

Motor Mechanic Charles Edward Dawson V-42893



Motor Mechanic Charles Dawson. Photo:
Canadian Virtual War Memorial

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Calgary AB, 16 October 1916**
- **Enlisted: Calgary Division RCNVR, 20 July 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Automotive Electrician**
- **Death: Killed when his ship, Motor Torpedo Boat MTB 459 was shelled on 16 July 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 12; HMCS *Tecumseh* Memorial Plaque, Crescent Heights High School WW2 Memorial, Field of Crosses in Calgary and Naval Museum of Alberta Plaque**

Charles Edward Dawson was almost 26 years old when he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) at HMCS *Tecumseh* in Calgary, Alberta on 20 July 1942. This was a few years older than most of the recruits that were enlisting in the early 1940's. He had already been in the work force for many years, and he was married.

Charles was born in Calgary 16 October 1916 to Charles Edward Dawson and Alice Dawson (nee: Brock). He was the first of four children; his sister Grace was born in 1917, his brother Frederick in 1924 and the youngest brother, Brock Earl, in 1928.

Their father Charles Edward Dawson (senior) was born in 1890 in Cannock, England and had immigrated to Canada in 1909. He found employment in Calgary as a salesman and assistant for a Jeweller. He trained and became a jeweller himself. Their mother Alice Brock was born in Hook, Pembrokeshire, Wales in 1890. Alice had been working as a live-in servant until she immigrated to Canada in 1912. They met in Calgary and were married at St. Mark's Church on 3 April 1915. Charles had been living at 1506 25 Ave S when he met Alice but shortly after getting married, they moved to 1729 2 Avenue NW. This area of Calgary was known as West Hillhurst, and it became the family's permanent residence.

Charles Edward Dawson (junior) attended Hillhurst Public School for grades one through nine and he then attended Crescent Heights High School for three more years. In 1937 he worked for Head's Lock and Key Company for a short time until he found employment with an Auto Electric Service. On this job, he learned how to service the electrical systems and magnetos of automobiles. He had been working at this job for four years when he enlisted in the Navy; he planned to return to this job after his service.

In 1940, Charles met a local Calgary girl named Sylvia Francis Gully. Sylvia had been born in Seattle Washington, USA 30 January 1918 and had moved to Calgary in 1921. She lived with her

parents at 1503 Centre A St. NE. Sylvia's father, Francis Gully, was well known in Calgary; he was a veteran of the Boer War and World War 1 and held an executive position with Canada Post. Unfortunately, he died in 1935. Sylvia's mother continued to live at 1503 Centre A St. N.E. with Sylvia and her older sister. Charles and Sylvia were married at St. Georges Anglican church in Banff on 25 September 1940; they lived together at her mother's house and were still residing there at the time that Charles enlisted in the RCNVR.

Charles's younger brother Frederick Edward had enlisted into the RCAF on his 18th birthday 24 January 1942 and Charles followed his example and enlisted in the RCNVR at HMCS *Tecumseh* in Calgary 20 July 1942. His attestation document shows him to have been 5' 8" tall and weighing 145 pounds. He had black hair and brown eyes. His religion was reported to be Anglican. He signed up only for the "duration of the hostilities" and stated that he intended to return to his current job after being discharged. He requested to be enlisted as an electrician or mechanic: *Tecumseh* chose to enlist him as an Electrician.



**Motor Mechanic Dawson's
brother Flying Officer
Frederick Dawson in a
1943 photo
Credit: Canadian Virtual
War Memorial**

On 28 July 1942 Charles was put on active duty and dispatched to HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax Nova Scotia. *Stadacona* was the training base on the East Coast, Charles took the artificer's electrician exam and passed easily and was given the rank of Artificer Electrician. He was also given basic military and seamanship training. He began updated training in Motor Mechanics and was rated as Motor Mechanic on 15 November 1942. Motor Mechanic Charles Dawson continued to be assigned to HMCS *Stadacona* and worked as a Motor Mechanic in the Halifax Dockyard until 2 October 1943. He was given leave in June of 1943 and knowing that he would be dispatched to the United Kingdom soon, he made a quick trip back to Calgary to visit his wife and other family members.

On 6 October 1943 Charles was dispatched to the United Kingdom and spent 18 days at HMCS *Niobe*. HMCS *Niobe* was the Headquarters of the Royal Canadian Navy in the United Kingdom; it was a shore base close to Greenock Scotland and acted as a manning base, pay station and hospital. On 25 October 1943 Charles was drafted to HMS *Attack*.

HMS *Attack* was a Coastal Forces Base of the Royal Navy, it was a land base situated on Portland Island in the English Channel. Coastal patrol vessels of the Royal Navy and the Royal Canadian Navy were docked in the harbour and this base acted as a manning and supply facility. The repair and maintenance of Coastal vessels also took place here. The vessels consisted of MTBs (Motor Torpedo Boats), MGBs (Motor Gun Boats) and MLs (Motor Launches). Motor Mechanic Charles Dawson was stationed at this base from 25 October 1943 to 7 December 1943 where he repaired and maintained MTBs while he waited assignment to an MTB.

