

## ANDERSON, William John (#V/19542)

William (“Bill”) Anderson served aboard one of the sturdy little “work horses” of the Royal Canadian Navy, one of Canada’s busiest ships in the Battle of the Atlantic. Tragically, he lost his life off the east coast of Canada six months before the war ended to what British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said was “... the only thing that ever really frightened me during the war...”

He was born in Sarnia on May 20, 1921, the youngest son of Edward James and Mary R. Anderson of 111 Alfred Street, Sarnia. His parents were married in Sarnia on May 29, 1910 and in the next decade would have five children. One of their children, Kenneth Anderson, passed away in June 1914 at the age of 5 months. Surviving William after the war were his two brothers--Stanley C., serving as a patrolman in the R.C.N.V.R. in Halifax, and Edwin J., in St. Thomas, Ontario—as well as and sisters, Mrs. Margaret Olenuik of St. Catharines, and Eileen A. Anderson in Sarnia. William attended St. Patrick’s High School and Sarnia Collegiate Institute and was a member of St. Joseph’s Catholic Parish. Prior to enlisting, William had been a machine operator employed with Electric Auto-Lite Limited in Sarnia for approximately one year.

On August 28, 1941, the 20-year-old William Anderson enlisted in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) in Windsor, Ontario. He stood six feet tall, had blue eyes and black hair, was single, and resided on Alfred Street with his parents at the time. After initially being posted to Windsor Division (*HMCS Hunter*) as an Ordinary Seaman, he was transferred to St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, where in May 1942, he would celebrate his 21st birthday while attending naval school. He would continue his naval training at several HMCS bases and ships including *Stadacona*, *Hochelaga*, *Kentville*, *Fort Ramsay*, and *HMCS Toronto*. In April of 1944, William would return to Sarnia on a nine-day leave to visit his family and friends, the first furlough he had in 20 months. On June 9, 1944 William Anderson of the RCNVR would become a member of the corvette *HMCS Shawinigan*, with the rank of Leading Coder.

Beginning on the opening day of the Second World War, the **Battle of the Atlantic** would be the longest continuous campaign of the war, and one in which Canada played a central role. The Royal Canadian Navy, along with the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and Canada’s Merchant Navy, played a vital role in defending the country’s eastern coast and escorting convoys of ships carrying men and essential machinery, arms, fuel and basic resources between North America and Europe.

The *HMCS Shawinigan (K136)* was a Flower-class corvette, originally designed to accommodate a standard crew of less than fifty. Commissioned on September 19, 1941 at Quebec City, it was one of the sturdy little “work horses” of the RCN and was to become the 9th corvette and 19th Canadian warship lost in the war. She was in the navy’s convoy escort and patrol fleet. Her sea miles totaled more than 150 000, and she had been one of the busiest vessels of her class, escorting convoy runs in the Atlantic Ocean and off the east coast of Canada. Few ships of her class spent more time at sea during the period when German U-boats were most active in the North Atlantic. During the two years prior to her sinking, she did not lose a ship under her charge. Men who served aboard her had been acclaimed for fighting efficiency, for rescue work and attacks on enemy U-boats. She escorted hundreds of thousands of vital war supplies and shipping to Allied ports.



Flower Class Corvette *HMCS Shawinigan K136*

On November 24, 1944, the *HMCS Shawinigan* and a United States Coast Guard Cutter *Sassafrass* escorted the ferry *Burgeo* from Sydney, Nova Scotia to Port aux Basques, Newfoundland. Ferries on this route were always escorted after the tragic loss of the passenger ferry *SS Caribou* two years earlier. In mid-October of

1942, the *Caribou* had been torpedoed on the same route and 136 lives were lost, including ten children. In November 1944, the three ships made an uneventful crossing to Port aux Basques, at which time the *Shawinigan* detached to continue doing an independent anti-submarine patrol in the area. The *Shawinigan* was scheduled to rendezvous with the *Burgeo* the following morning for the return to Cape Breton. But the *Shawinigan* never made it.

On that fateful November 24 moonlit night, the *Shawinigan* maintained radio silence while performing anti-submarine patrol in the Cabot Strait between Newfoundland and Cape Breton Island. Nearby, German U-boat *U-1228* was trying to repair a faulty snorkel without success and had decided to return to Germany for repairs. It was now 9:30 p.m. As soon as *U-1228* started her return route into the Atlantic, she sighted the *Shawinigan*. In its first recorded attack on enemy shipping, *U-1228* fired a single T-5 Gnat torpedo that struck the corvette in the stern.

Four minutes after the attack, the *Shawinigan*, with its entire crew, disappeared in a plume of frigid Atlantic water and a shower of sparks. The ship had no time to transmit any messages and authorities later speculated that the *Shawinigan's* depth charges exploded as she sank, adding to the destruction. The next morning, the *Burgeo* left Port aux Basques on schedule in the fog but could not find the *Shawinigan*. They maintained radio silence and did not inform command of *Shawinigan's* failure to appear.

Unescorted, the *Burgeo* made for Sydney and arrived on November 25 at 6 pm. Suspecting something had happened to *Shawinigan*, naval officers in Sydney ordered an air and sea search for the missing corvette, but bad weather put a stop to much of that. A day or so later, searching ships came upon fragments of wreckage, an empty Carley float and six bodies, which were all that remained to indicate what had happened to the *Shawinigan*.

