

Edgar Arthur Charman (1912-1945)

When I saw the photo on the right, I got a little curious.
A grave at the Canadian Cemetery in Holten for someone of
the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserves?

Two questions came to my mind:

1. What happened that a Navy man was buried in Holten?
2. What was the cause of his death on September 2, 1945?

Of course I knew that after Victory Europe Day there were
still casualties due to various causes, but also in September
1945?



During guided tours at the cemetery in Holten, the guides visit various graves and an
explanation is given about the victim.

The criteria for their choice is unknown to me.

I have already stated the reasons for my choice above: answers for my questions.
Since the service records of the war victims can be found on the internet, I started my
search for information from behind my laptop.

In this column I share with you the data I found.



First the personal details:

Edgar Arthur Charman, born November 4, 1912 in
Montreal, Quebec.

His father had already died in October 1918, but his
mother was still alive.

I have not been able to find the information about his
brother, who served as a sergeant in an infantry regiment
in WW2.

He himself was married on February 22, 1936 to Wanda
Eva Charman, née: Riley.

On January 2, 1942, their family was expanded with twins:
their son was named Ronald Lawrence Edgar, their daughter was registered as: Patricia Gail
Wander.

Edgar Arthur Charman enlisted in the Reserves of the Royal Canadian Navy on January 10,
1941.

No special reasons for this were mentioned. He was not unemployed because his form states
that he was an "advertising manager" for the Materials Division of Canadian General Electric
in Montreal.

He had already served his country from July 29, 1940 to January 9, 1941 as a trooper with the 3rd Canadian Motorcycle Regiment.

He was, more or less, "sent out" from that regiment..

The reason given is that it is believed that it is not likely he will become an "efficient soldier".

So, the next day he signed up with the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserves.

Personal description on enrolment:

Approx. 1.80 m tall, dark hair and gray eyes.

Special features: scar on his forehead between the eyes and a scar on the right side of the upper lip.

His physical condition was good. It is also noteworthy that he spoke both English and French.

Writer [all with star with W in centre]:



Chief Petty Officer Writer
Petty Officer Writer
Leading Writer
Writer
Writer Probationer
Boy Writer

He was appointed as: "Writer".

Here on the left you see the badge.

It is immediately clear that he was not classified in the 'lowest rank'.

It is difficult to judge whether the assessment made by the Motorcycle Regiment was correct. It seems that Charman was better placed in the naval reserves.

On May 19, 1942, after just over a year, he was promoted to "Leading-Writer".

Under the note 'character' he scores 'very good' and under 'efficiency' is stated: 'satisfactory'.



HMCS Cornwallis

Between January 1941 and May 1942, there are some ambiguities in his records.

It is clear that he was assigned to division headquarters until October 1941, with the rank of Assistant to Leading Writer.

The next annotation stated that he was assigned as 'Writer' on HMCS Cornwallis on 12 May 1942.

M.F.M. 7 A
1936-51-28 (1126)
11 G. 5771-28-1022

**ACTIVE SERVICE
CANADIAN FORCE
DISCHARGE CERTIFICATE**

This is to Certify that No. D. 3354 (Rank) Trooper.
Name (in full) Edgar Arthur CHARMAN ----- enlisted in
the ACTIVE SERVICE 3rd. Canadian Motorcycle Regiment, A.F.,
CANADIAN FORCE at Montreal, Que. on the twenty-ninth
day of July 19 41.
He served in 3rd. Canadian Motorcycle Regiment, A.F.
and is now discharged from the service by reason of Not likely to become an efficient
soldier. (Authority: Routine Order No. 37, Para. 5.)

THE DESCRIPTION OF THIS SOLDIER on the DATE below is as follows:--

Age 29	Marks or Scars
Height 5 feet, 10½ inches.	Scar upper lip. Scar right hand.
Complexion Fair.	
Eyes Grey.	
Hair Black.	Conduct: Good 6/8

Signature of Soldier: *E. Charman*
Date of Discharge 9th. January 1941.
Station: _____
Issuing Officer: (C. P. SMITH) Lt.-Colonel
Officer Commanding



HMSC Cornwallis was not a sea-going vessel but a 'Shore Establishment' in Halifax.

Then follows an annotation that things have been reversed (memo 20-07-1942).

The next note: he was assigned, as Leading Writer, to HMCS Bytown.

HMCS Bytown was called a "depot ship" but was not a real ship either.

HMCS Bytown was established to pay RCN personnel in Ottawa.

All uniformed personnel had to be booked on a ship for accounting purposes, even if they were employed by a shore-based establishment.

This was a tradition carried over from the Royal Navy and these 'ships' were referred to as 'stone frigates'.

HMCS Bytown served in this role for the Naval Service Headquarters (NSHQ) and the Ottawa Half-Company.

That destination remained for Charman until December 1, 1942.

Then he was transferred to:
HMCS York C.O.R.D.

This too was a "stone frigate" for the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve Division (NRD) in Toronto.

