

Stoker 1st Class Oliver Baker Hazle V-41401



Stoker 1st Class Oliver Hazle. Photo:
Canadian Virtual War Memorial

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Maxwellton SK, 3 March 1922**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Queen*, 2 July 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Mechanic, Farm Labourer, Family Farm**
- **Death: Died of wounds in Italy while serving in HM LCI(L) 107 on 1 September 1943**
- **Buried: Salerno War Cemetery, VII. B. 16**
- **Commemorated: Hazle Lake in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory.**

As with many people, significant events occurred before Stoker 1st Class Oliver Hazle was born, which profoundly affected his life. These events were recorded in a family history posted on the internet.

Hazle family story

Oliver's father, Raymond Ernest Hazle, was born in London, England, in 1874 into a very prosperous family who owned large real estate holdings. Raised as a Victorian gentleman, he received a classical education and even attended the Westminster Abbey church school, where he sang in the choir. Unfortunately, he was not taught how to handle money. Consequently, as a young man, he lost most of his significant inheritance through bad investments.

In 1902, he married Ada Smith, who came from an identical family background – in fact, the families knew each other for years. Ada's younger brother, Claude Smith, about ten years younger than Raymond, was pragmatic and adventurous – in many ways the opposite of Raymond - yet they became very good friends. At the turn of the century, Claude left his genteel life in England and emigrated to the United States, where he found work in a factory in Boston. Upon hearing that free farmland was available on the Canadian Prairies, he left the United States in 1906. He applied for a homestead in southern Saskatchewan under the provisions of the Dominion Land Act.

To encourage settlement in Western Canada, the Dominion Government offered the grant of a free homestead of 160 acres (also known as a quarter-section) for a \$10 registration fee (about \$260 in 2023 dollars or the equivalent of about three months' wages at the time) to those individuals and families who were prepared to live on and cultivate the land under specific conditions.

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Settlement came in two waves – 1905 and 1910 – in three distinct groups. The best-equipped group were Americans with farming knowledge and experience. The least equipped were from Britain, with little or no knowledge of agriculture. The third group was from Eastern Europe. Often impoverished, they sought to be free from oppression and turmoil. Upon arrival, as required, they all began to break the grassland with ploughs, pulverizing the soil and destroying the elaborate grassroots system which had anchored the soil and preserved moisture for thousands of years. Thus, they set the stage for the dust storms, soil erosion, and crop failures of the 1930s.

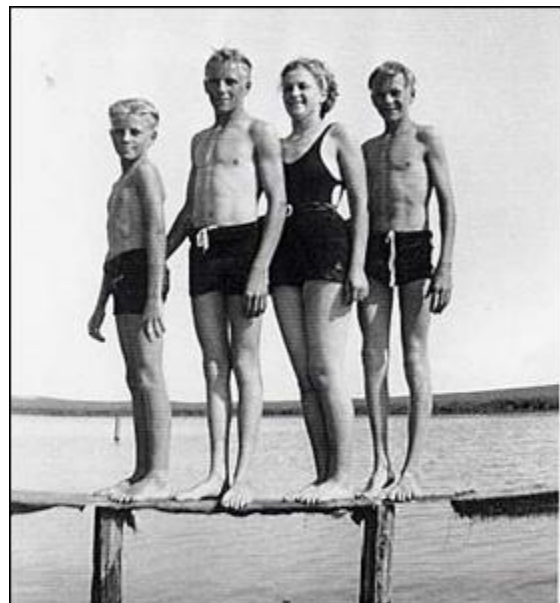
Claude's lack of knowledge about farming was evident when he chose a quarter section of land near the Lake of the Rivers, located 75 km south of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, and 90 km north of the Montana border. He chose this land for its picturesque resemblance to farms by the lochs in Scotland rather than for its potential fertility. However, the lake was "alkali," meaning it contained high levels of salts. Moreover, the land was covered with glacial till, which are rocks generally up to the size of a loaf of bread, left by the glacier of the last ice age. The lake was primarily fed by the snow melt in the spring, and as the lake water evaporated in the summer heat, the shoreline receded, creating salt deposits that blew onto the cultivated land, stunting the crops. In addition, the rocks from the glacial till would be forced upwards by the frost cycle, continually replenishing their supply on the surface and making it necessary to continuously pick them to avoid damaging farm implements.

