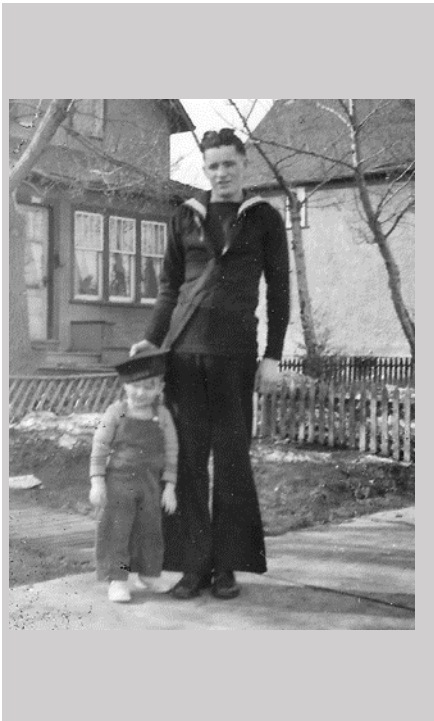


## Leading Stoker (Motor Mechanic) Robert McAfee V-32579



Leading Stoker Robert McAfee. Source:  
Canadian Virtual War Memorial

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Bushmills, County Antrim, Northern Ireland, 12 November 1923**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Queen*, 1 April 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Bread Wrapper, Weston Bakery**
- **Death: Died of tuberculosis attributable to his naval service on 1 April 1945**
- **Buried: Soldiers' Plot Regina Cemetery, Block D. Plot 5. Grave 7**
- **Commemorated: The Second World War Book of Remembrance, page 540, at the Centre Block, Houses of Parliament, Ottawa**

Robert McAfee, born on 12 November 1923 in Bushmills, County Antrim, Northern Ireland, was the seventh of nine children born to Rebecca and John McAfee. Twins William and Jennie were born in 1911; Robert's other sisters Mary, Elizabeth, Rebecca, and Dorothy were born in 1914, 1921, 1928, and 1929, respectively; and his other brothers Andrew and John were born in 1916 and 1918.

John (senior) was born in 1888 in Ireland and served in the Royal Irish Regiment in World War 1. Rebecca was also born in Ireland in 1888 and married John in Greenock, Scotland, in 1909. According to Robert's naval personnel file, the family came to Canada in 1926 from Northern Ireland and settled in Regina. Sadly, John (senior) died in March 1930. There are no records of the family in the 1926 or 1931 Census or the Regina Henderson's Directory until 1931 in the case of the Directory. Subsequently, Henderson's Directories recorded that the family moved four times between 1931 and 1940 within the same modest neighbourhood within the Albert Public School district, from which Robert graduated with grade 8. It appears that the family was very close-knit, and the older children contributed to the family income as they, in turn, found employment. After leaving school, Robert worked as a bread wrapper at Weston's Bakery, a large national company in Regina.

On 1 April 1942, Robert 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, Robert was 18 years old, single, 6 feet 1 inch tall, and weighed 128 pounds. He had black hair, brown eyes, and a medium complexion. His brother Andrew and his sister Elizabeth's husband joined the Canadian Army.

This material may be freely reproduced for non-commercial purposes, provided it includes the statement that it has been prepared by the Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph project of the Naval Reserve Association of Canada from interviews and publicly accessible sources.

When Robert 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 an RN request to loan 50 officers and 300 men for combined operations duty. It is not known whether or not this manning decision had any bearing on Robert's next draft. However, once sworn in, he was on his way to HMCS *York* in Toronto, Ontario, on 7 April to complete Initial Training rather than have him wait for the next intake at *Queen* - likely in late June. The course had been 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.

Following Initial Training in *York*, Robert was on a train to HMCS *Naden*, the large naval training base in Esquimalt, British Columbia, where he completed New Entry training, the syllabus of which included naval discipline, squad drill, small arms familiarization, seamanship, damage control... the sort of things that equipped the graduates to be safe and useful members of the ship's company of a warship.

On 1 September, Robert returned to Toronto to commence stoker training. Stokers comprised 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*, Robert was drafted to HMCS *Stadacona* to complete this stage of his technical training. *Stadacona* was the large naval base in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

