



William R. Dawe

**Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland)
Service No. 1859X**

World War I

Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland)

Royal Navy

Service No. D/JX173623

World War II

Born: 17 Mar 1897

Birth Place: Bay Roberts, Newfoundland

Parents: Samuel and Sarah Dawe

William enlisted in the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) in August 1915. He was eighteen (18) at the time.

His official service record shows that he served a total of three years seven months (3 years and 7 months) from 18 Aug 1915 to 24 Mar 1919.

William's service record contains the following hand written entries by date and ship he served on at that time while in the Royal Navy:

1. 18 Aug 1915 – 22 Sep 1915: HMS Calypso (Training vessel)
2. 23 Sep 1915 – 09 Jul 1916: HMS Pembroke 1
3. 10 Jul 1916 – 30 Sep 1916: HMS President 111
4. 01 Oct 1916 – 17 Mar 1917: HMS Pembroke 1
5. 18 Mar 17 – 09 Dec 17: HMS Briton
6. 10 Dec 1917 – 20 Dec 1918: HMCS Niobe
7. 21 Dec 1918 – 24 Mar 1919: HMS Briton

William was assigned to the RCN (Royal Canadian Navy):

1. 10 Dec 1917 – 30 Apr 1918: HMCS Stadacona
2. 01 May 1918 – 30 Nov 1918: HMCS Guelph
3. 01 Dec 1918 – 20 Dec 1918: HMCS Niobe

As if William's full time service wasn't enough, he was married to Minnie Rosamund Edgecombe in the midst of the war at St. John's on October 20th, 1917. They would have eight (8) children in 12 twelve years.

The 1921 Newfoundland General census shows William and Minnie living in St. John's East on Howe Place. They have two (2) children. Herbert Leslie age 2 and William R. Jr. just 5 months old.

At the next census in 1935, the Dawe's are still in St. John's and the family has now expanded to a total of eight (8) children:

Herbert Leslie 16, William 14, Emma 12, Ethel 10, Ronald 9, Cecil 6, Harry 5 and Gilbert 2.

Continuing to live in St. John's, the 1945 census has William at 49, Minnie at 45 and there are just six (6) children at home with them now.

William remained very active in post-war service as part of the Great War Veterans Association of Newfoundland and a staunch advocate for veterans and their families.

Then WW II came about, and wouldn't you know it, William again enlisted in the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) and was in fact part of the 1st Naval Draft on 27 November 1939.

Following his release at the end of WW II, William continued his work on behalf of veterans, eventually becoming the President of GWVA of Newfoundland.

On the 10th of June 1948 he was decorated for his service and his tireless work for veterans and their families by the British Government with the Order of the British Empire (OBE) medal.



William passed away on May 26th, 1986, at the age of 92. He is buried in St. John's at the Anglican Cemetery on Forest Road.

A true Newfoundland hero, William not only fought in 2 world wars for King and country but spent the better part of his life advocating for those who served in a tireless effort to ensure both they and their families were looked after.

This work continues to this day and is the founding principle of the Royal Canadian Legion.

The item below is a detailed account written by William in his war diary. It recalls a real live naval encounter between his ship, the HMS Hesperus and a German U-boat. It is the kind of stuff that one might see in a Hollywood war movie. It is well worth the read and is quite detailed. The picture below of the Hesperus limping into port with its bent bow provides ample proof of the story.

Diary Entry:

"HMS Hesperus was a hero class destroyer that served in the North Atlantic Campaign of WWII and is responsible for the sinking of five German U-boats. The Hesperus Diary, Boxing Day Dec. 26th, 1942, East Bound At 12:30 pm (Venessa) destroyer, screening astern of convoy, sighted an object on the horizon about nine miles astern. She informed us and together we raced at full speed towards the spot. The sea was quite calm and weather although very cold was quite clear. Upon reaching the estimated spot nothing could be seen of the object and together we commenced to search. At 1:45 we picked up an echo on our asdic's, (under water detector) and dropped two patterns of ten charges. Echo faded and we continued the hunt. A little later V picked up an echo and she too made two attacks. At 3:30 pm we sighted a periscope on starboard beam about 45 yds away. We turned at full speed and it disappeared. Action stations were sounded off. Up until 3:30 when the alarm bells sounded, I was asleep on the mess deck, after dinner I laid down for a nap. I was wakened twice to the thumping of depth charges but of course did not bother to get up. At 3:30 everyone jumped to life. As I pulled on my sea boots someone remarked that there was a U boat in the vicinity. Another said, "what again?" and we all laughed. U-boat near was such an old story and we had made so many seemingly unsuccessful depth charge attacks that they were almost monotonous. However, we had to go see what was going on. I took up my action stations as starboard lookout on the bridge. Just as I arrived, we dropped a pattern of 14 d. charges and the ship jumped and shook as they exploded throwing a high column of water up in the air. It was beginning to grow dark at this time: at 4:30 it was dark with no moon, although the sky was clear One of the chaps told me he had seen a periscope at 3:30 so I knew this was no uncertain attack. At 7:15 we were still staring out over the water in the hopes of catching sight of the wake of the periscope or torpedo track. I was very tired having been in one position for nearly four hours: my eyes were heavy and seemed to be burning out of my head. I was pitying the depth charge party as some of them were on since noon having had the afternoon watch and they were still reloading and firing the traps and throwers. We were keeping in touch with V all the time by radio-telephone. At 7:30 she told us that a U-boat had surfaced on her starboard bow and that she was about to ram. (I could just see V on our starboard beam about 100 yds. away). We heard her crew cheering and she reported she had rammed the U-boat. We had turned towards V to see what was going on and as I thought to picking up survivors, when suddenly V opened fire with all her guns and we seemed to be in her line of sight for some of her shell whistled quite close at sea level and some we thought had even passed through our rigging. Our captain told her to ease fire because of this. At the same time a dark object looming up very close on our starboard bow. I shouted, "U-boat Green 20 sir", but the captain had already seen her, he ordered" on small searchlight" and "all guns ready". In the beam of the 10 inch searchlight, we could see the U-boat quite plainly. She looked terribly large and appeared to be painted a silver color for she gleamed brightly in the light. She was speeding

along at about 18 knots. Apparently, the V had only struck her a glancing blow. The crew were all packed in the conning tower; we could see them waving handkerchiefs and they were shouting what sounded like "Kamerad". However, the captain was taking no chances on her getting away and shouted to the gunnery officer "give them hell"! And at once every gun was firing at the conning tower. We could hear the shells as they hit against the steel hull and see the tracer shells of our small guns as they ploughed through the mass of men there. I saw one man jump over into the water. There were two standing by her gun, but they made no attempt to return our fire. Seeing that the U-boat was not slowing down the Capt. Ceased fire and ordered "Stand by to ram" bringing the ship around in a small circle, so that she was directly ahead of us, and rapidly drawing nearer. Everyone except the Captain and the gunnery officer were lying flat on their stomachs which was the proper position for ramming stations. I got down for an instant but stood up before we struck, I wanted to see what was going on. When I stood up, I had a fleeting glance of a crowd of men staring up at our bridge and saw two tumble over into the water. I braced myself for the shock and then Crash!!! What a bump! I lost my grip and went to my knees bumping my chin on the way down on a voice-pipe. A second before we were speeding at 28 knots, but now we were stopped. The boys were on their feet again now and it was our turn to cheer. The Capt. went astern to clear our bows of the wreckage. The U-boat had broke in two, we had hit her fair and square in the conning tower."



HMS Hesperus arriving in port with its bent bow.