

Lieutenant Eric Soulis Ditmars, O-19770



Lieutenant Eric Ditmars. Photo:
Find a Grave website

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Vancouver, BC, 16 April 1915**
- **Enlisted: RCNVR NADEN, 18 March 1940**
- **Civilian Occupation: Clerk, Vancouver Granite Company**
- **Death: Lost at Sea while serving in HMS *Salvia* on 24 December 1941**
- **Mention in Despatches**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 8; Mountain View Cemetery, MASONIC-plot -048-0013; and Lt. Eric Soulis Ditmars Memorial Scholarship**

Eric Ditmars was born into a prominent Vancouver family on 16 April 1915. His parents were William Carey Ditmars and Winnifred C. Ditmars. His father was a partner and secretary-treasurer of the general contracting firm of Armstrong, Morrison & Company, Ltd. William's community and professional appointments are impressive: he belonged to the voluntary governing board of the Vancouver General Hospital and later became the honorary chairman of the hospital's board of trustees and in addition, he was president of the Vancouver Pioneers Association and became a Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Freemasons in British Columbia. He was also a member of the Vancouver Club, the Terminal City Club, the Shaughnessy Heights Golf Club and the Union Club in Victoria, British Columbia. In 1928 William received the "Good Citizen" award from the Native Sons of British Columbia. Eric had one older brother, William Calvert Ditmars, who became an influential Vancouver realtor.

Eric attended Prince of Wales High School in Vancouver and University School in Victoria. After graduating he enrolled at the University of British Columbia, where he studied mining engineering and joined the Phi Delta Gamma fraternity.

Eric joined the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve at HMCS *Naden* on 18 March 1940 and was among several young men who had been selected from the membership of the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club for service with the RCNVR. These included those who became known as the "Three Musketeers," Doug Maitland, Corny Burke, and Tom Ladner. He went overseas to Great Britain to train at HMS *King Alfred* in March of 1940 in the same draft as Cornelius Burke.

After basic training on *King Alfred* the Navy posted Eric to HMS *Osprey*, where he would complete an Anti-Submarine course. *Osprey* was an anti-submarine training establishment located at the Isle of Portland, in England's Dorset County. *Osprey* was active between 1924 and 1941. After brief service in HMS *Spartiate*, a shore establishment responsible for security and safety on the River Clyde, Eric joined HMS *Salvia* on 5 November 1940 as a Sub Lieutenant (Temporary). *Salvia* was a new Flower Class corvette commissioned on 20 September 1940.

Salvia operated with the Royal Navy's Mediterranean Fleet for its entire service career. Escorting merchant ships in this region meant countering attacks by Italian naval forces and German Luftwaffe anti-shipping aircraft. From January to April 1941, William and the crew of *Salvia* were involved in Operation *Excess* and the Battle of Greece. Eric was Mentioned in Despatches for his "gallantry and devotion to duty" while serving on *Salvia* in April of 1941 during the withdrawal of Allied forces from Greece. King George VI approved this award on 11 November 1941.




HMS Lanner and HMS Salvia under Bomb Attack in Suda Bay; They went about their hazardous duty fearless and determined (1941).

Painted by Lieutenant Commander Rowland JR Langmaid.

Photo: <http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/13069> courtesy of Royal Museums Greenwich

On 23 December 1941, *Salvia* was escorting convoy TA-5 from Tobruk, Libya, to Alexandria, Egypt, when *U-559* sunk the merchant ship *Shuntien*, which carried 850 German and Italian prisoners of war. *Salvia* remained behind to rescue survivors, embarking about 100 before setting a course for its original destination of Alexandria. En route, the *U-568* sighted *Salvia* and fired four torpedoes, some of which slammed into the Corvette. The stricken ship began sinking rapidly by the stern and an oil slick that covered the water ignited, trapping those aboard within a small radius. The captain, all four officers including Eric, 54 ratings and the men rescued from the *Shuntien* were lost. HMS *Peony* searched for survivors. It found a patch of oil on the surface, but no men.



LT. ERIC S. DITMARS, RCNVR
 Son of Mr. and Mrs. W. C. Ditmars, 2535 South West Marine Drive. Lieutenant Ditmars is "missing, presumed dead as of Dec. 24, 1941," according to the Royal Canadian Navy's 28th casualty list of the war released in Ottawa today.

