificer 5<sup>th</sup> Class William Tupkal was transferred back to HMCS *Tecumseh* in Calgary and admitted to Colonel Belcher Veteran's

Hospital. The service records are not clear, but it is most likely he was home on leave when he became ill. He was diagnosed with tubercular meningitis and died on 19 July 1944. At the time of

William's death, his brother James was serving as an Ordinary Seaman at HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax, NS.

Radio Artificer 5<sup>th</sup> Class William Steven Tupkal was 22 years old when he died.

For his service, Radio Artificer 5<sup>th</sup> Class William Steven Tupkal was awarded: the War Medal and the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal. His mother Mary Tupkal was presented with the Memorial Cross.

Radio Artificer 5<sup>th</sup> Class William Steven Tupkal was buried with full Naval Honours in the Highwood Cemetery in High River, AB Plot 43. Range R. His gravestone reads, "In Loving Memory. Loved By All Who Knew Him".

Radio Artificer 5<sup>th</sup> Class William Steven Tupkal is commemorated in the Calgary Field of Crosses; the Highwood Memorial Centre at High River, AB; the memorial plaque at HMCS *Tecumseh*; the Naval Museum of Alberta memorial plaque; and in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 465, at the Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa.

**Prepared By:**

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**Sources:**

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission – profile for William Steven Tupkal
- Library and Archives Canada Service via Ancestry.com – record for military service for William Steven Tupkal
- Ancestry.com for family information
- ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *Calgary Herald*
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial website
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- The Naval Service of Canada – Activities on Shore During the Second World War, Gilbert Norman Tucker, 1952,
- CSVC story for RA3 Ronald Miller by Greg McKenzie
- CSVC story for RA5 Albert King by John Dalzell