A third of *Shawinigan's* crew were twenty years old or younger and no crewmember survived the tragic sinking. Seven officers and 84 crew members, including William Anderson, were lost. It is impossible to record exactly what happened to *Shawinigan* during her final moments. Some sailors were probably killed instantly by the horrific explosion; others inevitably died in the icy water as the ship sank. Those fortunate enough to get into their life vests and survive the explosion would later die in the freezing North Atlantic.

The *Shawinigan* was one of only three RCN ships lost with all hands. Twenty-seven-year-old Petty Officer Stoker Michael Paithowski, another Sarnian, was also on board and perished in the sinking. His name is also inscribed on the Sarnia cenotaph and is included in this Project.

In late November of 1944, parents Edward and Mary Anderson in Sarnia would receive a telegram from the Department of National Defence informing them that their son, LEADING CODER WILLIAM J. ANDERSON HAS BEEN REPORTED MISSING AT SEA. The message contained no other information and intimated that a letter would follow. Mary had received a letter from her son William only one week prior, in which he had stated that he was well and getting along O.K.

On December 7, 1944, in a dispatch from Ottawa, the Hon. Angus L. Macdonald, Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, announced the loss of the *H.M.C.S. Shawinigan*, while on operational duty in the North Atlantic. He gave no details but said the ship's complement had been lost and five bodies have been recovered and identified. It was announced locally that two Sarnia seamen, William Anderson and Michael Paithowski, were members of the crew of the *Shawinigan* and were reported missing. In December 1944, parents Edward and Mary Anderson received a letter from the Secretary of the Naval Board. A portion of it reads as follows:

*Dear Mr. Anderson,*

*Further to my letter of the 29th of November, 1944, details of the disaster in which your son has been reported missing are now being released. H.M.C.S. "SHAWINIGAN", a Royal Canadian Navy corvette, was lost while on operational duty at sea. Seven officers, including her Captain, Lieutenant W.J. Jones, R.C.N.R., and seventy-eight ratings are missing. The bodies of five other ratings have been recovered and identified. There are no known survivors. It is requested that you will regard this information as confidential until an official announcement is made. May I again express sincere sympathy with you in your anxiety.*



L/Coder William John Anderson



Crew of the *Shawinigan* 1944

In mid-February of 1945, parents Edward and Mary Anderson in Sarnia would receive a telegram from Ottawa informing them that their son, LEADING CODER WILLIAM J. ANDERSON WHO WAS REPORTED MISSING AT SEA LAST NOVEMBER IS OFFICIALLY PRESUMED LOST. Later, the Navy would inform the Anderson family that William Anderson was officially recorded as, *Missing, presumed dead, when the ship in which he was serving, H.M.C.S. 'Shawinigan' was lost while on operational duty at sea.* It was understood that William's mother, Mary, would receive the Memorial Cross in the near future.

In July 1945, parents Edward and Mary Anderson received a War Service Gratuity payment of \$442.73 for the loss of their son. In August 1945, they received another letter from the Secretary of the Naval Board.

*Dear Mr. Anderson:*

*Further to my letter of the 15th of February, 1945, the Department is now able to release additional information regarding the loss of your son's ship and I am accordingly passing on the following particulars which will, no doubt, be of interest to you.*

*H.M.C.S. "SHAWINIGAN" sailed from Sydney, N.S., on the 24th of November, 1944, to escort a merchant ship to Port Aux Basques, Newfoundland, and arrived off Port Aux Basque that night. In accordance with orders she was then to carry out a patrol in the area for the duration of the night, after which she was to meet the same merchant ship the next morning and return with her to Sydney.*

*The merchant ship arrived in Sydney unescorted on the night of the 25th of November and after it was ascertained that "Shawinigan" had not appeared at the designated rendezvous to provide escort as instructed, searches were instituted and "Shawinigan" was discovered to be missing.*

*It was the opinion of the Department at the time that the ship had been torpedoed by an enemy submarine during the night of the 24th/25th of November, 1944, as submarines were known to be operating in the area; and this has since been confirmed from German evidence. Although no survivors were found, a few bodies were recovered by later searches, due to tidal movements, some distance from the area in which "Shawinigan" was known to be operating. As a result, the position of the sinking can not be exactly ascertained, although from German evidence and the Department's computation, it is estimated to be in the vicinity of the three mile limit off Channel Head, near Port Aux Basques, Newfoundland.*

It was not until after the war ended and *U-1228* surrendered, that the details of what had happened to the *Shawinigan* that night were uncovered. When the U-boat commander was interrogated in May 1945, he stated the ship sank quickly, followed by two underwater explosions. He saw no survivors in the water. Fifty-three years after the sinking, on June 14, 1997, at Trois Rivières, Quebec, the Prime Minister of Canada Jean Chrétien and his wife would take part in a Royal Canadian Navy ceremony to officially commission the new *HMCS Shawinigan (704)*. A memorial monument dedicated to the 91 lost was also unveiled. Twenty-three-year-old William Anderson has no known grave. He is memorialized on the Halifax Memorial, Nova Scotia, Canada, Panel 12.

From: *The Sarnia War Remembrance Project*, by Tom Slater