

HORLEY, Wallace Carman (#V/31090)

Wallace Horley planned to return to his career at Imperial Oil after the war ended. He never got the chance. In the summer of 1944, he was aboard one of the “backbone” warships of the Canadian navy when he lost his life during an escort operation during the longest continuous campaign of the war to what British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said was “... the only thing that ever really frightened me during the war...”

Wallace was born in Dewar Lake, Saskatchewan on September 10, 1921, the son of Carman Walter and Rachel (nee Muirhead, born in Dumbarton, Scotland) Horley. Rachel Muirhead, along with her mother and six siblings emigrated from Scotland to Canada in 1911, and initially settled in Saskatchewan. Carman Horley, born 1896 in Becher, Lambton the son of Joseph and Jane Horley, was the fifth of eight children. Their 50-acre family farm was hardly big enough for the size of the family. At a young age, Carman and an older brother travelled west to work on the farms in Saskatchewan. When World War I broke out, Carman enlisted in the army; however he received a discharge in order to continue working on the farms. He started work with the Canadian National (CN) Railway in 1917 and as the rail-line was built westward, he moved with the company.

Carman Horley and Rachel Muirhead were married in Greene, Saskatchewan on November 29, 1917. The Horley's later moved to Cochrane, Ontario and in 1931 settled on a farm south of Port Lambton. In 1935, the Horley family moved a couple of miles north of Port Lambton where Carman supported his family working road construction during the warm weather months and cutting wood in the bush during the winter months. In 1939, the Horley family moved to Sarnia, living at 114 John Street, and Carman supported his large family working in the processing department of Sarnia Refinery.

Carman and Rachel Horley had four daughters and five sons together: Evelyn Mary (born 1918 in Loverna, Sask., became Evelyn Dellow); Alistair James (born September 17, 1919 in Greene); Wallace Carman; Floyd Arthur (born July 26, 1923 in Cochrane), Frances Rachel (born 1929, became Frances Godley); Joseph Robert (born 1931); Jane Isabelle (born 1933); Ruth Agnes (born 1935, became Ruth Sainsbury); and William Donald (born 1937).

Three of the Horley boys served with the Royal Canadian Navy during the war. The Royal Canadian Navy consisted of three organizations that were frequently lumped together with little distinction under the title of Royal Canadian Navy: the professional force, the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), were sailors that had made naval warfare their profession and had been trained at the naval college and on Royal Navy ships; the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve (RCNR), drew upon the merchant navy and the pool of men who made their living as fishers; and the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR), the ordinary sailors from across the country who would form the bulk of the navy. The three categories of sailor were distinguished by the distinctive stripes on the cuffs of their uniforms: the RCN had broad straight stripes; the RCNR had criss-crossed stripes; and the RCNVR had wavy stripes, which led them to calling themselves the “Wavy Navy”.



Floyd (14), Alistair (18), Carman (41), Wallace (16) and Joseph (6)

Port Lambton 1937

The first to join was Floyd in January 1941, becoming a Wireless Operator with the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) serving off the west coast aboard the corvette *HMCS Moncton* and the River Class frigate *HMCS Buckingham*. Alistair was the second to join in the fall of 1941, becoming a Chief Petty Officer with the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve (RCNR) serving aboard the armed merchant cruiser *HMCS Prince Henry* in the Pacific and the "E" Class destroyer *HMCS Gatineau*. Wallace was the third Horley boy to join the navy, becoming a member of the RCNVR. The eldest Horley daughter, Evelyn, married William "Bill" Dellow. He also served in the war, with the Canadian Army, Elgin Regiment. Corporal Bill Dellow served with the Canadian Corps in Italy, was wounded there, and survived the war.

Growing up in Port Lambton, the Horley children spent a lot of their time on or in the water; sailing and swimming. Floyd, Alistair and Wallace all worked for a time on Canada Steamship Lines (CSL) ships on the Great Lakes. For them, that familiarity and comfort in the water no doubt impacted their decision to join the Navy. Wallace attended school in Port Lambton, leaving school after completing grade eight in order to work to help support the family. Wallace enjoyed playing baseball and sailing, he had a girlfriend, and his family members described him as the "strong, silent type".