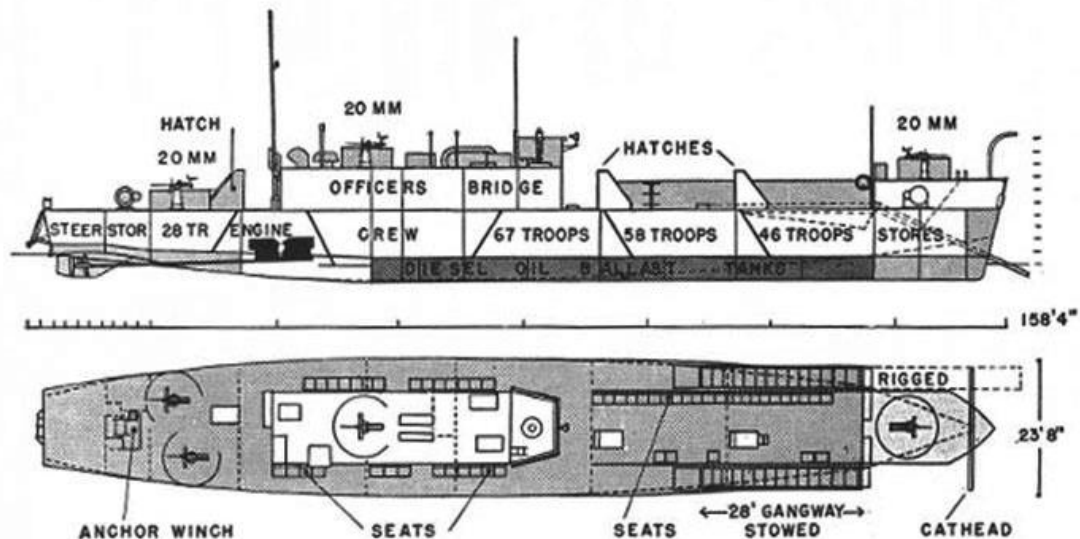
On 1 January 1943, he was promoted to Stoker 1<sup>st</sup> Class.

Also, on 1 January 1943, Robert commenced service on loan to the Royal Navy (RN). He was drafted to HMS *Saker*, the stone frigate located in New York City, which administered Royal Navy personnel in the United States. His actual billet was at the Detroit Naval Armory. The armoury was used as barracks and the site of the US Navy's diesel and electrical schools. Robert also received training at the Packard Plant, where the engines were manufactured. While in Detroit, he was promoted to Acting Leading Stoker and granted an Auxiliary Watch Keeping Certificate on 29 January.

Upon completion of training in Detroit, Robert was drafted to His Majesty's Landing Craft Infantry (Large) 295 - abbreviated LCI(L)295 - and joined her at New Jersey Shipbuilding in Barber, New Jersey. The ship was launched on 27 March 1943 and commissioned in April. In anticipation of the invasion of Europe, the British Admiralty planned to build vessels capable of transporting up to 200 troops at 15 knots from a rear staging area across open ocean and land or extract them from a beach. Because of a shortage of steel in Britain, the ship concept was passed to the Americans, who enhanced the design and brought them into production in American shipyards in three variants. A total of 349 of the variant of which *LCI(L) 295* was an example, were built. Two hundred twenty-one of these were provided to the RN under the United States Lend-Lease Act. They had a complement of four officers and twenty-four ratings with accommodations and messing for six army/marine officers and 182 troops.

Upon arrival at the shipyard, Robert and his shipmates had plenty to do onboard. Working alongside dockyard workers, they installed equipment and brought stores onboard. Once that work was completed, builder's trials were conducted, and the ship's company commenced training and work-ups.

## 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](http://Naval-encyclopedia.com)

In March 1943, Robert underwent an appendectomy.

LCI(L) 295 sailed from New Jersey Shipbuilding to Béjaïa, Algeria (about 105 nautical miles east of Algiers), arriving there on 16 May 1943. At that time, the ship came under the authority of the stone frigate, HMS *Copra* (Combined Operations Pay Records and Accounts), in Scotland. The purpose of LCI (L) 295's presence in Béjaïa was to take part in the invasion of Italy, which began with the invasion of Sicily. This was codenamed Operation HUSKY; it began on 7 July and lasted until mid-August.

Robert did not take part in Operation HUSKY because he was admitted to the military hospital in Béjaïa on 15 July with a sudden onset of chills, fever, headache, and profuse sweating and was diagnosed with malaria. (It was also observed in his personnel file that the entry awarding him the Italy Star was crossed out. The Star was awarded for at least one day of operational service in Sicily or Italy between 11 June 1943 and 8 May 1945).

After a week of treatment for malaria, it was determined that Robert was suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis, and he was transferred to the military hospital in Algiers. By 30 July, Robert was on his way by sea to Britain and was eventually admitted to No. 7 Canadian General Hospital on 13 August.

After substantial treatment there, he was repatriated and admitted to the Royal Canadian Navy Hospital (RCNH) Halifax, arriving there on 14 October 1943. On 3 November, a Medical Review Board considered Robert's case and concluded that he was deemed medically unfit for service; they referred him to a sanatorium in Saskatchewan and discharged him from the Navy.

