

## Signalman William Garvey V-14500



- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Victoria BC, 29 May 1922**
- **Enlisted: Vancouver Division RCNVR, 27 June 1940**
- **Civilian Occupation: Optician, Consolidated Optical Company**
- **Death: Killed when HMCS *Guysborough* was torpedoed and sank on 18 March 1945**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 13; HMCS *Discovery* Memorial Plaque; and Garvey Point was named in his honour**

Signalman William Garvey was born in Victoria, BC., on 29 May 1922 to Thomas Garvey and Blanche Gertrude Garvey. At the time of his death, he had two brothers serving with the RCNVR, Thomas Garvey, age 30, and John Garvey, age 24. He also had an older married sister, Monica Watts, age 29, who was living in Vancouver. His mother, Blanche Garvey, was a widow who lost her husband, Thomas, in Plymouth, England on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 1938.

Leaving high school after the grade 10 level was no doubt necessary to help support his widowed mother. William, and his two brothers Thomas and John, contributed to household expenses in return for full board and lodging. His mother had no other source of income. The two older brothers contributed \$39.00 a month and William, while employed prior to enlistment, also contributed \$39.00 a month. Following enlistment William increased his allotment to his mother to \$58.00 a month.

He began his civilian employment in 1938 with Consolidated Optical Company beginning as a delivery boy for three months followed by four months in the glass factory polishing, cutting and fitting glass. He then moved to the grinding room where he was employed doing surface grinding. This is a highly skilled occupation and speaks to William Garvey's abilities in this area. He spent three years with Consolidated Optical and was employed there at the time of his enlistment in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR). However, he indicated on his occupational history form that he did not wish to return to this employment following the war but would prefer continuing service in the permanent navy.

On enlistment in the Vancouver Division RCNVR on 27 June 1940 William Garvey was described as 5' 7¼" with brown hair and green eyes. He had a fair complexion and two warts on his left

elbow and scars on his left thigh. A subsequent description on completion of his Visual Signals training in HMCS *Naden* indicated that he was of medium build with a friendly manner. He had completed two years of high school and his trainers considered this to be a good basic education. They described him as alert with high average intelligence.

He was enrolled as an Ordinary Seaman and remained in Vancouver Divisional Headquarters for basic training. On the 9th of July 1941 he passed the Educational Test "1" which opened the door for advancement to the rank of Petty Officer. On 26 July 1941 he was reclassified as Ordinary Seaman for Visual Signals and drafted to HMCS *Naden* for training as an Ordinary Signalman. While in *Naden* on the 21st of August 1941 he passed the Provisional Test which included swimming.

HMCS *St. Hyacinthe*, the Naval Communications Training School was not commissioned until 1 October 1941 and until that time all training in communications took place in HMCS *Naden*. On 2 January 1942 William was rated Ordinary Signalman. William Garvey remained in *Naden* undertaking training until 1 May 1942.

On his examination for Ordinary Signalman, he received the following marks:

- Fleet Work paper, he was required to obtain 75% and was given 87%.
- Flashing exam, he was required to obtain 90% and was given 97.5%.
- Morse Flag exam, he was required to obtain 88% and he was awarded 96%.
- Semaphore both hand flag and mechanical the pass mark was 90% and he received 98% and 96%.

Nine other members of his training class were examined at the same time five of whom did not pass and were reverted to the trade of coder. William Garvey's marks indicate a considerable degree of application in an exacting trade. There was little margin for error in the field of visual signals on the bridge of a warship.



