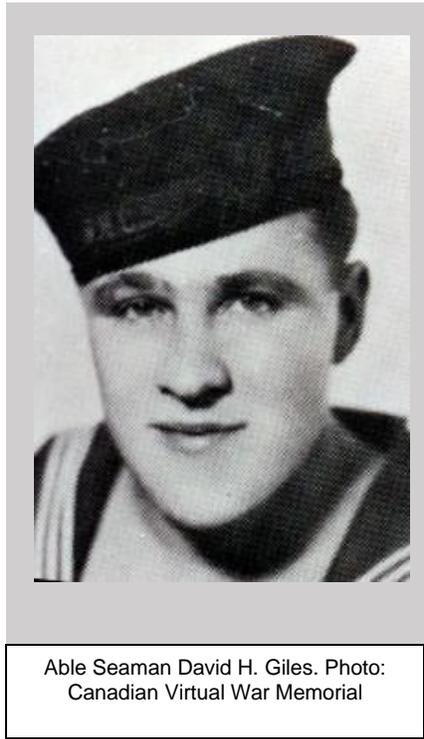


## Able Seaman David Henry Giles V-31768



- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Bredenbury SK, 30 September 1924**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Unicorn*, 18 March 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Truck Driver's Helper, Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Valleyfield* was torpedoed and sank on 7 May 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 11; on the Cenotaph in Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan; and Giles Lake in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his honour**

David Giles, known as Dave, was the fifth of eleven children born to Mary and Albert Giles on 30 September 1924 in Bredenbury, Saskatchewan. Brothers Thomas, Albert, Milton, George, and John were born in 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923 and 1934, respectively. Sister Margaret was born in 1925, twins Alberta and Alfreda were born in 1930, and Gertrude in 1933. An eleventh son, Frederick, died as a child. Dave's father, Albert, was born in 1890 in England and immigrated to Canada in 1911. His mother, Mary, was born in 1899 in southwestern Manitoba. They were married in Yorkton, Saskatchewan in 1919 and made their home in the village of Saltcoats, Saskatchewan, 18 miles southeast of Yorkton, where Albert operated a retail store. During the Giles' time there, the area had a productive agricultural economy that was served by a railway. For whatever reason they moved to Bredenbury in 1924 for about a year before returning to Saltcoats. It was during that time in Bredenbury that Dave was born.

Three things happened between 1924-30 which had a profound effect on the Giles family. The first was the adoption of control of alcohol sales by the Saskatchewan government in 1925 following Prohibition (prior to that decision there were more illegal stills in Regina alone than in the rest of Canada). The second event was the onset of the Great Depression; and the third was the onset of the drought that devastated agriculture on the Great Plains of North America. Either coincidentally or purposely, Albert Giles sold his business in Saltcoats in 1930 and moved the family to Hudson Bay Junction, Saskatchewan, 136 miles north of Saltcoats, where he had found a position in a Saskatchewan Liquor Board store. The somewhat rough and ready village was located on the edge of the boreal forest with an economy based on forestry and the area was served by the Canadian National Railway. There the children were enrolled in the local school. Unfortunately, Albert died in 1935 leaving Mary and the ten children, then ranging in age from 1 to 15 years of age, in financial difficulty. By necessity, at the age of 15, Dave left school on

completion of grade 8 to contribute to the family income and found work as a baker's helper for approximately two years. Apparently, the job appealed to Dave as he stated in the Occupational History Form that he completed upon enrollment that he preferred to return to baking at the end of the war. Equipped with initiative beyond his years, he then worked as a caterpillar operator for six months before working as a truck driver's helper for the Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources immediately prior to enrollment.

On 11 June 1941, at the age of 16, Dave travelled to Saskatoon and first contacted the Saskatoon Division (HMCS *Unicorn*) of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) regarding enrollment. He was enrolled nine months later at the age of 17 on 18 March 1942 as an Ordinary Seaman (Temporary) and was designated for gunnery training. His older brothers Thomas and Milton also enrolled in the Navy, while Albert enrolled in the Royal Canadian Dental Corps.

