

Leading Coder Abraham Bullard Crosson V-36397



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- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: North Bend, BC, 26 September 1913**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Discovery*, 27 February 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Office Clerk**
- **Died when HMCS *Guysborough* was torpedoed and sank on 18 March 1945**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 13; and HMCS *Discovery* Memorial Plaque**

Abraham Bullard Crosson was born in North Bend, BC, on 26 September 1913 to Abraham Smith Crosson and Madeline Lenora Crosson. He had an older sister, Mrs. Thelma Margaret Vye, and two younger brothers, George Norman Crosson and Gordon Thomas Crosson. His brother Gordon (K46052) was serving in the Canadian Army at Suffield, AB, at the time of Abraham's enlistment. His father was an employee of the Canadian Pacific Railway as a switchman. In 1942, the family lived at 3925 West 14th Avenue in Vancouver, BC.

Abraham was unemployed at the time of his enlistment on 27 February 1942, but he had worked as a clerk for R.A. Wyllie and Son for four years after he completed three years of high school. This company was described as "Importers" but must have closed its doors many years ago as no trace of the company could be found.

Abraham was taken on divisional strength in HMCS *Discovery* as an Ordinary Coder on 27 February 1942. His attestation record described him as 5' 9³/₄" tall with brown hair and blue eyes. He remained in HMCS *Discovery* for basic training until 9 May 1942, when he was drafted to HMCS *St. Hyacinthe*, the Naval Communications School in Ste Hyacinthe, QC. Communications training at HMCS *St. Hyacinthe* consisted of courses for Visual Signalmen (V/S), Wireless Telegraphists (W/T), Coders, Radar Operators, and Radio Artificers. Selection for the trade of "Coder" indicated that Abraham Crosson was probably of above-average intelligence. He had already passed the educational test for advancement to Petty Officer on 17 March 1942. His record of examinations, notations and qualifications stated that he was qualified as an Ordinary Coder on 3 July 1942.

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After completing his training, Ordinary Coder Crosson returned to HMCS *Naden* in Esquimalt, BC and awaited a sea-going position. On 16 July 1942, he was assigned to HMCS *Canso*, a newly commissioned Bangor-class minesweeper; *Canso* was part of the local patrol and convoy escort force based in Esquimalt, BC (and later Prince Rupert, BC). The ship patrolled the west coast of Vancouver Island, inspected inlets and sounds, and ventured past the Scott Islands to Gordon Channel at the entrance to Queen Charlotte Strait and back. *Canso* was one of the warships added to the west coast patrol force after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Ordinary Seaman Crosson's duties in *Canso* would have included encoding and decoding all ship-to-ship and all ship-to-shore communications to deny interception by the enemy.

On 20 February 1943, after 202 days of service in *Canso*, Ordinary Coder Crosson was transferred to HMCS *Chatham*, a shore base. He was promoted to Coder on 14 March 1943.

HMCS *Chatham* was named after HMS *Discovery's* consort ship, which Captain George Vancouver, RN, used to explore the West Coast of North America in the 1790s. The base was located in Prince Rupert, BC and was a routing center for convoys and patrols along northern British Columbia during the war. Service in this shore establishment would have provided excellent training and employment opportunities for those in the "Coder" trade. Coder Crosson remained in *Chatham* until mid-October 1943.

Coder Crosson's final draft was to HMCS *Guysborough*. HMCS *Guysborough* was a Bangor-class minesweeper built by North Vancouver Ship Repairs Ltd for the Royal Navy but was transferred to the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) for manning. She was commissioned on 22 April 1942 and assigned to the Esquimalt Force. On 17 March 1943, she left for Halifax, arriving on 30 April 1943.

Crosson joined the ship on 16 October 1943 as it completed a refit in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. He qualified for Leading Coder on 26 July 1943 and was promoted to Acting Leading Coder on 15 December 1943. Notably, his evaluations on 31 December 1944 and 18 March 1945 were both "V.G." for character and "Superior" for efficiency. Leading Coder Crosson served continuously in HMCS *Guysborough* until her loss on 17 March 1945.



