

## Able Seaman Robert William Goss V-55196



Able Seaman Robert William Goss.  
Photo: Vancouver Province 15 May  
1944, Page 5

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- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Corbin, BC, 17 August 1924**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Discovery*, 15 February 1943**
- **Civilian Occupation: Shop clerk, Vivian Engine Works Ltd.**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Valleyfield* was torpedoed and sank on 7 May 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 11; HMCS *Discovery* Memorial Plaque; and the HMCS *Valleyfield* Monument, Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, QC.**

Able Seaman Robert William Goss was born on 17 August 1924 in Corbin, British Columbia, to William and Mary Annie Goss. Today Corbin is a ghost town, but it was a coal mining community located at the foot of Coal Mountain south of the Crowsnest Pass in the southern Canadian Rockies. Robert had one younger sister, Marjorie Catherine Goss, born in 1928. He identified as Roman Catholic and indicated in his Occupational History Form that he was fluent in both English and German. His command of German is interesting, as he indicated on his Attestation Form that his parents were English nationals. Robert went to General Brock Elementary School, followed by John Oliver High School, where he received his Junior Matriculation. This education included one year of Pitman Business training.

At the time he enlisted, Robert was employed by Vivian Engine Works as a Shop Clerk although he only worked there for two months. The company manufactured diesel engines. His post-war occupational goal was to become an accountant.

His Attestation Form dated 15 February 1943 described him as 5' 6 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>' with brown hair and eyes. His complexion was described as 'medium', which seems vague. The form also indicated that he had no scars. This observation was not consistent with his medical examination, which was not dated but presumably taken at the time of his enlistment and noted a 1" scar over his left knee, an appendectomy scar and a left herniotomy scar. On the questionnaire for candidates who wished to join the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR), he indicated that he had been rejected by the Royal Canadian Air Force for medical reasons. At the time of his enlistment, his age was 18 years and 7 months.

Robert was taken on strength in HMCS *Discovery* in Vancouver as an Ordinary Seaman (Comm), indicating that he had requested a communications trade. He completed basic training at *Discovery* from 15 February 1943 to 22 March 1943, when the Navy transferred him to HMCS *York* in Toronto, where he served until 7 June 1943. On 8 June 1943, he was drafted to HMCS *Cornwallis*, in Nova Scotia, where he remained until 27 July before being sent to the Naval Communications School, HMCS *St. Hyacinthe*, located in St Hyacinthe, Quebec.

His training record at *Discovery*, covering boat work and parade training, was evaluated as satisfactory, with the additional remarks designating him as an Ordinary Seaman (W.T.), indicating that he had applied for wireless telegraphy. During the four months he spent at *York*, he wrote the “M” examination and was rated as “C”. His divisional officer made the following comments: “Average rating with average intelligence; shows a fair amount of initiative and gets results, should develop into a good W.T. man.” At *Cornwallis*, he passed seamanship training with an average mark of 67.5%. In gunnery, his mark was 59.7% and 65% in torpedo work. His divisional officer in *Cornwallis* made very favourable observations, identifying Robert as “Very good material” and saying that he “has proved satisfactory through six weeks of intensive new entry training.” On leaving *Cornwallis*, the Navy marked Robert as ‘trained,’ effective 22 July 1943.

The next step for all communications ratings was *St. Hyacinthe*, in Quebec. In the years before World War Two, training as a telegraphist took about a year. However, once the War began, the Navy reduced the period of training to approximately 3 months of intensive training. If a candidate failed their exam after six weeks, they would be assigned to the stoker trade or to a seamanship trade. Robert completed eight weeks of training in *St Hyacinthe* from 28 July 1943 to 28 September 1943. He did not receive high enough grades to rate as a wireless telegrapher and was reclassified as an Ordinary Seaman.

In early October, the Navy posted Robert to HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax, and shortly afterwards, he joined HMCS *Frederickton*, a Flower-class corvette. He only served in this ship for a total of 48 days until 22 November 1943. His time onboard *Frederickton* was not a complete success, as indicated by the following comment from his divisional officer, Sub-Lieutenant E.B. Richards, “Average intelligence but lacks decision. (His) appearance is slovenly and dirty unless checked on this.”

It is not clear from his records if Robert was landed due to this lacklustre report or if he had finished additional seamanship training that he required as a result of his remuster from Telegraphist. After returning to *Stadacona*, he was briefly assigned to HMCS *Hochelaga II* – the RCN manning depot in Montreal – before being drafted to HMCS *Valleyfield*. Robert joined the crew on 8 December 1943, the day after the ship’s commissioning in Quebec City. Robert served continuously onboard *Valleyfield* for 152 days until its loss on 7 May 1944. He was rated Able Seaman on 22 April 1944.

