

Able Seaman Peter William Wallace V-11722



Able Seaman Peter Wallace. Photo: Wallace Family collection

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Saskatoon SK, 11 January 1923**
- **Enlisted: Saskatoon Division RCNVR, 20 June 1941**
- **Civilian Occupation: Call Boy, Canadian National Railway, Saskatoon**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Athabaskan* was torpedoed and sank on 29 April 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 11; Regina War Memorial, Regina, SK; Naval War Museum Plaque, Pointe de St-Mathieu, France; and Wallace Bay, SK (northwestern Davin Lake at N56° 52' W103° 44')**

Peter William Wallace was born on 11 January 1923, to Peter and Christina Wallace in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Peter and Christina emigrated from Scotland to Winnipeg just before World War One and later relocated to Saskatoon. He was the fourth of eight siblings. Four of his brothers and one sister all served in the Canadian Forces during World War Two. He grew up at 131 Main Street in Saskatoon and resided there until he joined the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR). He attended Buena Vista Elementary School and Riverview Collegiate where he completed his training as a sheet metal worker. At the time of his enlistment, Peter was working for the Canadian National Railway as a Call Boy.

On enrolment in the RCNVR in Saskatoon, later called HMCS *Unicorn*, Peter was 5' 8 ½" tall, 120 lbs, with dark brown hair and brown eyes. He took the Oath of Allegiance on June 20, 1941 – he was 18 ½ years old and single. With the exception of his youngest brother Doug, who was too young to serve, and his sister Annie, who was living in England, all his siblings served in the military: John joined the Royal Air Force (serving in India); Alexander (Alex), Robert (Len), and Kenneth (Ken) all joined the RCNVR, and Matilda (Margaret) joined the Canadian Women's Army Corps.



Wallace family residence at 131 Main Street, Saskatoon, SK. Photo: Wallace family collection

Ordinary Seaman (OS) Wallace commenced training in Saskatoon but would soon find himself in HMCS *Naden* in Esquimalt, British Columbia for his initial seamanship training. During his first



Photo of new entries at HMCS Unicorn. circa 1942. Ordinary Seaman Peter Wallace: 2nd row, third from the right. Photo: Wallace Family Collection

period of training there, he spent a few days aboard HMCS *Prince Robert*, an armed merchant cruiser used for patrolling the west coast. Following that, Peter spent time in Halifax, Nova Scotia where he received his Anti-Aircraft gunnery training in HMCS *Cornwallis* and HMCS *Stadacona*. His A.A. III qualification was granted on June 3, 1942, and this entitled Peter to a 10 cents/day raise.

On completion of his gunnery training, OS Wallace was drafted back to *Naden* where he was posted to HMCS *Guysborough* (June 20, 1942 – December 15, 1943). Peter Spent 544 days serving in *Guysborough*. The ship was initially assigned to the Esquimalt Force as there were increased security concerns after the attack on Pearl Harbor in early June 1942. As Peter gained sea time and experience, his responsibilities increased. He was rated as an Acting Able Seaman (AB) in August 1942 and while his family at home was serving Thanksgiving dinner on Oct 12, 1942, Peter was confirmed as an AB.

