

Sub-Lieutenant (E) Francis William Carson O-12530



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- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Unity SK, 4 January 1920**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Unicorn*, 21 April 1943**
- **Civilian Occupation: Student at University of Saskatchewan**
- **Death: Killed when HMCS *Chanticleer* was torpedoed on 18 November 1943. He was 23 years old.**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 9 & Carson Peninsula (Lat 56°57' N Long 103° 24' W) in Northern Saskatchewan**

Francis William Carson was the fifth of seven children born to Rosetta Carson and (George) Edmund Carson on 4 January 1920 in Unity, Saskatchewan. His brothers Mervyn, Bryan and Alwyn were born in 1909, 1917 and 1925 respectively. His sisters Eva, Ida and Kathleen were born in 1913, 1915 and 1922. His parents were married in Atwood, Ontario in 1908 and moved to Unity shortly after WWI to homestead 10 miles south of the town. In 1926 the family purchased a home in Saskatoon as well which allowed the younger children to attend Buena Vista Public School. In summer the entire family went back to the farm. Francis completed grade 8 at Buena Vista in 1935. That fall he enrolled in Nutana Collegiate Institute. Tragedy struck the family in June 1936. His mother, Rosetta and his sister Ida were visiting Marshfield, Oregon when they were struck by a light truck which mounted the sidewalk at high speed while they were window shopping. Both died within hours. Soon after Edmund sold the house in Saskatoon and returned to the farm leaving Francis to live in boarding houses. He graduated from Nutana Collegiate in 1938 and enrolled in the University of Saskatchewan graduating in 1942 with a degree in mechanical engineering. He served as a cadet in the Canadian Officer Training Corps from 1 October 1941 until 20 April 1943. His brother Alwyn joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1943.

Francis began the process of joining the Saskatoon Division (HMCS *Unicorn*) of the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve in November 1942. In doing so he gathered letters of reference. One was written by the Mayor of Saskatoon who, before his election, had taught Francis mathematics at Nutana for four years. The Mayor said of Francis, "I am satisfied that if chosen...he will give a good account of himself. He is dependable, honest and loyal." Another letter written by Francis' physical education teacher described him as displaying, "those qualities of leadership which are so essential to officers of His Majesty's Forces."

Francis was sworn in as a Probationary Sub-Lieutenant (Engineering) on 21 April 1943. He was 5"8" and weighed 145 pounds. He had just turned 23 and was single. He had black hair, brown eyes and a fair complexion.

Within a month Francis was on a train to Deep Cove, Nova Scotia for basic naval officer training at HMCS *Cornwallis*. There he was confirmed as a Sub-Lieutenant on 1 August. He completed the course on 27 August and, after two weeks leave, was selected to be loaned to the Royal Navy. On arrival in the United Kingdom, he was appointed to HMS *Chanticleer* as her Assistant Engineering Officer on 14 September. At the time, *Chanticleer* was in refit on the Clyde. *Chanticleer* was a modified Black Swan class sloop that had entered service in March 1943. Like corvettes, sloops were specialised convoy-defence vessels. However, unlike corvettes which were based on a mercantile design with triple expansion engines, sloops were conventional naval vessels with turbine engines. They were also larger and faster with heavier armament. *Chanticleer's* sister, HMS *Starling*, was the most successful anti-submarine warship in World War II sinking 14 U-boats.

On completion of the refit *Chanticleer* was ordered to resume convoy escort in the North Atlantic until mid-October when she and her consorts sailed to Freetown, Sierra Leone to escort a convoy to Liverpool. Once off Gibraltar they merged with a second convoy also bound for Liverpool on 16 November. In all the combined convoy was made up of 66 merchant ships escorted by nineteen warships of the Royal Navy and the Royal Canadian Navy. They were soon detected by a Luftwaffe reconnaissance aircraft which led Kriegsmarine Headquarters to order up to 29 U-boats to converge on the area. Not all reached the convoy, of course, for relative velocity reasons.



HMS Chanticleer on the Clyde on completion in March 1943.
Photo: Imperial War Museum FL7853

The battle had been joined. For the next three days, the convoy fought its way home inflicting solid blows to the Germans sinking four U-boats including one sunk by HMC Ships *Calgary* and *Snowberry* in concert. While leaving the merchant ships unscathed, the U-boats managed to shoot down two Royal Air Force aircraft. As well, *Chanticleer* was struck by a Gnat acoustic torpedo fired by U-515 at 1524 on 18 November. The resultant explosion blew off her stern immediately aft of Francis' cabin killing him and 27 others. *Chanticleer* was taken to Horte in the Azores under tow soon afterward. Enroute, Francis was buried at sea the next day.

Francis was 23 years old at the time of his death. He served in the RCNVR for 211 days and he participated in 6 convoy escort taskings in the short 65 days of service in his first and only ship. For his service, Sub-Lieutenant (E) Francis Carson was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal.

Francis was buried at sea on 19 November 1943 at Lat 40° 06'N Long 19°48' W about 415 nautical miles northeast of Horte in the Azores. He is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 9. Additionally, Carson Peninsula (Lat 56°57' N Long 103° 24' W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory.

In 1945 the Naval Board wrote Edmund Carson a number of letters requesting that he provide information to enable the Board to determine if Edmund was eligible for a number of financial benefits. Edmund finally answered the last letter stating:

“At least part of the reason for not answering sooner...is I have been terribly broken up about Francis ...I just couldn't talk about him and even tried not to think about him which I know is foolish but if you understand me... I never will get over it as he was such a dear boy... “

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Prepared By:

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