

Coder James Andrew Rutter V-47674



Coder James Rutter. Photo: For Posterity's Sake website
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- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Regina SK, 2 December 1921**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Nonsuch*, 1 September 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Automotive Partsman, Edmonton Motors Limited**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Regina* was torpedoed and sank on 8 August 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 12; Naval Museum of Alberta Plaque; and the HMCS *Nonsuch* Plaque**

James Rutter was born in Regina, SK on 2 December 1921. His father was James Rutter (1893-1972). James Sr was born in England and came to Canada in 1918. He was a clerk for the Canadian Pacific Railway and had done similar work in England. His mother was Matilda Gottselig (1899-1992). She was born in Regina to German parents. James had a younger sister, Eleanor (1923-2014). Eleanor also served in the Navy as a Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (WRCNS) Telegraphist during the Second World War. The family moved to Edmonton, AB, shortly after James was born, residing at 10332 121 Street.

James graduated from Westglen High School in 1941, completing Grade 12 and obtaining his senior matriculation. Westglen High School had been recently built to alleviate school crowding in Edmonton during the early stages of the Second World War when Edmonton experienced a dramatic population increase.

James had a very active social life; the local newspapers had stories of various parties he had attended. The format of these stories mentioned all the young ladies in the top paragraphs and then all the young men in the lower paragraphs. All the stories mentioning James also noted Miss Jacqueline McCarthy. Many parties occurred at Miss McCarthy's summer



Wren Tel. Eleanor Rutter, W.R.C.N.S. who is spending two weeks' leave with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. James Rutter, of West Edmonton. *Edmonton Journal*, 11 June 1945.

residence at Seba Beach, a resort community near Edmonton. In later stories, James rated a mention of being a special guest of Miss McCarthy. James and Jacqueline were neighbours and high school classmates.

After graduating from high school, James worked as an automotive partsman at Edmonton Motors, an operating General Motors dealership. He enlisted in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) at HMCS *Nonsuch* in Edmonton on 1 September 1942. Edmonton had one of Canada's highest per capita enlistment rates during that time. James joined for "Hostilities Only" and was rated an Ordinary Coder. His enlistment papers indicated that he was 5 feet 11 inches tall, weighed 141½ pounds, had brown hair and hazel eyes, and had a medium complexion. He listed his religion as Roman Catholic. He remained on Divisional Strength at



Naval recruits with fixed bayonets, HMCS *Cornwallis*, Deep Brook, Nova Scotia, June 1943.

Photo: Library and Archives Canada, MIKAN No. 3404668

HMCS *Nonsuch* for several months. During this time, he would have continued working at his civilian job, probably living at home, and he participated in naval training once or twice weekly.

In February 1943, James and Jacqueline McCarthy were married at St Joseph's Cathedral.

Ordinary Coder James Rutter was called to Active Duty on 27 May 1943 and sent to HMCS *York* in Toronto, ON, for training. He spent a month

in Toronto and was then sent to HMCS *Cornwallis*, near Deep Brook in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley. There, James completed seamanship and gunnery training. His next stop was HMCS *St Hyacinthe* in August 1943. This was the Royal Canadian Navy's (RCN) Communications School located at Saint-Hyacinthe, which was approximately 35 miles east of Montreal, QC.

The communication specialties included Visual Signalmen (morse code by flashing light, semaphore for between ships and flag hoist communication); Wireless Telegraphist (radio); Wireless Telegraphist (radar); and Coders. The Coder's job was to encode and decode all ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore messages. These signals were coded using the Naval Code, a two-stage numbers and letters encoding procedure. The second stage was changed daily to ensure the code remained secure. The Coder used code books and decoding tables to translate messages from code to plain English and vice versa. On a ship, the Coder sat next to the Wireless Telegrapher.

After four months at HMCS *St Hyacinthe*, Ordinary Coder Rutter was sent to HMCS *Stadacona*, the major operations and training base in Halifax, NS. From there, he joined HMCS *Regina* on 24 February 1944.

HMCS *Regina* was a corvette, or more precisely, a revised Flower-class corvette. The ship was built in 1941 by Marine Industries in Sorel, QC and commissioned into the RCN in January 1942. Before Ordinary Coder Rutter joined the ship, she had been assigned to the Western Local Escort Group, operating primarily between Halifax and New York. In November 1942, she was assigned to the Mediterranean area to support Operation TORCH, the Allied invasion of North Africa. She

was later assigned to the UK to Gibraltar convoys, and on the night of 9 February 1943, HMCS *Regina* attacked and sank the Italian submarine *Avorio*. She returned to Canada for a major refit in April 1943.

Within four days of joining the crew, Ordinary Coder Rutter found himself sailing across the North Atlantic, where HMCS *Regina* joined Escort Group C1, which was part of the Mid-Ocean Escort Force. Escort Group C1 was assigned to escort a 41-ship convoy (SC-154) to the UK. During the voyage, HMCS *Regina* was detached and ordered to escort a Royal Navy (RN) tug and a disabled ship to the Azores. Then, in March 1944, she escorted a heavily damaged HMCS *Mulgrave* under tow to the Clyde River, Scotland. For a junior Coder, these “non-routine” ship taskings would have provided ample opportunity to practice his new skills when the ship needed to communicate with shore authorities.



