

## Signalman Robert John Bishop V-35169



Calgarians in Dramatic Sea Rescue. Photo  
Credit Calgary Herald, 10 Mar 1944

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Drumheller AB, 28 March 1924**
- **Enlisted: Calgary Division RCNVR, 3 October 1941**
- **Civilian Occupation: Core maker's Apprentice, North Western Brass**
- **Death: Died when HMCS Guysborough sank on 18 March 1945**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 13**

Robert John Bishop was the youngest of Albert and Hannah Bishop's five children. His parents and some of his older siblings immigrated to Canada from Wales. His father worked at the Imperial Oil Refinery in Calgary, and he had military service with the Imperial (Welsh) Regiment. The family lived at 2940 17 Ave West, Calgary, Alberta. Prior to enlistment Robert was a high school student and worked as a Core Makers Apprentice for North Western Brass.

In January 1940, at the age of 15, Robert applied to enlist as a Boy Seaman in the Royal Canadian Navy. He had Sea Cadet experience with the Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corp (RCSCC) *Undaunted* in Calgary, and he had his father's permission to join. His application went unanswered until October 1941, by which time he was old enough to enlist on his own. So, Robert left his grade 11 classmates at Western Canada High School and enlisted at the Calgary Division of the RCNVR on 3 Oct 1941.

Enlistment documents describe Robert as 5' 9" tall, 133 lbs with light brown hair, blue eyes, and a fresh complexion. He was a Church of England member. Ordinary Seaman Bishop did his basic training in HMCS *Tecumseh*, followed by Navy Signals training at HMCS *St. Hyacinthe* in Quebec. While there he qualified as an Ordinary Signalman. In May 1942, he was drafted to HMCS *Protector*, the navy base in Sydney, Nova Scotia. This base was the assembly point for Slow Convoy ships destined for Europe and their escort ships. Throughout his service Robert was rated as "of Very Good Character" and was always "of Superior Efficiency" as a Signalman. This efficiency resulted in his promotion to Signalman in January 1943.

Signalman Bishop he was drafted to his first (and last) sea-going ship, the Minesweeper, HMCS *Guysborough*, on 15 February 1944. Robert served in *Guysborough* during a busy period. In March 1944, she made a dramatic rescue of a US ship during a violent Atlantic storm. The US ship had a damaged rudder, lost all communications and had run out of fuel. The crew of HMCS *Guysborough* saw her safely into port. In June 1944, *Guysborough* was one of the famous Canadian minesweepers which cleared the way for the D-Day landings in Normandy as part of

the 14th Minesweeper Flotilla. After months of hard duty, HMCS *Guysborough* returned to Canada in December 1944 for refit in Lunenburg, NS.

Ordered back to the UK after her refit, *Guysborough* was sailing alone on 17 March 1945, in the Bay of Biscay when she was hit with an acoustic torpedo from U-868. It was early evening when she was hit but *Guysborough* did not sink immediately. The crew manned their guns, the watertight doors were closed to reduce the spread of flood waters, and bulkheads were temporarily repaired (or shored-up) to keep the vessel from sinking. However, U-868 was still in the vicinity and she fired a second torpedo at 1935 hours which took the *Guysborough* to the bottom. Two crew members were killed instantly in the explosions, the remaining crew abandoned ship onto five Carley floats because the ship's motor cutter and the whaler were unusable. The survivors lashed four floats together and this became a temporary raft for 48 men. The fifth Carley float was overcrowded and drifted away.

*Guyborough* was able to send a distress signal, but it took 19 hours for the frigate, HMS *Inglis* to arrive. In total, 49 men died of injuries or from exposure - 36 on the overcrowded raft. A survivor described the scene, "Both the air and water were cold. Most of the men who died, died smiling. If they suffered any, you'd never have known it." Three of those lost were from Calgary including Signalman Bishop. Robert's body was never recovered, he was 20 years old.

For his Service, Signalman Robert John Bishop was awarded 1939-45 Star, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, Atlantic Star & Clasp & the War Medal. His mother, Hannah Bishop, was awarded the Memorial Cross. Robert's older brother, Fredrich G Bishop served with the Calgary Highlanders overseas and survived the war.

Signalman Bishop is remembered on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 13.

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**Sources:**

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission database – Signalman Robert John Bishop
- London Gazette 14 August 1945
- Library and Archives Canada - Service file for Signalman Robert John Bishop
- Photo Credit: Calgary Herald March 10, 1944
- Calgary Herald March 1945
- For Posterity Sake [http://forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS\\_GUYSBOROUGH\\_J52.htm](http://forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_GUYSBOROUGH_J52.htm)