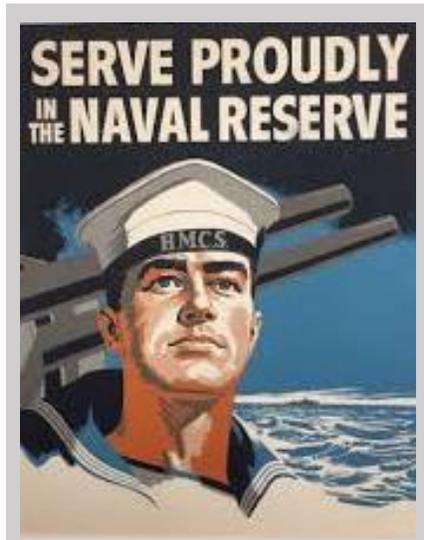


## Ordinary Seaman Arthur Charles Barrett V-68925



Do you have a photo of Ordinary Seaman Charles Arthur Barrett you can share? Please submit to [CSVC.CVMC@gmail.com](mailto:CSVC.CVMC@gmail.com)

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Powell River BC, 1 May 1924**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Discovery*, 11 August 1943**
- **Civilian Occupation: Pursers Cadet, Canadian Pacific Railway**
- **Death: accidental while serving in HMCS Cornwallis on 3 March 1944**
- **Commemorated: Vancouver (Mountain View) Cemetery, Abray. Block 3. Plot 26. Lot 8**

Ordinary Seaman Arthur Charles Barrett was born on 1 May 1924 in Power River, BC, the oldest child of William and Bethel Barrett. Barrett had two younger brothers, David and William, and one younger sister, Sheila. The family lived in a residential pocket of the Willington Heights area of Burnaby, just east of Vancouver. Barrett identified as belonging to the Church of England and he had completed one year of high school, after which he worked as a purser's cadet with the Canadian Pacific Railway. Interestingly, the family had moved from Powell River to Vancouver, then to Maple Ridge and back to Vancouver again all within Barrett's short life. When Barrett left school opting to join the Canadian Pacific Railway, his residential address changed to the RMS *Empress of Russia*, which he lived on for four years. Barrett enlisted in the Royal Canadian Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) on 11 August 1943 at HMCS *Discovery*.

Barrett's attestation form recorded on 6 August 1943 describes a 124 pound 5' 7" Caucasian male with light brown hair, blue eyes, and a fair complexion. The attestation report noted that he was underweight, but otherwise in perfect health. He was 19 years and three-months-old when he enlisted in the Navy.

The Navy called Barrett to active service one month after he enlisted, on 8 September 1943. He was briefly employed at *Discovery* in Vancouver before being sent east to HMCS *Cornwallis* in Deep Cove, Nova Scotia, southwest of Halifax. This establishment had recently been overhauled and reopened in April of 1943, but it continued to serve its former purpose as the Navy's main training unit for seamanship and indoctrination. Barrett reported there on 1 January 1944, and the environment in which he found himself would have seemed much more rigid and closer to the War than his previous military experience in *Empress of Russia*.

When Barrett arrived at *Cornwallis*, the War was starting to turn in the Allies' favour – the Russians had launched a successful counter-offensive against the Germans, the Americans had fought a

successful engagement at Guadalcanal, Allied soldiers had been in Italy for months, and technological advances seriously threatened German naval operations in the Atlantic. Barrett would have known all this, and probably woke every morning to the greyness of Nova Scotia, yearning to be at sea again and bringing the fight to the enemy. The War was truly in full swing.



**HMCS Raindeer Z08**  
Photo credit: Naval Museum of Halifax

On the morning of 3 March 1944, three months after arriving in Nova Scotia, Barrett reported to HMCS *Reindeer*. *Reindeer* was a 140' armed yacht that the Navy used for coastal operations from 1940 until 1943, when it arrived at Deep Cove solely for training purposes. As the crew mustered on a jetty, a transport truck disembarked their kit, including hammocks. Barrett went to the truck and picked up his hammock, and then walked toward *Reindeer* intending to board. During the walk, a bight in

the webbing of his hammock caught in a clip on his respirator unbeknownst to him. When he arrived at the edge of the jetty, he attempted to throw his hammock onto *Reindeer's* deck. According to the accident report, "when Barrett threw his hammock toward the boat deck the weight carried him over the side of the jetty. He fell head down and struck his head on the edge of the boat deck – a fall of approximately fifteen feet. He then appeared to strike the jetty piling and the fell into the water." Barrett's injuries were gruesome. *Reindeer's* crew retrieved him from the water, administered first aid as best they could, and rushed him to *Cornwallis's* base hospital. Barrett died at 2130 the same day.

Barrett's experience provides a window into a sometimes-overlooked intersection of Canadian naval history – while it may seem like his military career was tragically short, it actually began very shortly after the War began, as he lived on the *Empress of Russia* at the time. The British Admiralty requisitioned the vessel, and Barrett would have sailed in support of personnel transport and related military operations, including *Operation Torch*, the Allied invasion of North Africa (he also would have been a cadet while Philip Mountbatten was a midshipman onboard). Barrett's service with the Merchant Navy is impressive, and one wonders if he joined the RCNVR to further demonstrate his sense of patriotic duty.

Barrett's family was informed by telegram that he had been killed in an accident shortly after it occurred. The Navy shipped his body back to Vancouver, and he was buried in that city's Mountain View Cemetery on 11 March 1944.

During 1944 the Distribution of Services Estates Branch paid Barrett's modest estate to his mother, and the Navy also paid a War Service Gratuity of \$37.50 to her.

For his service Ordinary Seaman Barrett was posthumously awarded the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp. On 24 March 1964, at his father's request, he was posthumously awarded the 1939-45 Star and the Atlantic Star for his service with the Merchant Navy onboard *Empress of Russia*.

**Prepared By:**

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**Sources:**

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