Despite his choice, however, Claude demonstrated his pragmatic nature. For the first few years, he lived in Moose Jaw during the winter, working as a carpenter to raise money to buy machinery and supplies for the following summer. By September 1912, he had met the requirements under the Dominion Land Act and was granted title to the land.

The Hazle Children



Raymond and Ada's Children: Raymond, Edith, Ernest, and Ronald. London, 1913.
Source: HAZLE Family
Saskatchewan History Album
(saskhistory.ca)



Raymond and Mildred's Children: Arthur, Sidney, Joy, and Oliver. Readlyn, 1934.
Source: HAZLE Family
Saskatchewan History Album
(saskhistory.ca)

Claude returned to England for Christmas in 1913. While there, Ada repeatedly questioned him about life in Canada. She was concerned about Raymond's drinking and saw emigrating to Canada as a way of curtailing his habit. She planned for Raymond to accompany Claude to Canada in the spring and establish himself on Claude's farm, then Ada and the children – Raymond, 10 years old, Edith, 8, Ernest, 5, and Ronald, 4 would follow in the fall. Knowing the hardships involved, Claude did his best to dissuade her without success. On the other hand, Raymond jumped at the chance with visions of becoming a gentleman farmer. Consequently, Raymond and Claude sailed for Canada, arriving in New York on March 12, 1914. Ada remained in London with the children to sell their house and furnishings before boarding a ship for New York in August, just a few days before the beginning of World War 1.

In the meantime, Claude and Raymond began construction on a suitable house. Unfortunately, the house was not completed when Ada and the children arrived. It particularly lacked adequate insulation against the brutally cold winter that followed, and the fire from the lignite coal-fired stove would burn itself out overnight, leaving the house bitterly cold by morning. On those winter mornings, hoar frost was found on top of the bedding and the interior of the walls, while the supply of drinking water in a bucket in the kitchen would be frozen solid. Under these conditions, Ada became seriously ill and died in September 1915 - within a year of her arrival.

In 1916, Claude enlisted in the Canadian Army and was sent to Europe, where he fought at both Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele, leaving Raymond alone and ill-equipped to cope with the farm and the four children. Upon hearing of Raymond's situation, his sister back in England suggested that her friend Mildren Wing emigrate to Canada and work for Raymond as his housekeeper. Mildren, born in 1887, agreed on the condition that Raymond marry her on arrival in Canada. After further discussion, Mildred emigrated and she and Raymond were married upon her arrival in the fall of 1917. In due course, she and Raymond had five children: Joy, born in October 1918; Stanley, born in June 1920; Oliver and his twin brother, Sidney, born in March 1922; and Arthur, born in November 1925. Sadly, Stanley died in April 1922, shortly after the birth of Oliver and Sidney, likely from the so-called Spanish influenza, which reached pandemic levels after World War I and took the lives of other children in the area.

On Claude's return, he and Raymond decided to acquire the quarter-section immediately to the east of Claude's land and by September 1919, Claude received title through the grant process. That land also had glacial till issues, but with hard work, Claude, Raymond, and, by now, the older children managed to make a modest living.

The children were enrolled in Rose Lea school, about four miles (6km) away. This distance was problematic because the children's only means of transportation was a horse and cart. They often missed school during the winter when the temperature was below -30 Celsius, and the sun did not rise until after 9:00 a.m. and set by 5:00 p.m.

Matters became more difficult for the family by 1929. The Great Depression and the severe drought which devastated the Saskatchewan economy were beginning. In 1928, net farming income in Saskatchewan was \$363 million; by 1933, it dropped to \$11 million; and by 1937, two-thirds of the farm population of Saskatchewan was destitute. Relief costs, now referred to as social assistance, borne by the Saskatchewan government escalated to \$62 million, which was higher than the government's total revenues. The economies of towns and cities closely linked to the agriculture sector likewise suffered. Unemployment grew to 30% even as about 250,000 people left the Prairies for greener pastures in British Columbia and Ontario.

At the same time, Raymond's health deteriorated to the point where he was admitted to the Weyburn Mental Hospital, about 130 km away, for long-term care. Unable to run the farm without

him, Mildred rented it to a neighbour on a crop-share basis and, with her children, moved to the village of Readlyn, about 23 km away. Her stepchildren were now on their own. In Readlyn, the children were enrolled in the local school while Mildred, with the assistance of Oliver and Sidney, became the school janitor and was paid \$20 per month. Since she received very little rental income from the farm, Mildred also received relief from the provincial government.

