

*No Picture
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William Leonard Mercer
Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland)
Royal Navy
Service No. P/JX181690
World War II

Born: 31 Aug 1915

Died: 14 Jun 1978

Place of Birth: Bay Roberts, Conception Bay, Newfoundland

Parents: Jonathan “John” and Mary (Bishop) Mercer

The 1921 Newfoundland general census shows the Mercer family living in Bay Roberts. Parents John and Mary are 35 and 25 years old, respectively. Their three children range in age from six to three. William is the oldest at 6, followed by Gladys at 5 and Susie age 3.

1935 finds the family still at Bay Roberts but the number on children has increased to

eight, according to census entries. William is 19, Gladys is 15, John is 12, Victor 11, Robert 8, Mary 6, Wildred 3, and Leah is less than a year old. There is no entry for Susie.

In the fall of 1939, William made his way to St. John’s and enlisted in the Royal Naval Reserve of Newfoundland. This is a best guess scenario, but it fits with him being part of the 3rd Naval Contingent to go overseas from Newfoundland since that contingent of 175 men departed St. John’s on the 14th of January 1940 and arrived ten days later, January 34th at Liverpool England. The troopship was the RMS Newfoundland.



HMHS Newfoundland

“HMHS Newfoundland was a British Royal Mail Ship that was requisitioned as a hospital ship in the World War II. She was sunk in 1943 in a Luftwaffe attack off southern Italy. At that point she was one of three ships brightly illuminated, bearing standard Red Cross markings as hospital ships, which was her function, so due protection under the Geneva Convention.”

17 October 1943 finds William on board the SS Townshend arriving in port at New York, USA, having departed St. John’s, Newfoundland on October 5th, 1943. William is passenger #12 on the ships’ list.

He is 28, single and described as being 5' 7" tall, with brown hair, blue eyes and of fair complexion. He is listed as a naval seaman.

From his Royal Navy service number P/JX181690 more information is available. It seems the "P" designated William's home port division of Portsmouth, England. The "J" indicates that he was a seaman.

In 1945, William is now thirty (30) and back home with his parents and four other siblings living in Bay Roberts.

In April 1949, William married Ruby Florence Richards of St. John's. Together, they would have two children of record, Paul who died quite young and Glenda Ruby Jean. There were more children but unable to confirm the names.

William died in June 1978 and is buried at Topsail in the Topsail United Cemetery there.

From Bay Roberts Guardian – 14 Jun 1941

BAY ROBERTS, NEW

HOME ON LEAVE

Wm. L. Mercer, A.B., of H.M. Navy arrived home on 30-days' leave on Monday last. Bill went overseas with the 3rd naval contingent in January, 1940, and but for a few weeks in barracks he has been to sea continuously ever since. He has had some very exciting experiences since leaving here, the main event being the torpedoing of H.M.S. Laurentic last fall, on which himself and a number of other boys from this town were shipmates. A.B. Roy B. McLeod was reported missing in that action.

Bill's many friends here are glad to see him looking so well. He says he is having a fine time, and although at times the life is a bit tough, yet on the whole he speaks in the highest terms of the British Navy and seamen.

Before returning to duty he intends visiting friends at Bell Island and elsewhere.

From Bay Roberts Guardian – 12 July 1941

A.B. William L. Mercer, of H.M. Navy, left here last week to rejoin his ship, after spending a very pleasant leave here with his parents. He also visited friends on Bell Island. He wishes to express his deep appreciation and thanks to all who in any way contributed to make his holiday a happy one.