Canada and Newfoundland declared war on Germany on September 10, 1939. Three days earlier, on September 7, 1939, Wallace Horley joined the Canadian Active Service Force (CASF), the 11th Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers in Sarnia. It was also three days before his eighteenth birthday. Wallace was a cement worker at the time, living in Port Lambton. Two months later, Sapper Wallace was discharged from the CASF when "his services were no longer required". He then went to work at Imperial Oil Company in Sarnia, as a pipe fitter, living with his parents who were then residing at 114 John Street, Sarnia.

On March 19, 1942, twenty-year-old Wallace Horley enlisted in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve in Windsor, Ontario. He stood six feet tall, had blue eyes and light brown hair and was single. He stated that he planned to return to Imperial Oil after the war. His initial training was in Windsor on the *HMCS Hunter* until mid-May 1942. He would serve on the *HMCS Cornwallis* (May 18-July 21, 1942), and the *HMCS Venture* (July 22, 1942-January 13, 1944). On January 14, 1944, then Stoker Horley was assigned to the crew of the *HMCS Alberni (K103)*, a corvette of the Flower class. The *Alberni* was based out of Stadacona (Halifax) until April 21, 1944, then based out of Niobe (Scotland).



Alistair J. Horley



Wallace C. Horley



Floyd A. Horley

Beginning on the opening day of the Second World War, the **Battle of the Atlantic** would be the longest continuous campaign of the war, and one in which Canada played a central role. The Royal Canadian Navy, along with the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and Canada's Merchant Navy, played a vital role in defending the country's eastern coast and escorting convoys of ships carrying men and essential machinery, arms, fuel and basic resources between North America and Europe.

Built at the Yarrows Limited shipyard in Esquimalt, British Columbia, and named to honour the town of

Alberni on Vancouver Island, the *Alberni* had been commissioned for service by the Royal Canadian Navy on February 4, 1941. She arrived at Halifax in mid-April 1941, and just over a month later, departed for St. John's to join the recently formed Newfoundland Escort Force (NEF). She was the first western Canadian corvette assigned as a convoy escort and played a prominent role in the Battle of the Atlantic when the depredations of German U-boats were at their peak. In her illustrious career, the *Alberni* was credited with one probable sinking of a Nazi submarine; it assisted in several other kills; had shot down a Junkers 88 bomber; took part in the British invasion of North Africa; and had rescued countless numbers of men from the sea after Allied ships were attacked. In April of 1944, she was one of seventeen RCN corvettes sent to the UK in support of *Operation Neptune*, the landings at Normandy in June 1944. Wallace wrote a letter to his parents saying that he had participated in the invasion of Normandy, France while aboard the *Alberni*.



Flower Class Corvette *HMCS Alberni K103*

In August 1944, *HMCS Alberni* was on patrol for U-boats to the eastward of the swept channel leading to the Normandy beaches. On August 21, 1944, she was steaming south along the Isle of Wight at 14 knots in tough weather escorting a convoy in the English Channel southeast of the Isle of Wight. At 11:37 a.m. the “hands to dinner” pipe was sounded, calling many of the hungry sailors to the mess halls below deck. Four minutes later, with no asdic warning whatsoever, the *Alberni* was struck by a torpedo fired by German submarine *U-480*. The torpedo struck the ship on her port side immediately aft of the engine room. Within moments of the attack the ship was awash from the funnel aft, listing to port. The stern sank first. The ship rolled to port, and then the bow went under. The *Alberni* disappeared in less than one minute.

There was a strong wind and heavy seas at the time, and with the speed of the disaster, there was no time to release the ship's boats and Carley floats and many of the men didn't have time to put on life belts. The surviving crew members were those positioned farther forward, but even many of them never reached the upper deck. Four officers and 55 members of the crew, representing 2/3 of the *Alberni's* crew, were lost in the attack. For those dazed in the water, after forty-five minutes of struggling in the heavy seas, thirty-one crew members were rescued by Royal Navy motor torpedo boats 469 and 470 and taken to Portsmouth. Wallace Horley was one of the crew members who lost his life in the attack. At the time, no cause was given for the loss of the warship. The *Alberni* was the 8th corvette and 18th Canadian fighting ship to be lost in World War II.