On 8 December 1943 Charles was drafted to HMC *MTB 459* (Her Majesty's Canadian Motor Torpedo Boat 459). *MTB459* was 71.5 feet long, 20 feet wide and had a draught (depth below waterline) of 5'8", the boat usually traveled at a speed of 25 knots (48km/hr) but could reach a speed of 41knots (70 kms/hr). The shallow depth and high speed made for an excellent coastal patrol vessel, and they were used in the English Channel and along the coasts of France. A man with Charles Dawson's background in automotive mechanics was a valuable member of the crew because MTBs used internal combustion engines; *MTB 459* had three Rolls Royce V12 engines. *MTB 459* had a crew of 17, three officers and 14 men; *MTB 459* was one of eight MTBs that formed the Royal Canadian Navy's 29th MTB Flotilla.

The entire Dawson family suffered a loss on 23 January 1944. Flying Officer Frederick Edward Dawson of the RCAF had been assigned as a wireless operator in the RCAF 518 Squadron based in Scotland. On 23 January 1944 during the return of a 12-hour mission over the Atlantic, the Halifax Bomber he was flying in crashed into a cliff on the west coast of Ireland killing all aboard. He was one day short of being 22 years old; he had married a Calgary girl, Marion, shortly after enlisting and had a son Gregory Glyn Dawson who was 4 months old. He would never meet his son.

On 5 March 1944 Motor Mechanic Dawson received some good news from home. His wife Sylvia had given birth to their son, they named him Frederick Edward Dawson.

RCN 29th MTB Flotilla played a major role in the preparation of Operation Overlord. Operation Overlord was the name given to the invasion and takeover by the Allied forces of western and northern occupied Europe. The initial phase of this operation was called Operation Neptune and became more commonly known as D-Day; the Allied invasion of the beaches of Normandy in Normandy, France. A great deal of preparation was needed by naval forces to make this possible. RCN 29th MTB Flotilla was involved in every aspect of these preparations. In early May of 1944, MTBs acted as escorts for intense mine sweeping operations all along the French coast. Canadian MTBs were even involved in some reconnaissance work, searching the French



HMC MTB 459 on 20 May 1944
Photo: Department of National Defence - Public Domain,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=86068817>

coastline for possible landing sites. The main mission for the MTBs was to conduct night missions working out of Portsmouth Harbour. They went out on at least three missions per week working in conjunction with larger vessels such as Destroyers and Frigates. The larger ships would stay far enough off the coast to be out of range of Coastal based artillery and would use their radar to locate enemy ships and German convoys. The MTBs would use their speed and maneuverability to find, harass and attack these vessels; they would mark their location with star bursts so the larger ships could fire upon them.

On 6 June 1944 the D-Day invasion took place, RCN 29th MTB Flotilla was assigned to the east flank of the invasion sites near the Port of Le Havre, France. Their mission was to protect the landing craft from ships of the German Navy. After the D-Day invasion the pressure on the German Navy did not let up and the MTBs were back on frequent night patrols. The work was hazardous and nerve racking, they were usually close enough to the coast to be within range of shore battery artillery. The thin hulls of the MTBs and the storage of high-octane fuel onboard would make shell attacks disastrous.

On 16 July 1944 three boats of the 29th MTB Flotilla; 459, 464 and 466 were on patrol close to Le Havre with an RCN Frigate nearby. Around midnight the Frigate detected German minesweepers leaving the harbour and the three MTBs closed on their position. Suddenly



**MTB 459 Crew photo, May 1944. Petty Officer Motor Mechanic Charles Dawson is seen front row, first man on the right. Stoker Jack McMahon, the second fatality on 16 Jul 1944 is pictured in the front row, fourth from the left
Photo: PA 108024 Manitoba Naval Museum**

German aircraft lit up their location with flares and heavy shelling from the coastal batteries began. One shell made a direct hit through the hull and exploded in the engine room of *MTB 459*; *MTB 459* immediately took on water settling below the water line in the stern. The other two MTBs reacted quickly, 466 moved in, picked up the crew and put a tow line on 459. Meanwhile *MTB 464* circled and set up a smoke screen to hide their exact location. *MTB 459* was towed out of range and eventually to safe

harbour. Unfortunately, the explosion in the engine room had killed the two men stationed there: Stoker Jack McMahon of Melfort Saskatchewan and Motor Mechanic Charles Edward Dawson of Calgary Alberta. Both men were buried at sea.

For his service Motor Mechanic Charles Edward Dawson was posthumously awarded: the 1939-45 Star, the France-Germany Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother Alice Dawson and his wife Sylvia Dawson were awarded the Memorial Cross.

He is commemorated: The Halifax Memorial Panel 12, the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 287 at the Centre Block Houses of Parliament, Ottawa, HMCS *Tecumseh* Memorial Plaque in Calgary, Crescent Heights High School WW2 Memorial, Field of Crosses in Calgary and Naval Museum of Alberta Plaque (Calgary)

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Sources:

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- <http://www.forposterityssake.ca> PO MM Charles Edward Dawson
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- Naval Museum of Manitoba: History of Canadian Motor Torpedo Boats
- Library and Archives Canada - Service file for MM Charles Dawson
- Library and Archives Canada - Service file for F/O Frederick Dawson RCAF
- Calgary Herald Article August 1, 1944 - MM Charles Edward Dawson
- Calgary Herald 1935 Obituary for Francis Gully