In addition to his school janitor job, Oliver worked for Claude on his farm over the summers and during harvest while attending school. Upon leaving school at the age of 18 in 1940 after completing grade nine, he worked for his stepbrother, Ernest, who operated an automobile and farm implement repair shop in Morse, Saskatchewan. There, he acquired his mechanical skills and knowledge. Immediately before enlisting, Oliver was working full-time for Claude on the farm.

Oliver Baker Hazle's Naval career

On 2 July 1942, Oliver was sworn into the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) at HMCS *Queen* in Regina, Saskatchewan, as a Stoker 2nd Class (Motor Mechanic). When sworn in, Oliver was 20 years old, single, 5 feet 7 ½ inches tall, and weighed 123 pounds with blond hair, blue eyes, and a fair complexion. His twin brother, Sidney, enlisted in the RCNVR at *Queen* at the same time. Their brother, Arthur, joined the Canadian Army, as did their half-brothers, Raymond and Ernest. Their third half-brother, Ronald, enlisted in the United States Navy (USN).

When Oliver was sworn in, men were being recruited to man generally American-made combined operations vessels such as motor torpedo boats and major landing craft operated by the Royal Navy (RN). In early 1941 the Naval Staff agreed to a Royal Navy (RN) request to loan some 50 officers and 300 men for combined operations duty. It is not known whether or not this manning decision had any bearing on Oliver's next draft; however, once sworn in, he was on his way to HMCS *York* in Toronto, Ontario, on 4 July to complete basic training rather than have him wait for the next intake at *Queen* - likely in late August. The eight-week course was standardized in February 1941 and offered in all the naval reserve divisions across Canada. It covered subjects designed to inculcate the language, discipline, and basic procedures of the Navy.

Oliver completed the course on 4 September 1942 and was immediately granted Agriculture Leave. In response to a critical farm labour shortage, Agriculture Leave could be granted to armed forces personnel provided they were experienced in farm work and needed to work on their family farm for harvest. This was "leave without pay" and did not include benefits or transportation costs.

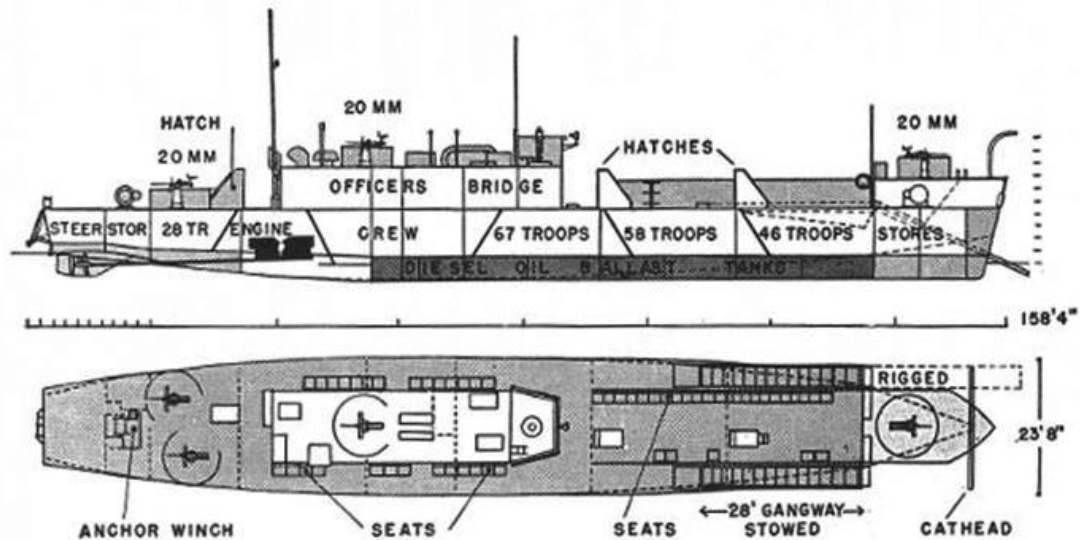
On 1 November, Oliver was back in Toronto to commence stoker training. Stokers made up roughly ten percent of the Navy's strength and were divided into three groups - Steam, Motor Mechanics (MM), and Fire Fighters (FF). Initially, their instruction had been provided at naval schools, but as the demand for engine room personnel increased, many were sent to civilian technical schools. In July 1942, the facilities of four Toronto technical schools were first employed to instruct welders, mechanics, motor mechanics, and motor operators. From *York*, Oliver was drafted to HMCS *Stadacona*, the large naval base in Halifax, Nova Scotia. There, Oliver was granted a Motor Operator's certificate and a Technical Training certificate, both of which were back-dated 30 September.

