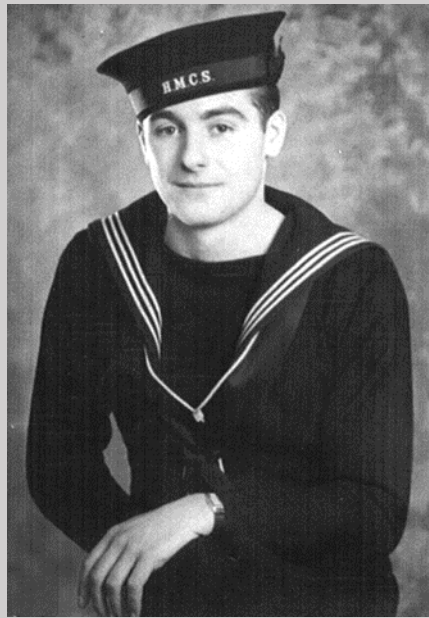


Signalman Theodore Joseph Bouvier V-31063



Signalman Ted Bouvier. Source:
Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Gravelbourg SK, 8 May 1920**
- **Enlisted: Regina Division RCNVR, 19 February 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Linotype Operator, Model Print Shop**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Valleyfield* was torpedoed and sank on 7 May 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 12; the Gravelbourg, SK Cenotaph and Bouvier Creek (Lat 55° 04'N Long 109° 33' W) in Northern Saskatchewan in named in his memory.**

Theodore Joseph Bouvier, known as Ted, was the fifth of twelve children born to Anastasie Bouvier and Arthur Bouvier on 8 May 1920 in Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan. His mother Anastasie was born in Ontario in 1889 and his father Arthur was born in Quebec in 1885. They were married in 1910 in a double wedding ceremony with Arthur's brother, Elphie and fiancée, Anna, in Tarsus, North Dakota which is about 12 miles south of the Manitoba border and 350 miles on present day roads from Gravelbourg. Both couples maintained a close family relationship and remained in the Tarsus area for some time. Anastasie and Arthur had five children there - Edgar in 1911, Florentine in 1913, Theodore in 1915 (Theodore died in 1917), Gloria in 1916, and Genevieve in 1918.

The family emigrated to Canada in 1919 and settled in Gravelbourg where they joined Elphie's family who had settled on a farm in the immediate area in 1913. With Elphie's assistance, Arthur became a butcher in the town itself. There Anastasie and Arthur had seven more children. Ted, who was named for his late brother (it was not uncommon to name a subsequent child for an earlier deceased child), was born in 1920, Valida in 1923, Lionel in 1925, Hector in 1927, Madelaine in 1929, Andre in 1931 and Rodger in 1935.

Gravelbourg, which is about 100 miles southwest of Regina, was named after Father Louis-Joseph-Pierre Gravel, a missionary and colonizer. He encouraged about 10,000 French Canadians - many of whom were living in the United States - to settle in Saskatchewan in what were termed block settlements which allowed settlers of the same ethnicity to form communities.

In 1918 a college affiliated with the University of Ottawa, a convent and a bishop's residence were built followed by a Romanesque cathedral in 1919, and a monastery and hospital in 1926. From

Canadian census records it is possible to see Gravelbourg's growth keeping in mind that the surrounding affiliated rural population would add as much as 50% to the population shown:

Census	Population
1911	0
1916	463
1921	1106
1926	1201
1936	985

Ted completed grades 1- 9 at the convent which accepted co-ed day students before leaving school in 1934. With the onset of the Great Depression and the accompanying drought in 1929, the population of Gravelbourg dwindled to 985 by 1936 as the economy weakened. In 1937 Ted travelled to Bathurst, New Brunswick and found work there in the printing trade before returning to Gravelbourg in 1940.

(It is not clear if he was accompanied by the family or if he set out alone. Nor is it clear why Bathurst was his destination.) Back in Gravelbourg he immediately found work with a local print shop as a linotype operator. In August 1940 he enlisted in the 2nd Battalion South Saskatchewan Regiment (Non-Permanent Active Militia) and eventually held the rank of Acting Corporal.

On 19 February 1942 Ted transferred to the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve from the South Saskatchewan Regiment at the Regina Division (HMCS *Queen*) and was attested as an Ordinary Seaman (Temporary). He was single, 5 feet 8 inches tall and weighed 139 pounds. He had black hair, brown eyes, a dark complexion and was fluent in English and French. Two of his younger siblings, Valida and Lionel, joined the Royal Canadian Air Force. Valida served at No. 2 Bombing and Gunnery School at Mossbank, Saskatchewan about 30 miles east of her home. Lionel served overseas. Two of Ted's first cousins, Leo and Maurice Bouvier, with whom Ted had close family ties also served - both in the Canadian Army. Trooper Maurice Bouvier serving with the Canadian Grenadier Guards was killed in action in Holland in April 1945.

Ted completed new entry training at *Queen* on 17 May 1942. An assessment in his personnel file states he "...has done exceptionally well in new entry training." He was then drafted to HMCS *St. Hyacinthe* in St. Hyacinthe, Quebec where he underwent Visual Signal training. Training was rigorous with a failure rate of about 20%.



