

## Cook John Thompson V-34087



Photo credit: Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial <https://svwm.ca>

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Bishop Auckland England, 15 September 1919**
- **Enlisted: HMCS UNICORN, 13 April 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Farm Labourer, Family Farm**
- **Death: Died when HMCS Regina sank on 8 August 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 13; St. Albans Anglican Cathedral, Prince Albert and Thompson Creek (Lat 55°00' N Long 108° 23' W) in Northern Saskatchewan.**

John was the fourth of five children born to Helena Thompson and John Thompson on 13 April 1919 in Bishop Auckland, Durham, England. Sister Cicely was born in 1909; brother Robert in 1912; brother George in 1914; and brother Alfred in 1921. Parents Helena and John were married in Durham in 1908. The entire family emigrated to Canada and settled in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan in 1926 when John was 7 years old. There John attended school off and on until the age of 18 when he left Prince Albert Collegiate Institute upon completing Grade 9. When John enlisted, he stated that he had worked for his older brother, Robert, on Robert's farm near Paddockwood, Saskatchewan for 10 years. Paddockwood is 25 miles north of Prince Albert. Given that, it is assumed that John alternated work and school before finally leaving school after Grade 9.

On 13 April 1942 John enrolled at the Saskatoon Division (HMCS *Unicorn*) of the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve as a Temporary Assistant Cook. He was 5 feet 8 inches tall and weighed 134 pounds. He had brown hair and brown eyes.

In less than two weeks John was drafted to HMCS *York* in Toronto for contact training then took new entry training from 26 May to 6 July 1942 at HMCS *Cornwallis*. From August to early September John was granted Agricultural Leave. This was a provision which allowed personnel with family farming connections to leave to assist in urgent farming issues such as spring seeding or harvest. On return to Halifax, he was drafted to the corvette HMCS *Buctouche* on 15 September. He would serve in her for the next 217 days.

*Buctouche* was a unit of the Western Local Escort Force (WLEF). A WLEF escort group would typically meet a westbound convoy at the Western Ocean Meeting Point (WOMP) off Newfoundland and then individual WLEF ships such as *Boutouche* would be detached with elements of the convoy to proceed separately to Halifax, Sydney, Quebec ports on the St. Lawrence River, Saint John, Boston, or New York City. The reverse process was employed for east bound convoys. During Cook



Merchant ship survivors arrive alongside *Buctouche*. Date unknown.  
 Photo credit: From the Collection of LS Stan Leyland, Wireless Operator, RCNVR  
 (<http://www.forposterityssake.ca/>)

Thompson's service in *Buctouche*, the ship escorted and protected merchant ships in 24 different convoys. Notably, on 21 Nov 1942, *Buctouche* attacked and severely damaged U-518 with depth charges 200 miles southeast of Sydney causing the U-boat to limp home. On 18 January 1943 John was promoted to Cook (S).

On 1 May 1943 John was drafted to another corvette, HMCS *Regina*, which had returned to Canadian waters in March for local escort duties, refit, and work-ups. He would serve in her for the next 466 days.

*Regina* joined Escort Group C-1 in February 1944. 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 aspect of the invasion of Normandy.

*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.

*Buctouche* and *Regina* were of different configurations from each other when John served in them. Nonetheless the galleys were similar and in approximately the same place on the upper deck abaft the bridge. The galley measured about 7 feet by 15 feet and contained an oil-fired range and oven with cupboards and counter space. *Regina* had the advantage of having a refrigerator nearby. The galley was hot and cramped for two or more hands to work in. Since the ship frequently took rolls of up to 40° to each side there was a real danger in being splashed with scolding liquids or falling onto hot surfaces. The ships employed "broadside messing". John and his fellow cook worked about 12-14 hours per day serving a ship's company of about 95. They heated, roasted, baked or boiled food brought to them by each "Cook of the Galley". The cooks of the galley were junior seaman detailed off to draw rations from the victualing stores man for

the three messes on board (the Seamen's Mess, the Stokers' Mess, and the Chiefs' and Petty Officers' Mess), prepare the rations for cooking, carry them to the galley, and then carry the cooked food back to the messes. There were no main cafeterias as found in modern warships. A steward handled the rations in the same way for the Wardroom. The Commanding Officer ate with his officers.



Late on the warm summer evening of 8 August 1944, *Regina* was the sole escort of a ten-ship convoy proceeding southwest from Milford Haven along the north Cornwall coast off Trevoze 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. John Thompson and twenty-nine members of HMCS *Regina*'s ship's company perished.

For his service, Cook (S) John Thompson 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. His mother Elena Thompson was awarded the Memorial Cross.

Cook John Thompson has no known grave. He is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial Panel 13 and his name appears on a memorial plaque in St. Albans Anglican Cathedral in Prince Albert. Additionally, Thompson Creek flowing northeast from MacCallum Lake (Lat 55°00' N Long 108° 23' W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory.

**Prepared By:**

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1983-88 & Citizen Sailor Virtual Cenotaph Research Team



**Sources:**

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission record for Cook (S) John Thompson
- Library and Archives Canada Service Record for Cook (S) John Thompson
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial – Profile page for Cook (S) John Thompson
- Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial – Profile page for Cook (S) John Thompson

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](http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_REGINA_K234.htm)

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Notes of a conversation between LCdr. David J. Freeman (Retired) and Capt. J. Dalzell (Retired), 12 December, 2021

McKay, John and Harland, John. Anatomy of the Ship The Flower Class Corvette AGASSIZ. London, UK: Conway Maritime Press, 1993

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