

Supply Assistant John Charles Henry Rathbone V-34478



Photo Credit: Canadian Virtual War Memorial – Profile page for Supply Assistant John Rathbone

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Birmingham England, 27 May 1917**
- **Enlisted: HMCS Queen, 20 April 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Hardware Clerk, Simpson Western Limited**
- **Death: Died of Wounds while serving in HMCS Regina on 9 August 1944**
- **Commemorated: St. Merryn Churchyard, Grave 17; Canadian Virtual War Museum; Saskatchewan Virtual War Museum; Rathbone Lake (Lat 55°28' N Long 108° 20' W) in Northern Saskatchewan**

John (known as Charles) was the second child born to Florence Rathbone and John Rathbone on 17 May 1917 in Birmingham, West Midlands, England. His sister Florence was born in 1910, also in Birmingham. His parents were married in 1909 and the family emigrated to Canada in 1920 and settled in Regina, Saskatchewan. There John senior found work as a meat cutter for about a year before establishing his own butcher shops – first Lakeview Meats, and then Arlington Meats. While Charles was growing up, the family moved nine times between 1920 and 1941 within the City of Regina according to a search of Henderson's Directory. Each time the move resulted in more comfortable accommodations which perhaps reflected the family's entrepreneurial predilection.

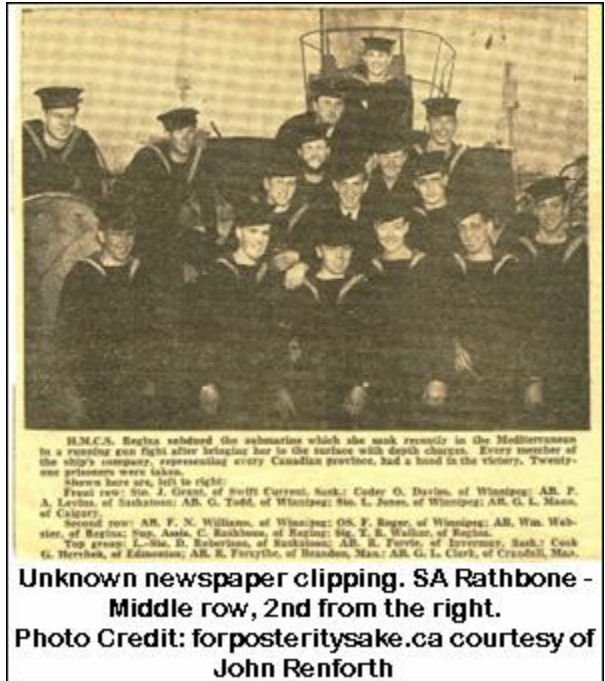
John completed Grade 8 at Victoria Public School in 1931 and did not pursue further education which was common practice at the time. Instead, he joined his father in the shops and, according to Henderson's Directory, was the manager in 1936. Unfortunately, John's father died the same year and John, now 19 years old, took on the financial responsibility for his mother and now invalid sister. They sold the business and by 1939 John was an employee of the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA). PFRA was established in 1935 by the Federal Government in response to widespread drought, farm abandonment and land degradation suffered in the prairie provinces during the devastating drought of the 1930s. In 1940, John was hired by Robert Simpson Ltd, a large retail chain, as a hardware salesman – a position he held until he enrolled in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve on 20 April 1942 at the Regina Division (HMCS *Queen*) as a Probationary Supply Assistant.

He remained in Regina at HMCS *Queen* taking basic training until August 1942 when he was posted to HMCS *Chippawa* in Winnipeg for contact training. In September and October he completed technical trade training in HMCS *Naden* and was confirmed as a Supply Assistant.

Then in November he travelled to Halifax and placed in the manning pool until 2 December when he was drafted to the corvette HMCS *Rimouski* then a unit of the Western Local Escort Force escorting convoys from the Canadian East Coast to the Western Ocean Meeting Point off Newfoundland.

In April 1943 John has drafted to another corvette, HMCS *Regina*. *Regina* had returned to Canadian waters in March from overseas for local escort duties, refit, and work-ups. She then joined Escort Group C-1 in February 1944. After an eventful Atlantic crossing she arrived in Londonderry toward the end of March and was assigned to Western Approaches Command for duties associated with *Operation Neptune*, the invasion of Normandy.

Regina's D-day task, together with the Canadian corvettes *Summerside* and *Woodstock*, was to escort twenty-seven Liberty ships through the Bristol Channel, along the south coast of England, and through a swept channel to Normandy arriving there in the early morning hours of 7 June. Upon completion of this task, *Regina* returned to the United Kingdom to be dispatched repeatedly to escort other ships and convoys until 8 August 1944.



Late on the warm summer evening of 8 August 1944, *Regina* was the sole escort of a ten-ship convoy proceeding southwest from Milford Haven along the north Cornwall coast off Trevoze Head bound for Normandy. At about 2130, a Liberty ship, the *Ezra Weston*, experienced an explosion which was mistakenly thought to have been the result of the ship striking a mine. *Regina* closed her and stopped to render assistance. After remaining stopped for about forty-five minutes, a second explosion erupted in *Regina* sinking her in less than 30 seconds. The second explosion, as was the first, was caused by torpedoes fired by the German U-boat, U-667. Twenty-nine members of HMCS *Regina's* ship's company perished. In the explosion John sustained a severe head wound and blown into the water. Within an hour he was rescued from the water and taken to a hospital in Padstow, Cornwall. There he died of his wound the following afternoon. He was buried in the nearby cemetery of St. Merryn Anglican Church.

For his service, Supply Assistant John Charles Henry Rathbone was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star and Clasp, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother, Florence Rathbone, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

Rathbone Lake (Lat 55°28' N Long 108° 20' W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in John's memory. John Charles Henry Rathbone is buried in Grave 17 of St. Merryn Churchyard, Cornwall, UK. The inscription on his headstone reads:

Called to Higher Service

John Rathbone came to the Navy with a very conscientious manner. At nineteen, upon the death of his father, he took on the running of the family business and the care of his mother and sister. In August 1942, he identified them to the Navy as dependents for the purposes of Dependent's Allowance, and he was described as "very conscientious and a good worker" in his personnel file. Perhaps that is how he should be remembered.

Prepared by:

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1983-88 & Citizen Sailor Virtual Cenotaph Research Team



Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission record for Supply Assistant John Rathbone
- Library and Archives Canada Service Record for Supply Assistant John Rathbone
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial – Profile page for Supply Assistant John Rathbone
- Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial -Profile p
http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_RIMOUSKI_K121.htm for Supply Assistant John Rathbone
- Notes of a conversation between Engine Room Artificer Donald McIntosh, HMCS Regina, and Capt. J. Dalzell (Retired), April, 2015
- For Posterity's Sake. HMCS Regina K234, Retrieved November 9, 2021 from http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_REGINA_K234.htm
- For Posterity's Sake. HMCS Rimouski K121, Retrieved November 9, 2021 from http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_RIMOUSKI_K121.htm
- Henderson's Greater Regina Directory, Retrieved November 20, 2021 from <https://archive.org/details/P003592-4-6>