On 1 January 1943, he was promoted to Stoker 1st Class.

Also, on 1 January 1943, Oliver commenced service on loan to the RN. He was drafted to HMS *Saker II*, the stone frigate located in Quonset Point, Rhode Island, which administered Royal Navy

personnel in the United States. His billet was at the Detroit Naval Armory, which was used as barracks and the site of the US Navy's diesel and electrical schools. Oliver also received training at the Packard Plant, where the engines were manufactured.

LCI(L)—LANDING CRAFT, INFANTRY (LARGE)



An oceangoing infantry carrier designed for direct unloading onto the beach, with a capacity for six officers and 182 enlisted men. It carries four 20-mm. guns. Dimensions: length, 158'5½" o.a.; beam, 23'3". Speed: 14 knots maximum.

Source: Naval-encyclopedia.com

Oliver completed his training in Detroit and was drafted to join His Majesty's Landing Craft Infantry (Large) 107, also known as LCI(L) 107. He joined the vessel at the Bethlehem Hingham Shipyard in Hingham, Massachusetts, in early 1943. In preparation for the invasion of Europe, the British Admiralty wanted to build ships that could transport up to 200 troops at a speed of 15 knots from a rear staging area across open ocean or extract them from a beach. Due to a steel shortage in Britain, the ship concept was passed on to the Americans, who improved the design and produced them in American shipyards in three variants. 349 vessels belonging to the variant LCI(L)107 belonged to were built. Of them, 221 were provided to the Royal Navy under the United States Lend-Lease Act. The vessel had a crew of four officers and twenty-four ratings, with accommodation and dining facilities for six officers and 182 troops.

It is assumed LCI(L) 107 sailed from Hingham Shipyards to Djidjelli, Algeria (about 130 nautical miles east of Algiers), arriving there in April 1943. At that time, the ship came under the authority of the Combined Operations base, HMS *Dinosaur*, in Scotland.

Between 7 July and mid-August 1943, LCI(L) 107 took part in Operation HUSKY, the invasion of Sicily. Initially, her task was to transport troops from troop ships to beaches on the southeast coast of Sicily in heavy seas and gale-force winds and then later transport troops between captured

ports. After Operation HUSKY, LCI(L) 107 was ordered to the port of Catania on the island's east coast to await further orders.

Operation BAYTOWN was the next stage in the invasion of Italy. Under the plan, scheduled to commence on 3 September, British and Canadian troops would cross the Strait of Messina onto the Italian mainland.

On the evening of 30 August 1943, LCI(L) 107 left Catania unaccompanied with a company of British Commandos on board and proceeded to Bova Marina on the south coast of Italy – a passage of about 45 nautical miles - and landed the Commandos before first light on 31 August. The Commandos' mission was to reconnoitre the area before the commencement of Operation BAYTOWN.

Upon reaching their destination, the ship was stranded on the shore because the sand's beach gradient and consistency were not as expected. After repeated attempts to free the ship, it was abandoned. The ship's company was divided into groups of four or five and proceeded independently on foot into the hills. That evening, Oliver's group encountered an Italian boy who provided them with food and showed them a bomb shelter where they could sleep. That night, likely betrayed by the boy, they were attacked by a party of Italian soldiers who threw hand grenades into the shelter. Oliver was critically wounded in the attack and taken to a hospital in Bagaladi, about 13 km away.

Oliver died on 1 September at 21 years of age. He was buried in an unmarked grave near the hospital. The site of his grave remained unknown until May 1950, when the authorities received a letter from one of Oliver's shipmates describing Oliver's fate. His remains were recovered and interred in the Salerno War Cemetery Grave 16 Row B Plot 7. He is commemorated in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 169, at the Centre Block, Houses of Parliament, Ottawa and Hazle Lake (Lat 55° 07'N Long 108°03'W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory.

For his service, Stoker 1st Class Oliver Baker Hazle was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Italy Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother, Mrs. Mildred Hazle, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

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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.



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