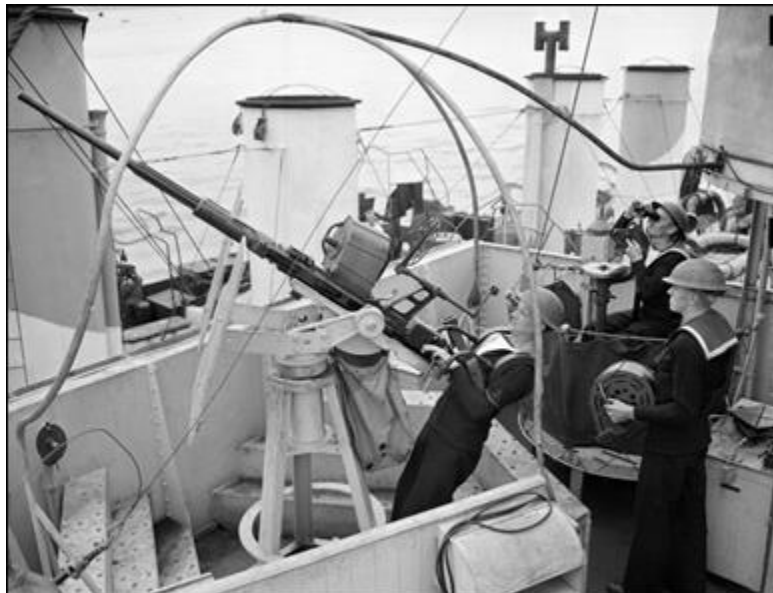
From early Dec 1942 to early Mar 1943, *Guysborough* patrolled more northern waters and the ship was based in Prince Rupert, British Columbia. Then, on March 17, 1943, *Guysborough* set sail for a new assignment in the Atlantic Ocean. The ship travelled south to the Panama Canal and then northward up the east coast of North America. *Guysborough* arrived in Halifax on April 30, 1943. In Halifax, the ship was first assigned to the Western Local Escort Force - the organization of anti-submarine escorts that serviced eastern Canada and New England – and then the Halifax Local Defence Force. In mid-Sep 1943, *Guysborough* underwent a refit at Baltimore and AB Wallace's posting in HMCS *Guysborough* ended on December 15, 1943.



On December 17 1943, Peter was posted to HMS *Persian*. This minesweeper - built in a Toronto shipyard – was commissioned into the Royal Navy in Nov 1943. The ship sailed from Halifax to the UK in Dec 1943 and it is possible

that AB Wallace was part of a Canadian crew delivering the ship to the Royal Navy. *Persian* arrived in the United Kingdom in early January 1944. After a brief shore posting, Peter was posted to HMCS *Athabaskan* on February 1, 1944.

Athabaskan was a much different ship than the minesweepers *Guysborough* or *Persian*. *Athabaskan* was twice the length of *Guysborough*, had a crew double the size of the minesweepers and had significantly more armament. The ship's role was different as well, after spending close to two years in smaller ships that were assigned protection and defensive duties, AB Wallace was now in a ship that patrolled for Axis forces and took the fight to the enemy



20-mm Oerlikon anti-aircraft gun, similar to that used by AB Wallace.

Photo: Library and Archives Canada, MIKAN No. 3525061

and the crew of HMCS *Haida*, 128 men (including Able Seaman Wallace) were lost with 50 being rescued by *Haida* and her motor work boat. AB Wallace was missing, presumed dead, at 21 years of age.

For his Service, Able Seaman Peter William Wallace, RCNVR, was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. His mother, Mrs. Christina Wallace, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

AB Wallace has no known grave. The wreckage of HMCS *Athabaskan* was located in 2002 in 50 fathoms of water. She and those who may be entombed in her are under the protection of the French Heritage Code. Peter is commemorated at the Halifax Memorial, Panel 11, and the Regina War Memorial (located in Regina, SK). Additionally, he is commemorated on a plaque in a naval war museum on Pointe de St-Mathieu (France), where there is a lighthouse and fort at the northwest entrance to the Rade de Brest. The inscription reads "In memory of the 128

AB Wallace served in *Athabaskan* for only 90 days. In February 1944, *Athabaskan* joined the 10th Destroyer Flotilla based at Plymouth. They were tasked with night sweeps in the English Channel and the Bay of Biscay. Their targets were German destroyers, trawlers, E-boats, and coastal shipping. On April 29, 1944, HMC Ships *Athabaskan* and *Haida* were conducting patrol operations when they were ordered to intercept German warships in the vicinity of Ile de Bas. Shortly after 0400, HMCS *Athabaskan* was torpedoed by T-24. Despite the heroic efforts of (then) Commander Harry DeWolf



Wallace family memorial to Peter. Photo: Wallace Family Collection

servicemen of the Canadian navy killed in action on board HMCS ATHABASKAN which sunk off the coast of Finistere on April 29th, 1944, during the liberation of France". Lastly, the province of Saskatchewan has named Wallace Bay (located in northwestern Davin Lake at N56° 52' W103° 44') in his memory.

Prepared By:

Karen Wallace, Lieutenant-Commander (Retired), Spouse of Peter W Wallace's nephew (Peter A Wallace), Commanding Officer HMCS *Unicorn* 2011-2015 & Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph Research team



Sources:

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