

Stoker Petty Officer Douglas Peter Robertson, V-11460



Photo Credit: Canadian Virtual War Memorial – Profile page for Stoker Petty Officer Douglas Robertson

- **Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve**
- **Saskatoon Division RCNVR**
- **Born 28 January 1918 Saskatoon, SK**
- **Civilian Occupation: Painter, Empire Hotel**
- **Died 8 August 1944, as a result of enemy action: Age 26**
- **Commemorated on Panel 12, Halifax Memorial & Robertson Island in Northern Saskatchewan**

Douglas was the fourth of seven children born to Elizabeth and Robert Robertson on 28 January 1918 in Saskatoon. Brother Robert was born in 1912; sister Elizabeth in 1914; sister Margaret in 1920; and brother Donald in 1930. Brother John died as an infant in 1913 as did brother David in 1926. Parents Elizabeth and Robert were married in Saskatoon in 1912 where Robert worked as a carpenter and glazier. While Douglas was growing up, the family lived in three different homes in the neighbourhood of Westmount. There he was enrolled in Westmount Public School in 1926 and remained there until the spring of 1931 when, for reasons which are unclear, he left on completion of Grade 6. Ironically, the third home in which Douglas lived before enrollment in the Navy was a flat above a branch of the Public Library.

The 1930s and the Great Depression were difficult for Douglas as evidenced by the Occupational History Form contained in his naval personnel file. He recorded that in the ten-year period he worked as a farm labourer for two years and, immediately prior to enrollment, worked in a hotel for another two years. While it was common for boys to leave school after Grade 8, Douglas was at a severe disadvantage with a lower level of education and no trade in the very competitive labour market which saw rates of unemployment over 35%.

On 26 July 1940 Douglas enrolled in the Saskatoon Division of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve as a Stoker Second Class. Thus began an active and progressive career.

He remained in Saskatoon taking basic training until January 1941 when he was drafted to HMCS *Stadacona* for New Entry training. On completion, in April 1941, he was drafted to the corvette HMCS *Cobalt* to begin his duties as a Stoker 2nd Class. *Cobalt* was in the Halifax Force until May 1941 when she and six other corvettes formed the Newfoundland Escort Force. For the next six

months she operated as an ocean escort between St. John's and Iceland; a dangerous task on a dangerous route made worse by terrible weather. Douglas was promoted to Stoker First Class in September. In November, Douglas had the advantage from a stoker's point of view of experiencing a three-month refit of the ship in Liverpool, Nova Scotia. Following completion of the refit *Cobalt* made two round trips to Londonderry, Northern Ireland.



In June 1942 Douglas was loaded on the three-month Boilermaker-Bricklayer course at the Mechanical Training Establishment in Halifax (marine boilers are extensively lined with fragile fire bricks). On completion of the course, he was promoted to Acting Leading Stoker and became a member of a roving dockyard work party augmenting ships' companies performing maintenance in harbour. His time ashore ended in October 1942 when he was drafted to another corvette, HMCS *Regina*, which had been assigned to take part in *Operation Torch*, the Allies Invasion of North Africa, and later to United Kingdom-Mediterranean convoy escort duties. While so employed *Regina* sank the Italian submarine *Avorio* in February 1943 in the western

Mediterranean before returning to Canadian waters in March for local escort duties, refit, and work-ups.

In February 1944, *Regina* returned to Service as a trans-Atlantic convoy escort. After an eventful Atlantic crossing she arrived in Londonderry toward the end of March and was assigned to Western Approaches Command for duties associated with *Operation Neptune*, the naval portion of the invasion of Normandy. In April, Douglas was promoted to Stoker Petty Officer. With his new rank came new supervisory responsibilities, and he moved from sleeping in a hammock in a crowded mess-deck to a bunk in a mess for the senior Chief and Petty Officers.

Regina's D-day task, together with the Canadian corvettes *Summerside* and *Woodstock*, was to escort twenty-seven Liberty ships through the Bristol Channel, along the south coast of England, and through a swept channel to Normandy arriving there in the early morning hours of 7 June. Upon completion of this task, *Regina* returned to the United Kingdom to be dispatched repeatedly to escort other ships and convoys until 8 August 1944.

On 8 August 1944, at about 1955, Douglas went below to the engine room to commence his watch. *Regina* was the sole escort of a ten-ship convoy proceeding southwest from Milford Haven along the north Cornwall coast off Trevoise Head bound for Normandy. At about 2130, a Liberty ship, the *Ezra Weston*, experienced an explosion which was mistakenly thought to have been the result of the ship striking a mine. *Regina* closed her and stopped to render assistance. After

remaining stopped for about forty-five minutes, a second explosion erupted in *Regina* sinking her in less than 30 seconds. The second explosion, as was the first, was caused by torpedoes fired by the German U-boat, U-667. Douglas and twenty-nine other members of *Regina's* ship's company perished.

For his service, Stoker Petty Officer Douglas Peter Robertson was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star and Clasp, the Africa Star and Clasp, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal.

He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 12. Additionally, Robertson Island in Deschambault Lake (Lat 59°54' N Long 103° 25' W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory.

Douglas Robertson came to the Navy with little education or work experience. Through hard work and diligence, he became a tech savvy leader. Sadly, like so many of his mates he was unable "to enjoy the blessings of the land, with the fruits of (his) labours" in a post war Canada.

Prepared by:

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Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission record for Stoker Petty Officer Douglas Robertson
- Library and Archives Canada Service Record for Stoker Petty Officer Douglas Robertson
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial – Profile page for Stoker Petty Officer Douglas Robertson
- Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial -Profile page for Stoker Petty Officer Douglas Robertson
- Notes of a conversation between Engine Room Artificer Donald McIntosh, HMCS Regina, and Capt. J. Dalzell (Retired), April, 2015
- For Posterity's Sake. HMCS Regina K234, Retrieved November 9, 2021 from http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_REGINA_K234.htm
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