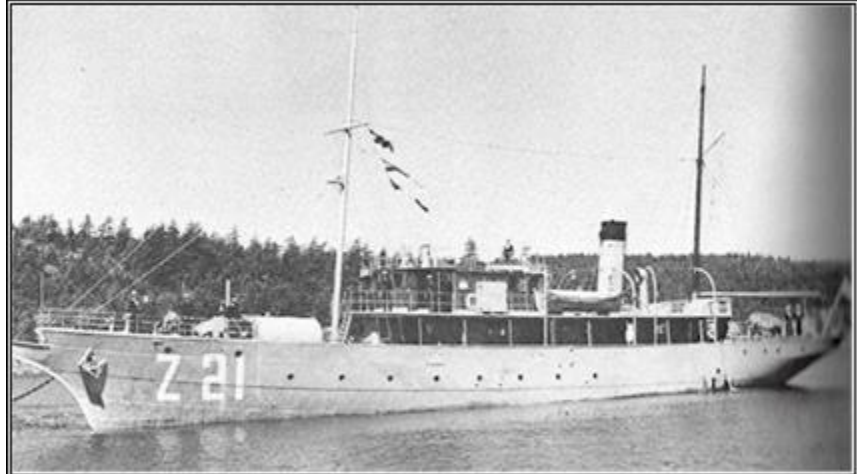
William Garvey's first ship was HMCS *Malaspina* where he served for 874 days from 10 January 1942 to 2 June 1944. *Malaspina* was a former fisheries patrol vessel and not an exciting man-of-war. The ship remained on the west coast throughout her service ending her days as a tender to HMCS *Royal Roads*. While serving in *Malaspina* William Garvey was rated Signalman on 1 May 1942, and on 7 March 1944 he had applied for transfer to the Ordinance Artificer Branch for optical duties based on his experience in his civilian occupation. This was

recommended if there were any vacancies in the optical branch but there is no evidence that this was considered by the naval authorities

In Spring 1944, William was posted back to HMCS *Naden* for a month before he was drafted to a shore unit, HMCS *Chatham*, in Prince Rupert for six months. *Chatham* had been an RCNVR Division prior to the war. At the start of the war, the entire ship's company had signed up for Active Duty and the Division was "paid off" (shut down). The Prince Rupert facilities were re-purposed

for use by the Naval Officer in Charge and Naval Control of Shipping personnel. During the period of Signalman Garvey's service in *Chatham*, they were heavily involved in planning and routing merchant ship convoys.

In mid-December 1944, Signalman Garvey returned to *Naden* while he awaited his next draft. He didn't wait long before being posted to HMCS *Vencedor* which was a three-masted topsail schooner built in Britain in 1913. She was sold to the Lieutenant Governor of BC in 1927. This was followed by brief service as a vessel for the Fisherman's Reserve before being taken over by the RCN as a miscellaneous auxiliary vessel. At this point Signalman Garvey must have begun to wonder when he would serve at sea in ship which could take the fight to the enemy.



HMCS Vencedor

[http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS\\_VENCEDOR.htm](http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_VENCEDOR.htm)

His time in *Vencedor* was brief; on 13 Jan 1945

Signalman Garvey found himself travelling to Halifax, NS where he awaited his assignment to a ship.

On 8 February 1945, William was drafted to HMCS *Guysborough*, a warship with considerable experience. *Guysborough* was a Bangor-class minesweeper built by North Vancouver Ship Repairs Ltd, Vancouver. Originally ordered by the Royal Navy, the ship was transferred to the Royal Canadian Navy. *Guysborough* began her service life in the Pacific, but she was transferred to Halifax in the Spring of 1943.

Signalman Garvey joined the crew while *Guysborough* was in refit in Lunenburg, NS. The ship had been on assignment with the RN's 14th Minesweeping Flotilla since March 1944. In that capacity, she was assigned minesweeping duties in support of the Invasion of Normandy (D-Day) and remained in UK waters until December of 1944 when she returned to Canada to undergo a refit.

In March 1945 following the refit, *Guysborough* sailed for Plymouth. The ship sailed alone from Horta in the Azores. On 17 March 1945, she was torpedoed and sunk with a loss of 53 of her ship's company while enroute to Plymouth, England. The fact that she was not part of a convoy or with other escorts was a decision made by her commanding officer and later this decision was the subject of some criticism.

The events of that terrible day began at 1850 in the second dog watch, when HMCS *Guysborough* (J 52) commanded by Temporary Lieutenant B.T.R. Russell, RCNR was hit in the stern by a GNAT torpedo from U-868 about 210 miles north of Cape Finisterre in the Bay of Biscay. Sailing alone, the minesweeper was towing her CAAT gear (Foxyer). This equipment was designed to work against acoustic torpedoes, but the GNAT nevertheless hit the stern, possibly because the gear was streamed too close to the ship to confuse the warhead.