Unidentified signalman aboard RCN Fairmile motor launch Q078 at sea, 10 May 1943.
Source: Library and Archives Canada

The tasks performed by Visual Signalmen required that they memorize the appearance and multiple meanings of about 70 flags and pennants; that they master the sending and receiving of semaphore messages at the rate of 15 words per minute (a "word" was defined as 5 characters), thus sending and receiving characters at a rate of more than one per second; and that they learn to send and receive Morse code visually using an array of signal projectors and flashing lights at a rate of 8 words per minute – a rate of one character every two seconds. Their fundamental skills equipped them to send messages on behalf of the "command team" - in present day parlance. To do this Signalmen first logged the message then either sent the message in plain language using a signal projector or semaphore, or encoded the message using one of three sets of publications – the International Code of Signals; Allied Communications Publications (ACP); or codes contained in Convoy Operation Orders - and then transmitted the message using either signal

projectors, semaphore, or signal flags depending on factors such as the time of day, visibility, urgency, and proximity of the receiving station among others. To send a message by signal flag,



RCN Signals rating hoisting signal flags, c1945.
Source: Library and Archives Canada

Signalmen worked rapidly as a team to select the appropriate signal flags from a vertical flag locker located near the bridge in which folded flags were arrayed in a specific grid, clip them together in order and then hoist them using halyards. Receiving signals basically reversed the process, i.e., messages were received, acknowledged, decoded as required, records and logged, and provided to the command team as quickly as possible. All these tasks were performed on open bridges in all weather, sometimes under fire. Ted passed the course with an average of 94% and was rated as an Ordinary Signalman on 28 August 1942. He was then drafted to HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax, Nova Scotia where he awaited a draft to a ship.

On 10 September 1942, Ordinary Signalman Bouvier was drafted to HMCS *Woodstock* (K-238), a Flower class corvette. Built in Collingwood, Ontario, she was named for the town of Woodstock, Ontario and had been commissioned on 1 May 1942. Following work ups and a brief assignment to the Western Local Escort Force she was assigned to Operation TORCH, the Allied invasion of North Africa. With Ted now onboard, *Woodstock*

arrived in Londonderry, Northern Ireland on 23 Sep 1942 as part of a convoy escort. Following another refit and the installation of additional weapons she participated in the invasion in November 1942.

Ted was promoted to Signalman on 20 March 1943.

Woodstock remained busy for the 551 days that Ted served aboard her. In addition to TORCH, *Woodstock* was assigned to various escort groups operating from Halifax, St. John's, and Londonderry. By the time Signalman Bouvier left the ship, he had participated in 24 different convoy escort assignments.

On 15 March 1944, Ted left *Woodstock* to attend training at the Signal Training Centre in HMCS *Avalon* in St. John's. On Ted leaving *Woodstock* his divisional officer wrote of him "*Works well. Learns quickly, keen & reliable...Will make a good L/Sig....*"

Ted successfully completed the training in *Avalon* and qualified as a Signalman 3rd Class making him eligible for promotion to Leading Signalman when a position became available.

Ted was next drafted to HMCS *Valleyfield* (K-328). *Valleyfield* was a River-class frigate named for Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, Quebec, situated on Grande-Île in the St. Lawrence River. The ship was built at Quebec City and commissioned on 7 December 1943. Following work ups she was assigned to Escort Group C-1 as a convoy escort and made three eventful North Atlantic crossings before Ted joined her in Londonderry sometime in April. With Signalman Ted Bouvier embarked *Valleyfield* left Londonderry on 27 April 1944 with convoy ONM.234: a 73-ship convoy with 18 escorts, traveling between 9-13 knots (17-24 km/hr) destined for various ports in North America.

In the early hours of 7 May 1944, as was standard practice, *Valleyfield* and the other escorts of the Mid-Atlantic Escort Force handed the convoy of 73 merchant ships over to the Local Escort Force. They parted company with the convoy south of Newfoundland at the Western Ocean Meeting Point and set course for St. John's, Newfoundland.



HMCS Valleyfield
Source: Government of Canada

At 0432, the five escort ships were approximately 50 miles south of Cape Race when *U-548* fired two Gnat torpedoes at the five ships. *Valleyfield* was hit by one torpedo on the port side of the boiler room. The ship broke in two and sank within four minutes. It was still dark when the ship was hit, and *Valleyfield* had been astern of the

other ships of the group. Consequently, it took some time for her sinking to be noticed. Then while three ships of the Escort Group conducted an unsuccessful search for *U-548*, HMCS *Giffard*, was dispatched to search for survivors. She approached the area cautiously thus unavoidably delaying rescue from the cold Atlantic Ocean. Including Signalman Theodore Joseph Bouvier, 120 members of *Valleyfield's* ship's company perished in the sinking and five more later died of exposure onboard *Giffard*. Only 38 were rescued and survived. Ted Bouvier was 23 years old at the time of his death.

Ted like most of the others killed has no known grave. He is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 12, on the Gravelbourg Cenotaph, and in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, page 155, Centre Blocks of Parliament, Ottawa. Additionally, Bouvier Creek (Lat 55° 04'N Long 109° 33' W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory.



**HMCS Valleyfield's Unofficial
Badge**
Source: Badges of Distinction

For his service, Signalman Theodore Joseph Bouvier was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Africa Star and Clasp, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother, Mrs. Anastasie Bouvier was awarded the Memorial Cross.

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