

## Able Seaman Richard Godfrey East V-36333



Able Seaman Richard East. Photo: *The Vancouver Daily Province*, 18 Aug 1944 page 3, Retrieved from ProQuest Historical Newspapers

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Keremeos BC, 13 December 1923**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Discovery*, 19 August 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Mail Carrier, Dominion Government**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Regina* was torpedoed and sank on 8 August 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 11; HMCS *Discovery* Memorial Plaque; and the Keremeos Cenotaph**

Richard East was born on 13 December 1923 in Keremeos, BC. His father was Alfred Edwin East, born in Forest Hill, London, England. Richard's mother was Blanche East, born in Boldre, Lymington, Hampshire, England. Richard had one much older half-brother, Jack Haldon East. He had one older sister, Elizabeth Blanche East, and three much older half-sisters, Rachel Patricia Clarke, Kathleen Mary Carter, and Margaret Brett.

Richard was a Patrol leader in the Boy Scouts. In the Fall of 1940, at the age of 16 years old and after two years of Junior Matriculation at Keremeos High School, he pursued enlistment as a boy in the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN). His application was supported by a letter from John W. Lewis, a retired Lieutenant in Command, Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, who served in the First World War. John had known Richard all his life. The local Member of Parliament and the Principal of the Keremeos High School also provided letters of recommendation. Richard was entered on the wait list for recruitment. While waiting to enroll, Richard was employed as a Rural Mail Carrier for the Dominion Government.

One month after his eighteenth birthday, Richard left his home on Rural Route 1, Keremeos, BC and joined the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR). He was enrolled as an Ordinary Seaman at HMCS *Discovery* on 19 January 1942. His enlistment documents describe him as 5 feet 9 inches tall and 138 pounds with brown hair, brown eyes, and a medium complexion.

Richard trained and served at HMCS *Naden*, the large naval training base in Esquimalt, BC, from 19 January 1942 to 9 November 1943. He received seamanship, gunnery, and submarine detector training in the armed yacht HMCS *Sans Peur* (Z02/Z52) while it patrolled the British Columbia coast between 20 August 1942 and 20 December 1942. Richard was promoted to Able Seaman on 19 January 1943 and was qualified as a Submarine Detector (S/D) on 30 October 1943.

Sailors like Richard, who qualified as S/D operators, had training in underwater tactics and sea conditions, and they had an acute sense of hearing. These skills were needed to locate submarines using the rudimentary sonar tools available at the time, namely Asdic. Able Seaman East was transferred to the Atlantic coast on 10 November 1943 and served ashore in HMCS *Protector* at Sydney, NS and then HMCS *Stadacona* at Halifax until 6 December 1943.

While HMCS *Regina* (K234), a Flower-class corvette, was in refit in Canada, AB East joined the ship on 7 December 1943. In February 1944, *Regina* joined the Escort Group C-1 and set sail from Argentia, Newfoundland, at the beginning of March for operations with the Mid-Ocean Escort Force. While fueling at sea, the ship fouled its screw and was towed to the Azores by the rescue ship *Dundee*, with the corvette HMCS *Valleyfield* providing an escort. After reaching Londonderry, Northern Ireland, toward the end of March, *Regina* was assigned to Western Approaches Command for its duties in the Normandy invasion. The ship was used as an escort in the English Channel and for coastal convoys.



**Example of the Asdic gear found in Flower-class Corvettes. Seen here are R. Cosburn (left) and Lieutenant F.A. Beck (right) at the Asdic set on the bridge of HMCS Battleford, November 1941.**

**Photo: Library and Archives Canada Photo, MIKAN No. 3455875**

On 8 August 1944, HMCS *Regina* was escorting the convoy EBC-66 that was transporting material for the Allied forces in France. The convoy's route was through the British Declared Mine Area that extended from the Cornwall coast to Ireland. While the convoy was near Trevoze Head, Cornwall, the *Ezra Weston*, an American merchant ship in the convoy, reported that it had struck a mine and was sinking. As it proceeded to the stricken ship, *Regina* ordered a Landing Craft Tank (LCT) ship for rescue operations. Depth charges on *Regina*'s stern were defused en route to prevent detonation in case *Regina* sank.

An undetected German submarine, U-667, had fired a torpedo at the *Ezra Weston* at 2127. The electric torpedo that struck the merchant ship left no track in the water, so the cause was assessed to be a mine when it exploded. When *Regina* reached the vicinity of the rescue operation, most of her crew were on deck. They were watching the LCT take men off the merchant ship. At 2230, the submarine fired a German Naval Acoustic Torpedo (GNAT) at HMCS *Regina*.

The article "*Ship's Doctor and Aide Heroes as Regina Sunk*" in *The Globe and Mail* on 13 September 1944 reported:

*"Suddenly there was a violent explosion and every man on deck was hurled into the sea. Those who died were either trapped below decks or killed by the force of the explosion. Regina sank in 28 seconds."*

The precaution of defusing the depth charges prevented the loss of the survivors in the water.

As reported in *The Vancouver Sun* on 12 September 1944, “In about half an hour the LCT had picked up all the survivors.” The survivors were landed at an “English port.” In fact, 66 survivors were picked up by the armed trawler HMS *Jacques Morgand* and LCT-644. Thirty of *Regina's* ship's company were lost. Richard was not one of the survivors. Able Seaman Richard Godfrey East was 20 years old when he died.

On 15 August 1944, a letter from the Secretary of the Naval Board was sent to his mother, Blanche East. It refers to a letter sent on 11 August 1944 that undoubtedly informed her that “your son is missing at sea as the result of enemy action.” The second letter closed with, “*Please be assured if further information is received regarding your son, you will be informed immediately.*”

A third letter sent by the Secretary of the Naval Board on 26 January 1945 to Richard's mother stated:

*“THIS IS TO CERTIFY that according to official information Richard Godfrey East, Able Seaman, Official Number V-36333, Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve, is missing, presumed dead to date 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1944, when the ship in which he was serving, H.M.C.S. “REGINA”, was torpedoed on the high seas.”*

Richard's mother, Blanche East, received the outstanding pay allotments of \$136.22, an estate balance of \$103.54 and a total of \$480.20 for a War Service Gratuity and Supplement for Overseas Service.

For his service, Able Seaman Richard Godfrey East was awarded: the 1939-1945 Star, the Atlantic Star & Clasp (the Clasp was for service in France and Germany), the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp (for service more than 60 days outside of Canada), and the War Medal. Blanche East, his mother, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

Able Seaman Richard Godfrey East is commemorated on Panel 11 of the Halifax Memorial at Point Pleasant Park, Halifax, NS; on the Memorial Plaque at HMCS *Discovery*; on the Cenotaph in Keremeos, BC, and in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 298, at the Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa.

**Post Script:** The conflicting reports of *Ezra Weston* and HMCS *Regina* being sunk by a British mine and a German torpedo led to the story “Fatal Decision” in Season 1 and Episode 3 of the TV series “Deep Wreck Mysteries”. The wrecks of *Ezra Weston* and HMCS *Regina* (K234) are in sixty metres of water, and divers have explored them. A brass fuse box plate from HMCS *Regina* (K234) was salvaged by a local diver and turned over to the United Kingdom's Receiver of Wreck, who presented the artifact to the RCN. The artifact is displayed in the Halifax-class frigate HMCS *Regina* (FFH 334).

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\*All stories are edited by the project crew and sometimes altered to conform to the Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph format, length, and content parameters.



**Sources:**

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