The unit was established in 1942 to replace the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve Half Company.

The addition C.O.R.D. stands for Commanding Officers Reserve Divisions.

So it is not surprising that we find the entry for Charman as of April 7, 1943: Promotion to a Commissioned Rank. Effective April 21 of that year.

On 8 April 1943 we find in his records that he "remained aboard" the "stone frigate" York. Rank description: sub-lieutenant (temporary) and attached to the commanding officer of the reserve divisions.

In 1943, Edgar Arthur Charman, on paper at least, was pushed back and forth quite a bit. Assigned to the Director of Special Services on 26 April 1943 and recorded again at HMCS Bytown.

Only a few days later, on May 1, 1943, he was re-enrolled to HMCS York, with the annotation that he had been assigned to the staff of the Commanding Officer of the Reserve Divisions.



The New Stadacona

The commissioning last month of HMCS Stadacona II, at Halifax, newest of the Navy's big shore barracks establishments, meant "moving day" in the near future for more than 3,000 officers and ratings serving ashore in this congested seaport.

Stadacona II, the former Y-depot barracks of the RCAF, built three years ago on the outskirts of the city, was officially taken over by the Royal Canadian Navy January 3 and is rapidly being readied to accommodate officers and men in this base and to serve as a depot for transient personnel travelling through Halifax.

During the next few weeks ratings who have been living "ashore" here will be moving into Stadacona II to sling their hammocks in the one and two-story barracks blocks vacated by the airmen.

Already staffed with officers and key ratings who are supervising the changeover, the barracks is rapidly acquiring the atmosphere of a ship and a naval appearance. Air Force signs over buildings and doorways are coming down and Naval designations are taking their place. Rooms have become "cabins". Floors are now "decks." Kitchens are "galleys" and the sound of a boat-swain's pipe is heard shrilling for attention to orders and announcements being relayed from the "quarter-deck", where the white ensign now flies over the establishment.

Captain of Stadacona II is A/Cdr. N. L. Pickersgill, RCNVR, of Regina, who has taken command of the "shore side ship" after four years of active service in this war and a record of more than 20 years without a break in the Volunteer Reserve.

Now 43, Cdr. Pickersgill served two years in the last war as a boy seaman and since 1939 has been in action against Germans and Japs in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

"We worked at night," Commander Pickersgill said recently. "Our job, during the tense time at the height of the battle of Britain, when everyone expected an invasion, was to act as extended lookouts for the coastal defences."

He has come east after 11 months in Regina, where he was in command of HMCS Queen, to the new and larger job as C.O. of Stadacona II. Living in Regina are his wife and two children, Lois 9, and David, 4.

Special annotation: to serve on the 'Navy Show'.

The Navy Show, officially: „MEET THE NAVY" was a story in itself.

The "MEET THE NAVY" was a musical revue produced during World War II under the supervision of Capt Joseph P. Connolly, director of Special Services for the RCN. Rehearsals began in June 1943 at Hart House in Toronto.

The Navy Show was created for the entertainment of citizens and service personnel in the Navy, Army and Air Force. It was also for encouraging recruitment and to maintain the public morale and goodwill.

(read the story by activating this link: (English)

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/meet-the-navy-emc>

On You Tube you can see the film that was made of this show, if you take the time for this you will be 'busy' for more than an hour and a quarter.

Link: <https://youtu.be/d2pFecD3Ug8>

By the way, the recordings are from after the war, when a part of the original crew had already returned to Canada.

On September 18, 1943, Charman is again on the list of HMSC Bytown. The costs for the Navy Show were apparently booked to this account.

At the beginning of April 1944 he was registered as a (temporary) lieutenant.

Still on the Navy Show list, so 'aboard' HMSC Bytown. (I hope you are still following, personally I had to look three times in the records-hs)

As of September 28, 1944 he is booked for HMSC 'Stadacona', he is on the list for the crossing to England. HMSC 'Stadacona' is also not 'seagoing', as the newspaper clipping on the left shows. It was previously a Royal Canadian Air Force depot.

Then, the next annotation for Charman reads: HMSC Niobe (II), on October 12, 1944.

Assigned to the Staff of the Canadian Naval Mission Overseas (CNMO) for service with the Navy Show.

HMCS Niobe (II) was, it's no surprise anymore, also a shore based establishment.

The reason:

Due to the large number of sailors in the United Kingdom waiting for new ships, or waiting for ships to come out of repairs, it became necessary to have a shore based establishment. Because Canadian ships specifically used Greenock as a berth, the search for a location in Scotland began.

After some time negotiating the Smithston Institute (the local workhouse and lunatic asylum) a deal was struck and HMCS NIOBE (II) was commissioned on December 15, 1941. It acted as an accounting base, crew pool and hospitalization center for all RCN personnel in England.



HMCS Niobe, Greenock Scotland

Photo by courtesy of the office of the RCN Heritage Officer

MCS NIOBE (Greenock) was closed on 9 February 1946.

