

## REMEMBERING STOKER ERNEST ALBERT LEYLAND, V46538, RCNVR, HMCS OWEN SOUND

Who was Stoker Leyland? According to the government records, Stoker Leyland was HMCS Owen Sound's only casualty of World War II. Born on 16 Feb 1922 he was the son of Mrs. May Leyland of Vancouver, BC. Ernest joined the RCNVR on 18 Aug 1942 and went on active service on 16 Jun 1943. He died in hospital in Londonderry, Northern Ireland from peritonitis on 25 Aug 1944 and was buried in the Londonderry City Cemetery, C. of E. Plot, Sect F, Grave 43. This information is from the book "Ultimate Sacrifice" Vol 3, Part 2, by Robert P. D'Aoust

Is that it? Is this his story? A young sailor who died in hospital during the war - away from family - to be forgotten over time. Until I received an email from Alison Allen, that is what I would have thought. Her grandmother and great-grandmother both knew Stoker Ernest Albert Leyland and this is their story.

"My mother's uncle, William (Billy) Reid, had stomach problems all his life and was not ever fit all through life but had been taken on by the Derry Fire Service during war time because he had to 'do his bit'. He was already in the hospital terminally ill when a young military man was brought in. The story we knew was that he was desperately ill, we thought wounded. My mum told me some years ago that this young man and William, known as Billy, hit it off straight away and that both were good singers apparently singing 'you'll never walk alone' the night before they both died. Over the years the name, country and date of death was lost to us younger ones and I knew that my family really wanted to find that out and remember both boys. My granny could never listen to the song, ever again. However, when I decided we needed to find out who this person was I had a couple of years searching. Through those searches ref Derry graves I found William and then looked for a war grave of someone dying the same day. I found Stoker Leyland of the Owen Sound. I know my great gran wrote to his mother and ensured he was buried and the grave cared for and I knew that she ensured he was buried where she could care for the grave.

My great granny and gran would have known how his mother felt, dying so far from home but he was not on his own they made sure of that. Through a veterans magazine I put an ad in to see if anyone recalled him, thought it was a long shot after so long. I was contacted by a wonderful lady



who told me her friend had seen my ad. The PO Stoker who made contact is Hugh Main, he was Stoker Leyland's boss on the Owen Sound and told me of being in an Atlantic convoy, I guess early Aug 1944. Stoker Leyland had peritonitis and as they could not leave the convoy it took around five days to get him to Derry. He must have been put in the bed next to my great uncle who was being nursed by my great gran Charlotte Reid and her daughter my granny (who is standing) Evelyn Moss, nee Reid. This photo was a very sad one, taken following the Irish tradition when in mourning, just after the death of Billy Reid. A search was carried out for Stoker Leyland's family but it has not been successful sadly. I would love to know if my great gran's letters are still with someone and let them know that their loved one is still in at least one family's thoughts.

When I learned Stoker Leyland's full name I think I knew why perhaps there was an immediate connection in the hospital.

In Feb 1943 Charlotte lost her older son when he took a patrol out in the Medjez el Bab region of Tunisia, he was a Sergeant in the Inniskilling Fusiliers, name of Ernest Albert Reid, same two names as Stoker Leyland. Yesterday, just, I discovered more about him by chance and it just hit me at the coincidence I read. He had been on patrol with a Canadian Lt Curphey who was taken prisoner and died later. I guess they were hit by machine gun fire. It was a relief in a way because we never knew how Ernie had died and it has confirmed he was not blown to bits. My grandfather Moss was also fighting in Medjez el Bab and a despatch rider and when he learned of Ernie's death he tried to find out what had happened. He had witnessed the battle and come to the conclusion of being blown up. Whilst the Reids wrote to Mr. Churchill and had a response it was never established what happened. All these years on and there is available information, so sad they have all passed and didn't know. But he is at peace in the grave over there.

Interestingly, both Curphey and Leyland are mentioned in the Lethbridge Herald newspaper of that time. I thought it a coincidence both Reids were in the company of well-respected Canadians when they passed - who appear to be from a similar area (newspaper wise maybe).

They were wonderful, kind ladies."

The photo is of Alison Allen's grandmother and great-grandmother, Evelyn Moss (nee Reid) and Charlotte Reid, who cared for Stoker Ernest Albert Leyland in his final hours and ensured he was not forgotten.