Upon enrollment, Dave was single, 5 feet 8 ½ inches tall and weighed 150 pounds. He had brown hair, blue eyes, and a ruddy complexion.

Dave completed basic training at *Unicorn* on 20 April 1942 and was then drafted to HMCS *Naden* in Esquimalt, British Columbia where he completed four months of gunnery training on 26 August 1942. He was then drafted to the various "stone frigates" in Halifax, Nova Scotia for administrative purposes until 17 September 1942 when he was drafted to HMCS *Milltown*, a Bangor-class minesweeper named for Milltown, Ontario. It is likely that Dave went directly to Port Arthur, Ontario (now Thunder Bay) where the ship had been built by the Port Arthur Shipbuilding Co. Ltd. and awaited commissioning on 18 September 1942.

Bangor-class minesweepers, as the name implies, were designed to operate in coastal waters to sweep mines; however, since enemy mines were laid only once in Canadian waters in 1943, the Bangors were used primarily to escort coastal convoys. *Milltown* was an exception, and while Dave was onboard, *Milltown* made seven round trips escorting ocean convoys between New York City and Liverpool – a job for which she was not suited – this was in addition to escorting several coastal convoys. Like all Bangors, she had extremely poor habitability. They were designed to accommodate a crew of 40 but her ship's company grew to 86 to cover an increasing spectrum of equipment and the men to operate and maintain it. The Bangors had a shallow draft to enable them to operate in shallow coastal waters that made them very unstable in the swells and waves of the open ocean and their short length caused them to bury their bows when steaming into the sea. Dave served under these conditions until 16 November 1943 – a total of 426 days. He was promoted to Able Seaman on 21 March 1943.



HMCS Milltown.  
Photo: The Roger Litwiller Collection, courtesy of Ross Milligan, RCNVR

In mid-November 1943, Dave left HMCS *Milltown* and was sent to Quebec City where he joined HMCS *Valleyfield*. *Valleyfield* was a River-class frigate named for Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, Quebec, situated on Grande-Île in the St. Lawrence River. The ship was built at Quebec City by



Morton Engineering and Dry Dock Co. and was commissioned on 7 December 1943. After arriving in Halifax on 20 December 1943, her ship's company underwent work-ups in St. Margaret's Bay, Nova Scotia and near Bermuda until February 1944, when she joined the Newfoundland Command Escort Group C-1 as a convoy escort. *Valleyfield's* second convoy, which left Halifax on 28 February 1943, was eventful: She was detached to escort a tug and tow to the Azores and then escort another tug and tow from the Azores to Scotland. After her third and uneventful return trip to Canada, HMCS *Valleyfield* left Londonderry,

Northern Ireland on 27 April 1944 with convoy ONM 234 headed towards North America.

In the early hours of 7 May 1944, as was standard practice, the Mid-Ocean Escort Force of which *Valleyfield* was a member, handed the convoy over to the Local Escort Force, and parted company with the convoy south of Newfoundland at the Western Ocean Meeting Point and set course for St. John's.

At 0432, *U-548* fired two GNAT torpedoes at the five ships of Escort Group C-1. *Valleyfield* was hit by one torpedo on the port side of the boiler room, broke in two and sank within four minutes about 50 miles south of Cape Race. She had been astern of the other ships of the Group. Consequently, it took some time for her sinking to be noticed. Then, while three ships of the Group conducted an unsuccessful search for *U-548*, HMCS *Giffard* was dispatched to search for survivors. *Giffard* approached the area cautiously thus unavoidably delaying the rescue of *Valleyfield's* crew. Including Able Seaman Dave Giles, 120 members of *Valleyfield's* ship's company perished in the sinking and five more later died of exposure onboard *Giffard*. Only 38 crew members were rescued and survived.

Able Seaman Giles was 19 years old and like most of the others killed, has no known grave. He is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 11; and on the Cenotaph in Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan. Additionally, Giles Lake (58°55'01.1"N 105°48'03.1"W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory.

For his service, Able Seaman David Giles was awarded: the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother, Mary Giles, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

### Prepared By:

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