

## Lieutenant Hugh Dunbar Sutherland Russel O-64370



- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Montreal ON, 11 March 1916**
- **Enlisted: Montreal Division RCNVR, 9 December 1940**
- **Civilian Occupation: McGill Student & Surveyor, Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company**
- **Death: Died while serving in HMS/M *Traveller* on 12 December 1942. Age: 26**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 8**

Like many young, single students, Lieutenant Hugh D.S. Russel gave up his quest for an engineering degree at McGill University to enlist at the Montreal Division of the RCNVR in December 1940. He was 24 years old, with no boating experience of any kind but did have a blasting certificate from his work experience in 1938 with Sullivan Consolidate Mining in Kimberley, BC.

Russel's late father Hugh and his mother Alice had two boys, Hugh and Keith, along with two half-sisters. As boys, Russel and his brother attended Selwyn House at Trinity College School in Port Hope, Ontario. Russel played hockey, football, and cricket, but he excelled at boxing. By the time he matriculated, he was tall and fit with an eager attitude according to a family friend who intervened to speed up Russel's commission in a letter to Admiral Percy Nelles, RCN, the Chief of Naval Staff.

Sub-Lieutenant Russel, RCNVR was one of the first graduates at Royal Roads where he did his basic officer training and courses in early 1941. His marks were average. From there he went to Halifax in January 1941 and served in the newly commissioned HMCS *Algoma* in the North Atlantic for six months. Later he took his Group Anti-submarine Control Course, which he failed. He was promoted Lieutenant on his birthday in 1942 and volunteered for submarines, arriving in England and the Royal Navy in June 1942.

After basic officer submarine training in the RN, Russel was posted to HMS *Elfin* and the Sixth Submarine Flotilla at Blyth on England's northwest coast for three months of on-the-job training in older boats. By now he was nearly 6' 4" tall, an uncomfortable height in submarines. In September 1942 he was posted as a spare officer to the First Flotilla in Beirut, which had been evacuated from Malta during the incessant bombing by enemy aircraft. The Mediterranean was a hot bed of anti-submarine activity at that time with a lousy life-expectancy for submariners. On arrival Russel joined HMS/M *Traveller*, a well-blooded and efficient boat, as her fourth hand.

His first operational patrol in September was off the coast of North Africa and was an eventful introduction for young Russel. *Traveller* made two attacks on vessels supplying Rommel in the desert, one of which sank.

Russel then participated in a covert mission as part of Operation ANGLO. This was *Traveller's* most dangerous operation to date — the evacuation of commandos from enemy territory. The submarine had done it before, but it was no less hazardous than previous extractions. Caught in brilliant moonlight illuminating the submarine on the surface, *Traveller* cautiously approached a small bay on the island of Rhodes to exchange pre-



arranged signals with the commandos. The boat came in so close to shore that the CO could see enemy patrols, and *Traveller*, being unable to dive in such shallow waters, was very vulnerable. The moonlight turned out to be a blessing for the commandos, who had to swim to the submarine, because their dinghies had been destroyed. The submarine's lookouts would never have seen them on a black, moonless night.

HMS/M *Traveller* spent two hours exposed before successfully rescuing the survivors of the Rhodes raid. The boat was not seen until she withdrew but was able to dive and avoided four poorly aimed depth charges from a patrol vessel. The CO remarked in his report that the patrol's success had been nothing short of miraculous.

On November 28, 1942, after suffering a depth-charge attack on another patrol, Russel and *Traveller* sailed with a relief CO for the Gulf of Taranto as part of Operation PORTCULLIS. This was a reconnaissance of Taranto harbour to determine the location of enemy warships. The findings were to be used a month later in Operation PRINCIPAL — the scheme to destroy enemy ships using chariots (human torpedoes). PRINCIPAL itself was so secret *Traveller's* CO was unaware of the purpose of this patrol.

Taranto was a difficult place to reconnoitre; the approaches were heavily defended, patrolled, and mined. HMS/M *Traveller* reported on the seaward defences of the harbour but was never heard from again. The submarine was the victim of either A/S patrols or, more likely, a mine. Although the Italian broadcasts at the time reported a submarine was destroyed by A/S craft, the enemy records do not confirm it.

Six officers and fifty-nine men were lost without trace about December 4, 1942. Russel's mother heard about her son's presumed death, aged 26, on December 12 after his submarine failed to return. Ironically, the Italian warships that *Traveller* had gone to find had already left Taranto for Naples, and the planned chariot raid was cancelled.

The wreck of HMS/M *Traveller* has not been found so far though others have. Lt. Hugh D.S. Russel, RNCVR, is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial in Nova Scotia on Panel 8.

For his service, Lieutenant Hugh Russel was awarded the 1939-1945 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp and the War Medal. His mother, Alice Russel, was awarded the Memorial Cross

**Prepared By:**

Julie H. Ferguson, Lt(N) (Ret'd), author of *Through a Canadian Periscope* and Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Project Researcher



**Sources:**

- Ferguson, Julie H., *Through a Canadian Periscope*, 2nd ed. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2014
- Canada, World War II Records and Service Files of War Dead, 1939-1947: [https://www.ancestry.ca/imageviewer/collections/9145/images/44486\\_83024005549\\_0976-00226?treeid=&personid=&hintid=&queryId=2006fb1f405d61dcccde25278472359&usePUB=true&phsrc=UYA19&phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&pld=114047](https://www.ancestry.ca/imageviewer/collections/9145/images/44486_83024005549_0976-00226?treeid=&personid=&hintid=&queryId=2006fb1f405d61dcccde25278472359&usePUB=true&phsrc=UYA19&phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&pld=114047)
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial: <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/2640728?Hugh%20Dunbar%20Sutherland%20Russel>
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission: <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2640728/hugh-dunbar-sutherland-russel/>
- Library and Archives Canada Service file: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/second-world-war/second-world-war-dead-1939-1947/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=43759&>