*Valleyfield* was a River class frigate that offered more comfortable accommodation than the smaller corvettes. Compared to the corvettes, the River class frigates were faster and had twice the range. The Royal Navy named their frigates after rivers, while the Canadian Navy named them after towns and cities. Following the ship’s commissioning on 7 December 1943 at Quebec City, *Valleyfield* departed for Halifax and arrived on 20 December. It then commenced work-ups in St. Margaret’s Bay, and completed the process in Bermuda.

*Valleyfield* left Halifax at the end of February 1944 to join Escort Group C-1, which sailed for the United Kingdom with slow convoy 154. However, en route, *Valleyfield* was detached to Horta, Azores, to escort the rescue ship *Dundee* with the corvette HMCS *Regina* in tow.

*Valleyfield's* next assignment was to escort a Royal Naval salvage tug with the disabled HMCS *Mulgrave* in tow from Horta to the Clyde, in Scotland. The three ships left the Azores on 14 March and joined convoy SL151 (from Sierra Leone), three days later.

*Valleyfield* returned to Canada but was ordered to Londonderry, in Northern Ireland. On 27 April 1944, she was assigned to convoy ONM 234. Just before midnight on 6 May 1944, the convoy found itself 50 miles south of Cape Race, Newfoundland. Small icebergs scattered the area, confusing the radar picture. The convoy sailed on, knowing that they were not far from the safety of St. John's, Newfoundland. Unfortunately, they didn't realize that the German submarine, U-548, was observing them, and knew their course and speed.

*Valleyfield* was travelling astern of the convoy. The Officer of the Watch had just called for the middle watch (from midnight to 0400) when the ASDIC operator warned that they had detected a submarine. Simultaneously - as the Officer of the Watch called Action Stations - a torpedo tore into the port side of the *Valleyfield*, causing an enormous explosion. The ship broke in two and sank very quickly.

As the ship was sinking, most of the crew managed to reach the frigid North Atlantic, which the previous watch has assessed for sea survival time, registering a temperature of 32 degrees Fahrenheit (0 degrees Celsius). Additionally, oily water choked the survivors as they huddled together, helping each other survive. Some climbed on top of wreckage or clung to Carley floats. Others remained in the water, kept afloat by the life jackets.

Once the ship had completely sunk, the surviving ship's company found themselves alone, with the other escorts unaware of what had happened astern of the convoy. Finally, HMCS *Giffard* realized that *Valleyfield* was missing and reversed course to rescue the survivors. However, as per wartime doctrine, *Giffard* did not effect the rescue until it had spent valuable time searching for the U-boat, which had caused *Valleyfield's* loss. By this time, many men had given up, let go of their hold on the Carley floats or wreckage and drowned or died of exposure. A total of 125 men perished that night, all within the coastal shores of Newfoundland. There were 38 survivors, the last of whom died on 12 April 2015. *Valleyfield* was the only Royal Canadian Navy ship of its class to be lost during the War.

The Navy informed Robert's parents by telegram on 8 May 1944 that he was missing. It was not until 30 August 1944 that the Navy sent a subsequent letter confirming his death.

For his service, Able Seaman Goss was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, and the War Medal. He had already received the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp on 2 July 1943. He was 19 years and 9 months old at the time of his death. His mother was awarded the Canadian Memorial Cross on 22 September 1944



Able Seaman Robert William Goss is commemorated on Panel 11 of the Canadian Virtual Memorial located in Point Pleasant Park, Halifax, Nova Scotia. There is a monument dedicated to the memory of those lost in the sinking of HMCS *Valleyfield* located in Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, QC. An anchor from the "destroyer" HMCS *Gatineau* placed on a block of cement is the main piece of the monument. The following inscription is engraved in both official languages on an aluminum plate at the base of the monument.

*"Monument erected to the memory of the frigate H.M.C.S VALLEYFIELD K-329 commissioned December 7, 1943, torpedoed and sunk the night of May 6 to 7, 1944 by U-548 during the battle of the Atlantic. Monument dedicated to the memory of the 120 officers and men who rest with their ship in the Atlantic Ocean 90 miles south of Cape Race, Newfoundland, to the 5 who lie buried in St-John's and the 38 who survived. UNVEILED ON SUNDAY MAY 7<sup>th</sup> 2000 Under the auspices of the City of Salaberry-de-Valleyfield in the presence of Mr. Denis Lapointe, mayor Mr. Marcel Gareau, priest, the survivors of H.M.C.S Valleyfield K-329, Mr. Clifford Winter, president of the Canadian Legion Branch 62, and Lieutenant (N) Pierre Lefebvre, CD. A.de.C to whom we owe this initiative."*

**Prepared By:**

Lieutenant Commander (Ret'd) Robert W. White (HMCS *Discovery* 1960 – 1989) Citizen Sailor Virtual Cenotaph Research Team.



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