Lieutenant Ditmars left Vancouver as a sub-lieutenant in March, 1940. He was promoted to lieutenant in April, 1941, when he went on loan to the Royal Navy.

The Minister of National Defense announced on Dec. 30, 1941, that Lieutenant Ditmars was "missing on active service."

The Vancouver Sun, 28 Apr 1941, Mon · Page 2

The official notification of the presumption of death was dated 24 August 1942. Eric Soulis Ditmars was 26 years of age. He had served in the RCNVR for a little more than a year and a half. Eric's service file does not show his promotion to Lieutenant, but the *Vancouver Sun* indicated on 28 April 1941 that he was promoted to that rank in April of 1941, eight months before his death.


Eric did not have a will and his assets were limited to a bank account that he held jointly with his mother, Dominion Government Bonds, and a life insurance policy payable to his mother. Very Sadly his mother, Winnifred C. Ditmars, died in May of 1945. This complicated the distribution of the estate and the War Service Gratuity which under normal circumstances would have gone to her. It appeared that an early distribution of a portion of the estate in the amount of \$821.26 had gone to Mrs. Ditmars, but a subsequent distribution paid by the War Service Gratuity in the amount of \$490.53 made in October of 1945 was divided equally between the father and the estate of his late wife. This was based on 635 days of qualifying overseas service. It was not paid out until the 12th September 1945, which seems a considerable delay given Eric's death in 1941.

For his service, Lieutenant Eric Soulis Ditmars was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. The certificate for his Mention in Despatches was mailed to the family on 16 September 1943. His mother received the Canadian Memorial Cross on 12 August 1942.

Eric is commemorated in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 28, at the Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, Ottawa; on Panel 8 of the Halifax Memorial; the Ditmars family memorial stone located in Mountain View Cemetery (MASONIC-Plot-048-0013), Vancouver; and the Lt Eric Soulis Ditmars Memorial Scholarship is named in his honour. This is a \$1600 scholarship endowed by the late William C. Ditmars. UBC makes the award on the recommendation of the Department of Mining and Mineral Process Engineering to a student in the Department who shows promise of outstanding ability and has sound personal qualities and character.

Prepared By:

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ERIC DITMARS.

W. C. DITMARS' SON 'MISSING' OVERSEAS

Mr. and Mrs. W. C. Ditmars, 2535 Southwest Marine drive, received word today from the minister of defense for naval services that their son, Eric, a lieutenant in the Royal Canadian Navy, has been reported "missing on active service."

Lieutenant Eric Soulis Ditmars, 26, was believed to have been serving in a corvette in the Mediterranean.

He is the son of W. C. Ditmars, president and managing director of Armstrong, Morrison & Co. Ltd., contractors, and Mrs. Ditmars of 2535 Southwest Marine drive.

He was one of a group picked from the yacht club in 1940 to train in a naval college in Hove, England. He later went to Portsmouth and was commissioned and saw service in a corvette in the North Sea.

A year ago his vessel was sent to the Mediterranean and based at Alexandria. He is believed to have been in the area when last heard from.

Lieut. Ditmars attended Prince of Wales High School, University School in Victoria, and the University of British Columbia.

The Province (Vancouver, BC) 31 Dec 1941, Page 22



Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database – profile for Eric Soulis Ditmars
- Find a Grave: <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56171310/eric-soulis-ditmars>
- HMS' Lanner' and 'Salvia' under Bomb Attack in Suda Bay, 1941 – (Rowland Langmaid) <https://wikioo.org/paintings.php?refarticle=AQVCZP&titlepainting=HMS%27%20Lanner%27%20and%20%27Salvia%27%20under%20Bomb%20Attack%20in%20Suda%20Bay,%201941&artistname=Rowland%20Langmaid>
- <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/2557990>
- Library and Archives Canada; Ottawa, Canada; Service Files of the Second World War - War Dead, 1939-1947; Series: RG 24; Volume: 30920. Ancestry.com. Canada, World War II Records and Service Files of War Dead, 1939-1947 [database online]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry Operations, Inc., 2015.
- Lt. Eric Soulis DITMARS Memorial Scholarship: <https://students.ubc.ca/enrolment/finances/award-search/vancouver/faculty-applied-science/keevil-institute-mining-engineering/2176>
- The Vancouver Province, 31 Dec 1941, Page 22
- The Vancouver Sun, 28 Apr 1941, Page 2
- U-Boat net: <https://uboat.net/allies/merchants/1235.html>