Foxer was the code name for a British built acoustic decoy used to confuse German acoustic homing torpedoes. A Canadian version was also built called the CAAT (Canadian Anti-Acoustic



**HMCS Guysborough**

<http://www.forposterityssake.ca/JPGs/PHOTO-DIR/CTB-PHOTOS-27000/CTB028037.jpg>

Torpedo) device. CAAT consisted of one or two noise-making devices towed several hundred metres astern of the ship. The noise makers mechanically generated a far louder cavitation noise than the ship's propellers. This noise was designed to distract acoustic torpedoes away from the rear of the ship into a circling pattern around the noise maker until the torpedo ran out

of fuel. The downside of CAAT was that it also rendered the own ship's ASDIC ineffective and concealed any other U-boat nearby that could approach the ship. In most cases it was highly effective against German acoustic torpedoes.

After *Guysborough* was hit, she settled by the stern with a slight list to port, 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 were killed in the explosions, but the remaining men abandoned ship on five Carley floats because the motor cutter and the whaler were badly damaged by the second torpedo. One group consisting of 48 survivors lashed four rafts together, but the fifth raft drifted away overcrowded by the remaining men. The ship managed to send a distress signal and several vessels were sent to their rescue, but it took HMS *Inglis* (K 570) approximately 19 hours to arrive at the location of the sinking. By this time 49 of the survivors had died of injuries or exposure on the overcrowded raft. However, 40 survivors were rescued by HMS *Inglis* and one more survivor was picked up by HMS *Loring* while searching for the submarine.

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 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 sub that sank Guysborough.*

*"It had one 'success'—our ship—before being sunk by depth charges on April 10, 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?" (Legion Magazine, March 2021)*

The exact circumstances of the death of Signalman William Garvey will never be known. With two brothers also serving in the RCNVR his grieving mother would have suffered terrible anxiety. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that brothers Thomas and John did not survive the war. Signalman Garvey only served in *Guysborough* for 40 days before she was lost on the 18th of March 1945. He was 22 years old and by this time he was an experienced signalman who had received his first good conduct badge. His character had always been rated as Very Good and his efficiency in his trade as Satisfactory

At the time of his death William Garvey did not have a Will. When his estate was settled his mother received \$62.41. Money sent to his mother included the balance of his pay and allowances as well as money in his account at the Bank of Commerce. In addition, she received a War Service Gratuity of \$743.34.

For his service Signalman William Garvey was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp and the War Medal. There is no evidence that his mother received these medals. His mother, Blanche, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

Signalman William Garvey is commemorated on Panel 13 of the Halifax Memorial in Point Pleasant Park, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Garvey Point is named in his honour. It is located in the in the Fiordland Conservancy Park, Queen Charlotte Sound, BC (52°46'00"N, 128°08'00"W)

#### **Prepared By:**

Lieutenant Commander (Ret'd) Robert W. White (HMCS Discovery 1960 – 1989) Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Research Team.



#### **Sources:**

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database – Profile for William Garvey
- Canadian Fallen: <https://canadianfallen.ca/110410/GARVEY>. Retrieved 16 April 2022
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial: <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/2558217?William%20Garvey>. Retrieved 14 April 2022.

- Find a Grave, database and images  
<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56171577/william-garvey>: accessed 15 April 2022), memorial page for Sgnltn William Garvey (unknown–18 Mar 1945), Find a Grave Memorial ID 56171577, citing Halifax Memorial, Halifax, Halifax County, Nova Scotia, Canada ; Maintained by War Graves (contributor 6)  
.Retrieved 18 April 2022
- For Posterity Sake:  
[http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS\\_GUYSBOROUGH\\_J52.htm](http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_GUYSBOROUGH_J52.htm).  
Retrieved 23 April 2022
- Foxer: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foxer>. Retrieved 23 April 2022
- HMCS Malaspina:  
[http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS\\_MALASPINA.htm](http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_MALASPINA.htm). Retrieved 23 April 2022
- HMCS Vencedor: [http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS\\_Vencedor.htm](http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_Vencedor.htm).  
Retrieved 23 April 2022
- Knowbc.com: <https://www.knowbc.com/limited/Books/The-Encyclopedia-of-Raincoast-Place-Names/G/Garvey-Point>. Retrieved 15 April 2022.
- Legion Magazine: <https://legionmagazine.com/en/2021/03/adrift-in-the-bay-of-biscay/>
- U-Boat Net, HMCS Guysborough: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2558217/>. Retrieved 23 April 2022.