As a member of the staff of the Navy Show, Edgar Arthur Charman came to Europe. The musical, first performed in Toronto in September 1943, had already been successful on tour in Canada. Number of visitors: over 500,000.

After the Canadian tour, the crossing to Europe followed, to Scotland to be precise. After the arrival, many performances in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England followed.

The absolute highlight was the time in London, where they played for more than five months. Just in the period when many V1's and V2's fell on the city. On request they played for the Royal Family in the Hippodrome. King George VI made a generous donation.

After London, performances followed in Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam and finally in Oldenburg-Germany.

So, that was the route of Edgar Arthur Charman in Europe.

Until the day, September 2, 1945.

The records read: 'accidentally shot'

Lt. E. A. Charman Accidentally Killed

The Navy Department announced yesterday that Lt. Edgar Arthur Charman (S.B.), R.C.N. V.R., was accidentally killed at Oldenburg, Germany, on September 2. His wife, Mrs. Wanda Eva Charman, resides at R.R. No. 1, St. Eugene, Ont.

Quite extensive descriptions of the incident can be found in Charman's records. This is understandable, because the circumstances have been extensively investigated. Appropriate here seems to me, the rather short statement that was initially sent to the widow.

,On the evening of September 1, 1945, after the Royal Canadian Navy Show in Oldenburg, he returned to the Royal York Hotel where he and members of the party were staying. With another member of the Navy Show, he visited a Navy officer's room, who was cleaning an army pistol.

During the evening, other weapons were brought in and examined.

After your husband disassembled and reassembled his gun, it was accidentally fired, resulting in his immediate death'.

The investigation board concluded that Lieutenant Charman's death was due to the injudicious handling of foreign weapons. There was no indication of intent.

On behalf of the department, I express my sincere condolences on the loss.

With sincere regards,'

Investigation revealed that there were three people in the room. Besides Lieutenant Charman they were: Lieutenant Elvidge and a lady, Leading-Wren Griffin.

The latter was unlucky enough to fire the weapon. Charman was hit in the head.

It remained uncertain whether she had taken the weapon from the table or whether it had been handed to her by Charman.

She herself stated that it was handed to her.

It was certain that two weapons played a role.

For someone less experienced with handguns, they had a certain resemblance.



FN Browning

Namely the famous Belgian Browning and a German Sauer&Sohn. The latter is therefore most likely the one with one or more cartridges in it.

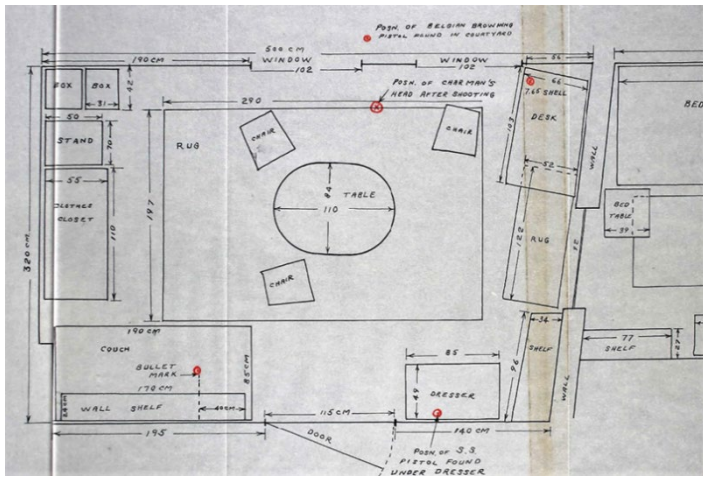


Sauer&Sohn

If Charman had given Griffin a pistol, it could not be ruled out that instead of his Browning, which he knew was unloaded, he handed her the Sauer&Sohn.

The investigation board reported that Griffin was to blame for not taking the standard safety precautions when picking up or handling a foreign weapon.

Lieutenant Elvidge was not further appointed, only insofar as he had not been attentive enough during the evening.



He should have known that a Leading-Wren was less familiar with small arms and should have given at least a warning.

The fact that the investigation board investigated the incident in detail is also apparent from the map of the crime scene.

Room layout with dimensions in centimeters.

Furthermore, in the records we find a copy of a letter that a close colleague of Charman wrote to his widow and a copy of a letter from the leader of the Navy Show, Captain J.P. Connolly to her.

There is also a detailed description of the burial with military honours at a temporary Canadian cemetery near Oldenburg.

It is also reported that Charman's brother, a sergeant in an infantry regiment, was on leave and had only arrived in Oldenburg the day after the funeral.



As usual, the Memorial Cross, engraved on the back, was sent to his widow and his mother.



In 1948 Mrs. Charman was informed that the remains of her late husband were transferred to the Canadian Cemetery in Holten.

**R.I.P.
Edgar Arthur Charman**

Herman Sligman

Sources:
Ancestry.com, wikipedia, navalandmilitarymuseum;
Canada.ca; naval-history-net

