

## Wireless Telegraphist (Radar) 3rd Class Arthur John Whitehead V-31653



- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Moose Jaw SK, 8 January 1922**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Queen*, 26 March 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Plumber's Helper, Unemployed**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Shawinigan* was torpedoed and sank on 25 November 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 11; Memorial in the City of Shawinigan; Stained Glass window in the Chapel at Canadian Forces Base Halifax and Whitehead Lake in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory**

Do you have a photo of Telegraphist Arthur John Whitehead that you can share? Please submit to [CSV.CVMC@gmail.com](mailto:CSV.CVMC@gmail.com)

Arthur John Whitehead was the second of three sons born to Lilian Whitehead and Robert Whitehead on 8 January 1922 in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. His brothers George and Robert were born in 1920 and 1931 respectively. Arthur's parents were both born in England, and they were married in County Kent, England in 1919. It is not clear when they emigrated to Canada although Arthur's personnel file indicates that his older brother George was born in Moose Jaw as well.

Moose Jaw is located about 40 miles west of Regina at the confluence of the Moose Jaw River and Thunder Creek. There are two theories as to where it got its name. The first theory is that it is the anglicized version of the Plains Cree expression "*moscâstani-sîpiy*" meaning "a warm place by the river". The second is that it is the anglicized version of the Plains Cree expression "*moose gaw*" meaning "warm breezes". The valley created by the confluence and the Coteau Hills creates a natural shelter against cold winds. In 1881 the site was chosen as a division point for the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) because of the ample water supply available for steam locomotives. By 1941 the population of Moose Jaw was 20,496.

The Moose Jaw Henderson's Directory indicates that Robert Sr. was employed at the CPR station responsible for baggage in 1921 and that the family lived in a modest house within walking distance of the railway station. The directory also indicates that Robert remained employed by the CPR in the same position into the 1950s. His address also remained the same. Arthur attended nearby William Grayson Public School from grade 1 to 7. He was then enrolled in a 6

month long pre-vocational course followed by a three-year wood-working course at the Moose Jaw Technical High School (later to be called Albert E. Peacock Technical High School). In 1940 at age 18 he left school and found work as a plumber's helper with a local plumbing and heating firm. He was unemployed for a short time before he enlisted in the Regina Division (HMCS *Queen*) of the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) on 26 March 1942. When sworn in as an Ordinary Seaman, Arthur was 5 feet 8 ¼ inches tall, weighed 145 pounds, with brown hair, blue eyes and a fair complexion. His brother George enlisted in the Canadian Army and served overseas.

Arthur remained in *Queen* attending to administrative tasks and undergoing basic training until 8 November 1942. He was then drafted to HMCS *Naden* in Esquimalt, British Columbia where he completed new entry training on 14 January 1943. While in *Naden* he was granted leave to return to Moose Jaw to marry Bertha on 27 January 1943. He then returned to *Naden* where he remained until 8 February when he was drafted to HMCS *Chatham* in Prince Rupert, British Columbia. *Chatham* was a routing centre for convoys and patrols along the northern British Columbia coast.

While serving in *Chatham*, Arthur was promoted to Able Seaman on 26 March. Here his personnel file becomes vague. What is known, however, is that he returned to *Naden* administratively on 28 April and travelled by train to HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax, NS arriving there on 12 May 1943. He was transferred from the Seaman Branch to the Communications Branch and placed on a Wireless Telegraphist (Radar) course which provided instruction in the operation of radars. (Note: At the beginning of the War, technological innovations entered the realm of Naval warfare. It appeared that any new piece of equipment that was contained in a metal box with knobs and dials on the outside and vacuum tubes and wires on the inside was placed in the domain of the Communications Branch.)

On 31 May 1943, he was rated Wireless Telegraphist (Radar) 3rd Class and Radio Direction Finder (RDF) 2<sup>nd</sup> Class. Arthur remained in *Stadacona* until 5 July 1943 when he was drafted to HMCS *Hamilton*, and Arthur became a father with the birth of son Edwin on 28 July 1943 in Moose Jaw.

Commissioned as USS *Kalk*, *Hamilton* was an old ship. She served in the United States Navy (USN) during World War I and was laid up in 1922. Re-commissioned in the USN in June 1940, she served briefly with the Neutrality Patrol in the Atlantic before being transferred to the Royal Navy at Halifax on 23 September 1940 and re-commissioned as HMS *Hamilton*. In July 1941 she was transferred to the Royal Canadian Navy as HMCS *Hamilton*. She worked as a convoy escort along the coast of Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and US Atlantic for two years before being allocated to HMCS *Cornwallis* as a training ship in August 1943.



HMCS Hamilton (I24). Source: Government of Canada

Arthur served in *Hamilton* until 18 April 1944. During that time, *Hamilton* performed uneventful training cruises primarily in the Bay of Fundy. Arthur returned to the manning pool at *Stadacona* on 19 April 1944. He was drafted to HMCS *Shawinigan* on 6 June 1944.

HMCS *Shawinigan* (K136) was a Flower-class corvette commissioned on 19 September 1941, at Quebec City, 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 Arthur joined her, *Shawinigan* was undergoing a refit in Liverpool, NS. On completion of the refit in June, she was transferred to Escort Group W-2 and proceeded to Bermuda to work up. On completion of work-ups *Shawinigan*, as a member of Escort Group W-2, provided, among other services, escort to ferries sailing from Sydney, Nova Scotia.



On 24 November 1944, *Shawinigan* sailed in company with the American cutter, USCGC *Sassafras*, together they were tasked with escorting 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 she then departed on an independent anti-submarine patrol. At 0230 on 25 November, she was torpedoed by the U-boat 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. The entire crew of ninety-one, including Wireless Telegraphist 3rd Class (Radar) Arthur John Whitehead (age: 22), perished.

Arthur 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. Walter is commemorated on Panel 11 Halifax Memorial; and in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, page 476, at the Centre Block of Parliament, Ottawa. Whitehead Lake (Lat 54° 49'N Long 101° 54'W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory.

For his service, Wireless Telegraphist 3rd Class (Radar) Arthur John Whitehead was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. Both his mother, Lilian, and his widow, Bertha, were awarded the Memorial Cross.

As 1945 progressed, Bertha, a widow at 21 years, busied herself in settling Arthur's estate and carried on raising their infant son, Edwin, alone.

**Prepared By:**

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