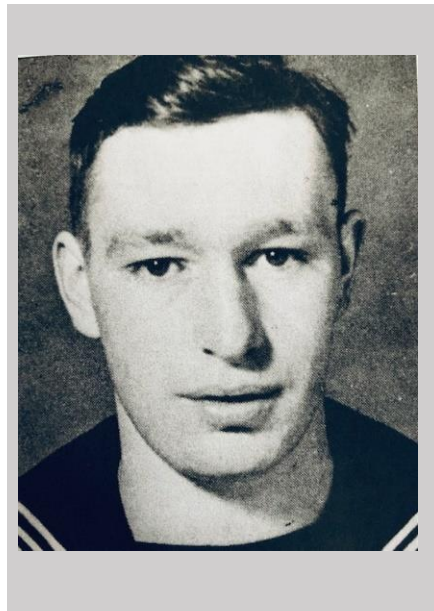


Able Seaman Maurice Waitson V-18646



AB Maurice Waitson

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Napanee ON, 5 May 1924**
- **Enlisted: Kingston Division RCNVR, 15 January 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Tinsmith Helper, Boyle & Son Hardware**
- **Death: Died when HMCS Athabaskan sank on 29 April 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 11; Napanee Cenotaph & Memorial Plaque at Pointe Saint Mathieu, Finistère, France**

Maurice was born the second youngest in a family of seven children. The Napanee River provided him, his family and friends with an abundance of outdoor activities. In the summer, they gathered at their favourite watering hole above the falls to swim and relax. That same frozen ice surface became their outdoor rink for playing hockey. Spring, summer and fall, at the foot of the falls, attracted Maurice and his buddies to flyfish for pickerel and salmon.

He was a young apprentice as a tinsmith at Boyle's and Sons shop in Napanee, when at the age of seventeen he enlisted in the army. The recruitment officer knew Maurice was underage but allowed him to sign up anyway. He was re-mustered to the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve in Kingston, On. During World War II, Maurice's parents had three sons in the Royal Canadian Navy, and his mother, Alma Waitson, had three brothers in the Royal Navy in Britain.

Admitted into active service as an Ordinary Seaman, at HMCS *Cataraqui* in Kingston on 15 January 1942, Maurice was sent for training 4 March 1942 at *York*, followed by *Stadacona*, 27 April, 1942, *Cornwallis*- 5 June 1942, *Stadacona* 7 July, 1942, *Niobe*, Scotland 12 December, 1942 and then commissioned to HMCS *Athabaskan* as an Able Seaman 25 February, 1943.



Members of Athabaskan's crew pose for a photo. AB Waitson is closest to the camera.
Credit: Sherry Pringle

Initially assigned to "B" Guns, he switched gun detail with his pal John Fairchild, positioned on "X" Guns, in early April, 1944. Serving in this two-million-dollar Tribal Class Destroyer, one of four such Canadian ships, built in Newcastle-on-Tyne, was wrought with strife. Dubbed the "Unlucky Lady, she started her life in the dockyards with a name switch. HMCS *Iroquois* was the first to be scheduled for launch but was heavily damaged during an air-strike on the dockyards. To keep the scheduled launch date for *Iroquois*, the navy renamed *Athabaskan-Iroquois* and the damaged *Iroquois* then became *Athabaskan*.

Her brief fighting career lasted only fourteen months and saw *Athabaskan* spending weeks and months in drydocks for repairs. Stress damage from severe Arctic conditions was the first of several drydock experiences, followed on one occasion by a collision with a harbour cable. Her most severe damages were the result of being hit in the Bay of Biscay, by the first recorded Glider Bomb (nicknamed "Chase Me Charlie").

After patrolling the frigid waters of Scapa Flow, the Murmansk Run and the Faroe Islands, the crew were happy to be assigned to the warmer waters of Plymouth, England. On one occasion, the ship and her crew escorted the British destroyer, King George V, carrying Prime Minister Winston Churchill to secret meetings in Gibraltar.



Maurice Waitson seen here on leave in London had arranged to meet his Napanee pal Ralph Mellow RCAF, but Athabaskan sunk before the friends could meet.
Credit: Sherry Pringle

On the night of 26 April, 1944, *Athabaskan* and *Haida*, entered into battle with three Elbing Class Destroyers, sinking *T27* in the Channel. A number of ships from the 10th flotilla were out of commission after the hostilities from the 26th. As a result, *Athabaskan* and HMCS *Haida* entered the Channel, the sole supporters for the night's mine-laying operation, preparing the waters for the Normandy Invasion. At 4:17 a.m. *Athabaskan* was torpedoed by *T24*, knocking out the aft stations of X and Y Guns. A second explosion ripped off her stern and at 4:28 a.m., *Athabaskan* sunk. Back home in Canada, Maurice's mother fell out of bed screaming that her son had just been killed and the ship had sunk. Meanwhile, off Brittany's coast, *Haida* returned to the carnage and rescued forty-four sailors. Her cutter carried another six safely back to port in Plymouth. At dawn, *T24* returned to the disaster and recovered eighty-three sailors still in the water and whisked them off to become POWs. *Athabaskan's* compliment of sailors that night was 261. When dawn broke on the 29th April, 1944, 128 *Athabaskan* sailors perished, 83 were taken prisoners of war and only 50 were rescued by her sister-ship, *Haida*.

Able Seaman Maurice Waitson was among those listed as MPD or Missing Dead. He was 19 years old. He is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 11, on the Napanee Cenotaph and on a memorial plaque at Pointe Saint Mathieu, Finistère, France.

For his service, Maurice Waitson was awarded the 1939-1945 Star, the Atlantic Star, Defense Medal, War Medal, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp. His mother, Alma Waitson, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

Prepared By:

Sherry Pringle, Author of *All The Ship's Men: HMCS Athabaskan's Untold Stories*, Niece of Maurice Waitson and Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Project Researcher



Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission
- Library and Archives Canada Service Record for Maurice Waitson
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial profile for Maurice Waitson
- Cenotaph, Napanee, Ontario
- Pointe Ste. Mathieu, Finistère, France- plaque commemorating Athabaskan's war dead.
- Waitson Lake, Map Reference Wunnummin L. 53-A (1964) 1MCE
- Unlucky Lady by Len Burrow/Emile Beaudoin
- All The Ship's Men: HMCS Athabaskan's Untold Stories by Sherry J. Pringle
- Ancestry.ca-Canada World War II Records and Service Files of War Dead 1939-1945