HMCS Regina circa 1942-43 in a skillfully enhanced and colourized image. Her Pennant number (K234) is hidden, perhaps as a wartime security measure.

Photo National Defence, Canadian Navy Heritage Website; Image Negative Number CT-252

When HMCS *Regina* returned to Londonderry, Ireland at the end of March 1944, she was assigned to Western Approaches Command for invasion duties. In May 1944, Ordinary Coder Rutter was promoted to Coder. His work efficiency was rated as “Satisfactory” and his character was assessed as “Very Satisfactory”.

On 6 June 1944, D-Day, and throughout Operation NEPTUNE, *Regina* served as an escort for several convoys or individual ships. She was also assigned to anti-submarine patrols. The threats that the convoys faced were mines, U-boats, E-boats, and enemy aircraft. Allied shipping often needed channels swept of mines and then marked. Precise navigation was required so that ships knew where the minefields were located.

James and Jacqueline’s daughter, Deane Kathleen Rutter, was born on 30 June 1944 in Edmonton. There is no indication in his RCN records, and there is very little likelihood, considering his ship’s invasion duties, that James ever met his daughter.

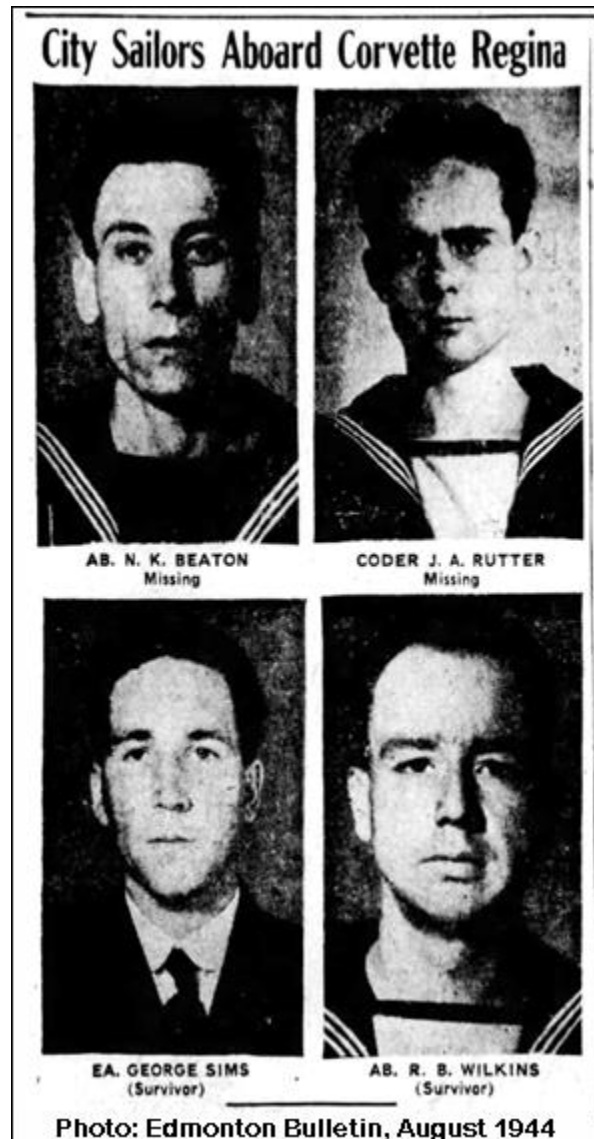
On 8 August 1944, *Regina* escorted convoy EBC-066, a 10-ship convoy bound from the Bristol area to Normandy. They heard an explosion and closed on the *Ezra Watson*, an American merchant ship. The captain of the stricken ship signalled that he had struck a mine. The crew of the *Ezra Watson* was rescued by an RN Landing Ship Tank (LST) in the convoy. The LST then tried to tow the *Ezra Watson* to shallow water, where perhaps her cargo could be salvaged. HMCS *Regina* was standing by the rescue and salvage operations when she exploded. HMCS *Regina*

sank within seconds, taking 30 of her crew with her. Coder Rutter was among the Canadian sailors who were lost. Coder James Andrew Rutter was 22 years old when he died.

Post-war analysis of German navy records showed that the *Ezra Watson* and HMCS *Regina* were not mined but were torpedoed by a U-boat, U-667. A few days after sinking the two Allied ships, U-667 later struck a mine and was lost with all hands.

For his service, Coder James Andrew Rutter was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp, and the War Medal. His wife and mother were each awarded the Canadian Memorial Cross.

Coder James Andrew Rutter is commemorated on Panel 12 of the Halifax Memorial at Point



Pleasant Park, Halifax, NS; the HMCS *Nonsuch* Memorial Plaque; the Naval Museum of Alberta Plaque; and the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 434, at the Centre Block Houses of Parliament, Ottawa.



Prepared By*:

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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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