U-480 was an experimental vessel, considered by many to be the first stealth submarine due to its special synthetic rubber coating technology called “Alberich”. The rubber contained a series of holes that helped break up sound waves. This is why the *Alberni*, despite sweeping with asdic radar and sonar, had no indication the submarine was in the area. The *Alberni* was determined to be the first allied vessel to be sunk by “Alberich” technology. Between August 21-25, 1944, *U-480* sank two warships; *HMCS Alberni* and *HMS Loyalty*, and two merchant ships; *Fort Yale* and *Orminster*. Five months after sinking the *Alberni*, sometime between late January and mid-February 1945, *U-480* struck a mine southwest of the Isle of Wight, sending it to the bottom and the entire crew of 48 was lost.



Stoker 1st Class Wallace Horley

On August 23, his parents on John Street in Sarnia received a telegram that read; THE MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE FOR NAVAL SERVICES DEEPLY REGRETS TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON WALLACE CARMAN HORLEY STOKER FIRST CLASS OFFICIAL NO V-31090 IS MISSING AT SEA LETTER FOLLOWS. No other details were provided. In late August 1944, Carman received the following letter from the Secretary, Naval Board:

Dear Mr. Horley:

It is with deepest regret that I must confirm the telegram of the 23rd of August, 1944, from the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, informing you that your son, Wallace Carman Horley, Stoker First Class, Official Number V-31090, Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve, is missing at sea.

The only information that can be given at this time is that your son is missing at sea when the ship in which he was serving was lost by enemy action in the English Channel. As soon as further particulars can be released, you will be informed.

Should you know the name of the ship in which he was serving, it is requested that, for security reasons, you will regard this information as confidential until such time as an official announcement is made. Please accept the sincere sympathy of the Department in your anxiety.

In mid-September 1944, Ottawa released the casualty list in connection with the sinking of the *Alberni*, and Stoker First Class Wallace Carman Horley was among those listed as missing from the lost warship. Information released from Ottawa included that two-thirds of the crew were either dead or missing after the sinking and that the attack occurred while the vessel was pursuing “invasion duties”. No cause was given for the loss of the ship.

In December of 1944, Wallace Horley’s death was later officially recorded as, *Missing, presumed dead. He was serving in H.M.C.S. ‘Alberni’ which was sunk in the English Channel.* In early March 1945, Stoker First Class Wallace Horley, along with Army Private Russell Jolly (included in this Project), were honoured at a memorial service at Devine Street United Church. Both men were members of the congregation and both had died recently while on active service. In mid-June 1945, Carman and Rachel Horley received a War Service Gratuity of \$311.59 for the loss of their son Wallace.

Many years later, Frances Godley (nee: Horley) recalled the day that the military men came to the John Street home to break the news. Then fifteen years old, Frances remembered what was on everyone’s mind was, “which of them is it?” because three boys were serving at the time. Frances also recalled the time the Commanding Officer (CO) of the *Alberni*, Ian H. Bell, came to visit Carman and Rachel months after the sinking. “He cried”, Frances remembered, because she had not seen a man cry before.

His death was a devastating blow to the Horleys—one that his siblings later described as “the saddest day in our family’s history”. Father Carman Horley seemed to be the most impacted by the tragedy—Wallace was named after his father, and like his father, had the strong, silent and stoic personality. For all the family members, little was said about Wallace after his death, the emotions were too agonizing. Years later, Carman and Rachel did visit the Halifax Memorial.

Twenty-two-year-old Wallace Horley has no known grave. His name is inscribed on the Halifax Memorial, Nova Scotia, Panel 12. His name is also inscribed on the Sarnia Refinery Plaque. Unveiled in 1949, the plaque has the names of 24 Sarnia Imperial Oil employees who made the ultimate sacrifice in World War II. Wallace’s parents are both buried in Lakeview Cemetery in Sarnia. On their gravemarker are inscribed the words, HORLEY CARMAN WALTER 1896-1968 HIS WIFE RACHEL MUIRHEAD 1899-1974 THEIR BELOVED SON WALLACE CARMAN 1921-1944 LOST AT SEA H.M.C.S. ALBERNI.

From: *The Sarnia War Remembrance Project*, by Tom Slater