

## Steward Stewart Casselman Dillen V-34261



- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Brockville ON, 27 October 1916**
- **Enlisted: Kingston Division RCNVR, 22 April 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Steward, Canadian National Steamship Lines**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Athabaskan* sank on 29 April 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 13, Brockville Memorial Civic Centre Plaque; Dillen Lake is named in his honour, Memorial Plaque at Pointe Saint Mathiew, Finistère, France, Memorial Passageway – HMCS *Cataraqui*; the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 291 at the Centre Block Houses of Parliament, Ottawa;**

Stewart Casselman Dillen was born in Brockville, Ontario on 27 October 1916. He had one sister named Dorothy. His parents were Herbert and Ethel Dillen; the Dillen family were Baptists. After completing Grade 10 at Brockville Collegiate Institute records show that Stewart took a radio operating and television course at a business college before finding work as a labourer for Bescoby's Transport. On 4 April 1940, Stewart enlisted with the militia unit Brockville Rifles but was released on 24 Jan 1941 as "*medically unfit*".

Upon leaving the Army, Stewart found work with the Canadian National Steamship Lines as a steward where he served the Captain's table and worked as a waiter. He worked on SS *Ontario #1*, a car ferry that ran between Coburg, Ontario and Rochester, New York. A unique feature of this ferry service was its railway tracks on deck that allowed coal cars to be transported across Lake Ontario and then continue their journey on the opposite shore. The ferry also had the capacity for 1000 deck passengers, berths for 90 people, buffet facilities and a music room.

On 22 April 1942 Stewart Dillen enlisted as a probationary Steward at the Kingston Division



Vintage view of car ferry Ontario no. 1 at night.  
Photo: <https://www.rochestersubway.com>

RCNVR (later known as HMCS *Cataraqui*). At enlistment he was 5' 11" had a medium complexion with brown hair and brown eyes. He had a vaccination scar on his left arm. Dillen was placed on active service the same day that he enrolled. He remained at the Kingston Division for initial training which focused on discipline, drill, naval terminology, ranks, simple knots, seamanship, and simple boat pulling. In other words, the very basics of naval service.

Probationary Steward Dillen was drafted to HMCS *York* in Toronto on

27 October 1942 for further instruction and training. Upon completion of this training, he was drafted to HMCS *Naden* in Esquimalt, BC for his trades training as a Steward. After his occupational training was complete, Dillen found himself on a train to the Halifax, Nova Scotia. There he consolidated his training in the messes in HMCS *Stadacona* and HMCS *Cornwallis* before being rated as a qualified Steward on 20 January 1943.

Steward Dillen remained ashore and plied his trade in the officer's mess (called a Wardroom in the Navy) at *Stadacona* and *Cornwallis* until he was drafted overseas to the RCN Manning Depot known as HMCS *Niobe* on 14 September 1943. Dillen served in *Niobe* for a little more than two months before he has drafted to his first and only warship on 18 Nov 1943: HMCS *Athabaskan*, a Tribal Class destroyer. Dillen joined *Athabaskan* as the ship was completing repairs after it survived a German attack in late August.

In December 1943 Dillen and his shipmates escorted a convoy through bitter winter storms to Archangel in the Soviet Arctic. In February 1944, *Athabaskan* joined the 10th Destroyer Flotilla in Plymouth. She saw extensive operational service in the English Channel as part of this strike force: the most significant action occurred on 25-26 April, when *Athabaskan* assisted in the destruction of the German torpedo boat T-29.

Three days later, on 29 April 1944 at about 0300 she was patrolling with her sister Tribal Class destroyer HMCS *Haida*. The ships, ordered to intercept German warships near Ile de Bas, the Canadian ships engaged T-24 and T-



Ship's Company HMCS *Athabaskan*, Plymouth, England, April 1944.  
Photo: Library and Archives Canada, PA-13180/MIKAN: 3399986.

27. *Haida* drove off T-24 in flames and then drove T-27 ashore before returning to her sister's last position only to find that she had sunk. One hundred and twenty-eight men including Steward Dillen were lost, 44 were rescued by *Haida*, and six by *Haida*'s motor work boat. At dawn, after the departure of *Haida*, 83 men were later taken prisoner by three German minesweepers. Stewart Dillen's body was not recovered, he was 27 years 6 months old.

Steward Dillen's mother was notified by letter on 1 May 1944 that her son was listed as missing. A second letter dated 10 October 1944 confirmed that no further information had been received of his survival or that he was a prisoner of war. The final letter of 5 January 1945 confirmed that her son had been lost when the *Athabaskan* was sunk.

Steward Dillen's father received his medals. For his service, Steward Stewart Casselman Dillen was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp and the War Medal. The Memorial Cross was awarded to Stewart Dillen's mother, Ethel, on 31 January 1945.

**Prepared By:**

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**Sources:**

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