In February 1944, HMCS *Guysborough* was sent to the United Kingdom as part of Canada's contribution to the invasion of Normandy. Upon arrival, she was assigned to the British 14th Minesweeping Flotilla and swept Channel 2 of mines in the American sector of the invasion route during the night of 5/6 June. The 14th Minesweeping Flotilla resumed minesweeping

activities an hour after the assault began on 6 June. They swept Baie de la Seine until 13 June. The 14th Flotilla continued minesweeping activities in the invasion area until 21 June. *Guysborough* remained in UK waters until December, when she returned to Canada for another refit, this time at Lunenburg, NS.

Following the refit, she departed for Plymouth. At 1850, during the second dog watch on 17 March 1945, HMCS *Guysborough*, commanded by Temporary/Lieutenant B.R. Russell, RCNR, was hit in the stern by a Gnat torpedo (acoustic torpedo) from *U-868* about 210 miles north of Cape Finisterre in the Bay of Biscay. Sailing alone, the minesweeper was towing CAT gear against acoustic torpedoes; however, the torpedo nevertheless hit the stern, possibly because the gear was streamed too close to the ship to confuse the warhead. She settled by the stern with a slight port list, but the vessel did not sink. The U-boat fired a second torpedo at 1935. This torpedo hit the starboard side amidships and caused the minesweeper to sink quickly by the stern. Two crew members had been killed in the explosions, but the remaining men abandoned the ship onto five Carley floats because the second torpedo badly damaged the motor cutter and the whaler. One group of 48 survivors lashed four rafts together, but the fifth raft drifted away, overcrowded by the remaining men. The ship had sent a distress signal before sinking, and several vessels were sent to their rescue. Still, it took HMS *Inglis* around 19 hours to arrive at the sinking location. By this time, 49 survivors had died of injuries or exposure on the overcrowded raft. However, 40 survivors were rescued by HMS *Inglis*, with one more picked up by HMS *Loring* while searching for the submarine. The fact that she was not part of a convoy or with other escorts was a decision made by her commanding officer and the subject of some criticism. Of *Guysborough's* ship's company, 51 men were lost. Leading Coder Abraham Bullard Crosson was 31 years old when he died.

A shipmate, Coder John Gleason, recalled the long hours in the water:

"I was one of 42 crew members swarming around one Carley float designed to carry 12. Nineteen hours later, six of us were alive.

I remember the total blackness of the night. I remember the eerie silence, only the gentle slushing of the sea around us, no one uttering a sound. I remember the hopeless feeling of isolation and the awareness that I would probably die soon. That I would never marry. Never have children.

As the hours passed, the cold began claiming sailors. They just drifted away, dead or no longer able to hang on.... The more men the sea claimed, the closer those left got to the float. The float was an escape from the icy water, blessed rest for the arms, a chance to survive. I remember thinking that I was finally there. I could reach up and grab the ropes of the yellow raft!

It was my turn to climb up.... I remember reaching out to the coxswain for help. He grabbed my hand and pulled, then said, 'I don't think I can do it, John.'"

Years later, Gleason came across news of the submarine that had torpedoed *Guysborough*:

"It had one success—our ship—before being sunk by depth charges on 10 April 1945. The U-boat's entire crew was lost. The war in Europe ended 28 days after the U-boat was sunk. Fifty-one dead from our ship, 51 dead on the sub: man for man.

*I started to cry at my desk. I was alone in the house, and I just sat and sobbed.
One hundred and two young men dead. Why?"*

Leading Coder Crosson's mother received a telegram and letter on 21 March 1945 from the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, which informed her that her son was missing at sea. A subsequent letter, dated 23 April 1945, described the circumstances of Guysborough's loss and her son's death on 18 April 1945. She also received a letter from the former Commanding Officer of *Guysborough*, who had survived the sinking, expressing his condolences.

For his service, Leading Coder Abraham Bullard Crosson was awarded the 1939-1945 Star, the Atlantic Star & Clasp, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp, and the War Medal. The Memorial Cross was awarded to his mother, Madeline Lenora Crosson.

Leading Coder Abraham Bullard Crosson is commemorated on Panel 13 of the Halifax Memorial at Point Pleasant Park, Halifax, NS; the Honour Roll plaque at HMCS *Discovery*; and the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 507, 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.

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