

## Engine Room Artificer 3rd Class Walter McGiffen Love V-8030



Engine Room Artificer Walter Love.  
Photo: Canadian Virtual War Memorial

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Natural Dam, New York USA, 18 August 1903**
- **Enlisted: Hamilton Division RCNVR, 8 May 1923**
- **Civilian Occupation: Engineer**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Athabaskan* was attacked and sank on 29 April 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 12; the Second World War Book of Remembrance, page 368, Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa and HMCS *Star* Memorial, Hamilton, ON**

Engine Room Artificer Third Class Walter McGiffen Love was born in the United States of America, in the hamlet of Natural Dam. This small community existed in the north of New York State near the American border. He was the second child of Canadian parents, Henry Edward Fred and Eva Elizabeth Love. Walter had one younger brother and an elder sister, respectively named Edward and Rena. Walter came to Canada at the age of two, and he and his family settled in Hamilton, Ontario. He had blue eyes, dark hair and was five feet and eight inches tall. Unfortunately, little is known of his early life.

Walter's naval story began early, he was one of the first members of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR). The organization was formed on 31 January 1923, and Walter was sworn in as a member of HMCS *Star*, one of founding Naval Reserve Divisions, on 8 May 1926. At 23 years old, he was sent aboard HMCS *Patriot*, an older British World War One era destroyer used primarily as a training ship for the initial ranks of the RCNVR. After his training as a motor mechanic, Walter served aboard the former Royal Navy warship as an Ordinary Seaman. This vessel was the only major warship of the Royal Canadian Navy based out of Halifax following the 1922 naval budget cuts. After finishing his training at Halifax's HMCS *Stadacona*, Walter was promoted to the rank of Able Seaman on 16 August 1923. In the following summers



The first RCNVR personnel from Hamilton to travel to Halifax for summer training in July 1923.  
Photo: HMCS *Star* History 1991 by Commander Robert Williamson.

of 1924/25, he again travelled to Halifax for training, where he received the Motor Mechanic qualification after detailed instruction on how to efficiently repair and operate internal combustion motorboat engines.

A few years later, Walter was honorably released from the RCNVR in 1926. Returning to the country of his birth, he joined the United States Navy and served until 1929. At this point, Walter returned to Canada and re-enrolled with the RCNVR. Back at HMCS *Star*, Walter attempted an occupational transfer, to either Engineman or Engine Room Artificer. This request was denied by his chain of command, on the grounds that he lacked the required credentials for those roles.



The next year, Walter traveled to Halifax for additional training and had the opportunity to briefly serve on the recently commissioned HMCS *Saguenay*. Built in the United Kingdom, the River-class destroyer arrived in Nova Scotia during the summer of 1931. In the associated service report, his supervisor described him as a “*good workman... trustworthy and someone who takes interest in his work.*” In 1933, Walter was promoted to Chief Motor Mechanic and assisted in the refit of the *Saguenay* as well as the training ship HMCS *Champlain*. After his return from reserve service, Walter was married on October 3, 1934, to Muriel Mennetta Love. A few years later, Walter achieved one of his professional goals and successfully

became an engineman in 1936. He spent the next several summers training at *Stadacona* honing his new trade.

While a student at Hamilton’s Technical School, studying to become an engineer, Walter was mobilized for active service in 1939. After the outbreak of the Second World War and Canada’s declaration of War against Germany on 12 September, he was assigned to the Canadian eastern fleet. Granted his Stokehold and Engineering Watchkeeping certificates, Walter reached the rank of Stoker Petty Officer. For the first two years of the conflict, Walter served on an assortment of minesweepers. These vessels were often responsible for searching shallow coastal waters for naval mines deployed by German U-boats. He was detached from HMCS *Bras D’Or* on 20 September 1940. Shortly afterwards, the ship was tragically lost at sea, going down with all hands while escorting merchant shipping in a probable navigational accident.

Receiving additional training, Walter achieved another longstanding aspiration. Following coursing in Halifax, he became an Engine Room Artificer Fourth Class – a specialist in marine engineering. Following service with the training vessel HMCS *Beaver*, Walter began his first major posting on the armed merchant cruiser HMCS *Prince David*. Shortly after his posting, *Prince David* came upon the British merchantman *St. Margaret* floundering towards Trinidad with serious engine trouble. Fearing for the ship’s safety, *Prince David* intervened and took the ship in tow and safely brought the vessel to Bermuda. The question of salvage went on for almost seven years.

In 1948, \$3,427.37 was finally collected and divided up among the ship's crew. Unfortunately, Walter was fated never to see a single penny of the reward.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, *Prince David* was transferred to Canada's West Coast to be refitted and up gunned. Now based in Esquimalt, the ship took up defensive duties in the Pacific Northeast. However, Walter returned to Halifax in early 1942 to sail as an Engine Room Artificer Third Class aboard the recently commissioned HMCS *Athabaskan*. Walter would spend the rest of his service in the Atlantic aboard this ill-fated Tribal-class Destroyer. The eighteen months he was attached to the warship were spent laying mines off German waters, patrolling the English Channel, and escorting convoys routed to the Soviet Union. Of note, the *Athabaskan* was almost sunk by a Henschel Hs 293 glided explosive during an anti-submarine chase in the summer of 1943. Several sailors were killed, fortunately, the bomb passed entirely through *Athabaskan* before detonating outside of the ship's hull.

On the morning of 29 April 1944, the *Athabaskan* was patrolling with her sister destroyer HMCS *Haida*. Responding to Admiralty orders to intercept German warships near the English Channel, the Canadian ships engaged German torpedo boats. *Haida* successfully drove off two attacking vessels. However, as she returned to her sister ship's last known location, she discovered *Athabaskan* had lamentably been sunk. One hundred and twenty-eight men were lost after the destroyer was fatally struck with a torpedo. After an extraordinary 966 cumulative days at sea,



Walter, 40 years old, was lost to the ocean. He left behind his wife and three children, ages eight, five, and two.

After his death, his wife returned to the United States after the war and remarried. Of those who survived, 44 were rescued by *Haida*, and six by small boat. After the surviving Canadian ship's departure, 83 sailors were taken as prisoners of war by Germany. Stationed in the engine room, it was extremely unlikely that Walter managed to get off the warship before she went under. Like many other souls, his remains are likely still entombed under the deep waves of the English Channel.

For his service ERA 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Walter Love was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service medal and clasp and the Defence medal. Walter is remembered on panel 12 of the Halifax Memorial located in Halifax, NS; the HMCS STAR memorial and the Second World Book of Remembrance, page 368, Centre Block at the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa, ON

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**Sources:**

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