This material may be freely reproduced for non-commercial purposes, provided it includes the statement that it has been prepared by the Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph project of the Naval Reserve Association of Canada from interviews and publicly accessible sources.

In consideration of his medical condition, he was provided with a private compartment for the train journey to Regina. Once in Regina, HMCS *Queen* coordinated his admittance to Fort San, Saskatchewan's sanitorium, with the Department of Pensions and National Health. The sanitorium was near Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan, about 77 km northeast of Regina.



**Robert in Sanitorium.**  
Source Canadian Virtual War Memorial



**Fort San. Source: Village of Fort Sam website**

Robert was discharged from the Navy on March 11, 1944. A pension board determined that his illness was caused by his naval service.

PAGE TWO

## Probe death of Reginan

—At Lethbridge

LETHBRIDGE, April 4 (Special).—Inquest into the sudden death here Sunday afternoon of Robert McAfee, 21, of 1612 Angus street, Regina, who was discharged from the Royal Canadian Navy last November, was opened here Tuesday afternoon and then adjourned until April 18.

The body of the former sailor who was found unconscious aboard a commercial plane flying from Lethbridge to Vancouver Saturday afternoon and then died in hospital here without regaining consciousness, was identified about 28 hours later by an elder brother, John McAfee, of Regina.

The jury conducting the inquest under Dr. K. I. Murray released the body for burial which will take place in Regina.

John McAfee explained that his brother joined the navy in 1942 and served abroad, including the North Africa theatre of war. He became ill while on service and was eventually discharged after hospital treatment.

The witness explained that he saw his brother Friday evening and he seemed to be well then.

**ROBBED OF \$825**

WINNIPEG, April 4. — Peter Zablony, grocery store proprietor in North Winnipeg, told police Tuesday he had been robbed earlier in the day while taking \$825 to a nearby bank. Detectives searched the surrounding district shortly following the report of the robbery but no sign of the unidentified gunman could be found.

On an unknown date, likely in February or March 1945, Robert was discharged from Fort San Sanitorium. On 31 March, he boarded a Trans-Canada Airlines flight from Regina to Vancouver. Once in the air, Robert lost consciousness and was removed from the aircraft in Lethbridge, Alberta, where he died the next day. His death was attributed to tuberculosis. As a result, in September 1945, Robert's mother was awarded a pension of \$35.00 per month - equivalent to \$600.00 in 2023 dollars.

Robert was interred in the Soldiers' Plot Regina Cemetery Block D. Plot 5. Grave 7. He is commemorated in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, page 540, at the Centre Block, Houses of Parliament, Ottawa.

Source: Regina Leader Post April 4, 1945

For his service, Leading Stoker Robert McAfee was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother, Mrs. Rebecca McAfee, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

**Prepared By\*:**

John Dalzell, Capt(N) (retired), Commanding Officer HMCS UNICORN 1983-88 & Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Research Team.

\*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:**

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database – Profile for Robert McAfee
- Library and Archives Canada Service Record for Leading Stoker Robert McAfee
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial – Profile page for Leading Stoker Robert McAfee
- Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial -Profile page for Leading Stoker Robert McAfee
- Library and Archives Canada 1926, 1931 Census
- Internet Archive. *Henderson's Regina City Directories*. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/>
- Gilbert, Norman Tucker. *The Naval Service of Canada Its Official History Volume II*. Ottawa, Ontario: King's Printer, 1952.
- Navypedia. LCI(L) Large Landing Craft Infantry. Retrieved February 14, 2024, from LCI(L) large infantry landing craft (1942-1943, 1942-1943/1943-1944) (navypedia.org)
- Wikipedia (January 1, 2024). *Landing Craft Infantry*. Retrieved January 20, 2024 from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landing\\_Craft\\_Infantry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landing_Craft_Infantry)
- Naval Encyclopedia. *Landing Craft 1942*. Retrieved January 20, 2024, from <https://naval-encyclopedia.com/ww2/us/landing-craft-infantry.php>
- Google Earth Pro
- Naval History and Heritage Command. *The Sicilian Campaign*. Retrieved January 21, 2024 from The Sicilian Campaign, Operation 'Husky' (navy.mil)
- Naval History Magazine. *To Sicily with Alec Guinness*. Retrieved January 25, 2024, from To Sicily with Alec Guinness | Naval History Magazine - June 2002 Vol. 16 Number 3 (usni.org)

- Wikipedia (May 25, 2022). *Fort San*. Retrieved February 18, 2024 from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort\\_San,\\_Saskatchewan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_San,_Saskatchewan)
- Find a Grave. *Members of McAfee Family*. Retrieved February 2024 from <https://www.findagrave.com/>
- Regina Leader-Post. *Prob Death of Reginan*. Retrieved February 15, 2024 from <https://news.google.com/>