

Lieutenant Henry George Ellis O-22220



Lt. Henry George Ellis

<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/2438412?Henry%20George%20Ellis>

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Scarborough England, 11 April 1908**
- **Enlisted: Vancouver Division RCNVR, 21 May 1941**
- **Civilian Occupation: Automobile Dealer, Stonehouse Motors**
- **Death: Accidental Death while serving in HMS *Vernon* on 12 January 1942**
- **Commemorated: Haslar Royal Naval Cemetery, G. 9. 25**

Lieutenant Henry George Ellis was born on 11 April 1908 in Scarborough, Yorkshire England to William Ellis and Edith Emma Ellis. He had one older brother, William Geoffrey Ellis. Henry Ellis was educated in Scarborough at the elementary school between 1913 and 1919. His secondary education was at Scarborough College between 1919 and 1924. He passed the Cambridge “local” examination but did not attend university. While at Scarborough College he was a member of the school cadet corps and had attained the rank of sergeant. At school he was involved in several athletic activities including rugby, soccer, cricket and water polo both as a team member and captain.

Henry Ellis’ father was a Master Mariner and as a very young man Henry had served in his father’s deep-sea trawler completing two fishing trips to the North Sea. He also had active experience in three types of watercraft: motor up to 45’, sail and motor sail in the form of a 28’ yawl. His experience in sail included pleasure cruising and racing. In Canada he had extensive experience in BC coastal waters as far north as Prince Rupert. He had been a member of the Cowichan B.C. Yacht Club for two years prior to enlistment.

Henry Ellis emigrated from Scarborough, England with his parents at the age of 16. He arrived in Quebec on the 24th of October 1924 on board SS *Megantic*. His father’s occupation at that time was indicated as ship broker. Henry’s employment in Canada included six years with the Imperial Bank of Commerce and seven and a half years with Swift Canadian Company as a provision and beef salesman. A note in his file indicated that he lost his job with Swift Canadian Company because of a gambling problem “playing horses” and that he had got in “too deep.” At the time of his attestation his occupation was listed as an automobile dealer with Stonehouse, Motors. As of

July 1941, he was studying with the International Accountants Society to obtain qualification as a Certified General Accountant. While waiting to be accepted by the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve he took military training with the B.C. Regiment.

He married Elizabeth Somerton in Prince George B.C. on 1 September 1930 but the couple were divorced on 30 April 1940. A daughter, Edith Nancy Jean Ellis, was born to this union on 29 May 1935. Henry Ellis had entered into an agreement with his former wife to provide support for his daughter beginning with an amount of \$15.00 per month and later increased to \$25.00 a month. He had difficulty meeting this commitment and it was reduced to \$21.00 a month. The notation in his records regarding gambling stated that he was unable to support his former wife and that she was looking for a job. His second marriage was to Jean May Ellis, but no record could be located. It was, however, before Henry George Ellis' enlistment with the RCNVR Vancouver Barracks (later HMCS *Discovery*) on 21 May 1941 and may have taken place on the 15th of March 1941 as indicated on Henry Ellis' Yachtsman's Application Form. It was a marriage of short duration.

Henry Ellis was very anxious to offer his skills to the Navy in whatever capacity they wished to accept him, and he wrote several letters to this effect in which he cited his experience at sea and in accounting. He was consistent in these applications that he was applying for service as an "officer." His preference was to serve with the Royal Navy and that may have delayed his acceptance. He was prepared to proceed to England almost immediately asking only for ten days to put his affairs in order. His handwritten letters in 1940 repeatedly expressed his determination to serve and offer as references Mr. R.W. Mayhew MP, Col. J.H. McMullin and Alan Chambers Esq. MP. In a letter to J.O. Cosette, the Naval Secretary, written on the 24th of February 1941, he stated that he had made several trips to Iceland on North Sea Trawlers. This was not entirely accurate but there was a growing sense of frustration with the delay in his acceptance by the RCNVR.



Vernon Monument

<https://vernon-monument.org.uk/>

He was finally taken on strength by D.H.Q. Vancouver as Temporary Lieutenant on the 21st of May 1941. This was followed by brief service in D.H.Q. Montreal before being sent to HMCS *Stadacona* where he was held additional for passage to the UK for service with the Royal Navy. On arrival he was posted for training to HMS *King Alfred*. This establishment was tasked to train a new kind of naval officer in order to swell the ranks of Britain's rapidly expanding navy. These were for the most part HO (Hostilities Only) officers commissioned into the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve (RNVR)

as temporary appointments. They were to be released from service on the cessation of hostilities.



Haslar Memorial Cemetery

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Unfortunately for Lt Ellis he had failed the eyesight test for “executive” officer and was therefore sent to the Mining Section of HMS *Vernon*. That this was not entirely to his satisfaction was expressed in a letter to Commander Eustace Brock, RCNVR Liaison Officer, written from Portsmouth on 11 December 1941. In this letter Ellis made the case that the war with Japan would make his skills in “rendering mines safe and bomb disposal” valuable to the Royal Canadian Navy. He indicated that he now had four months of training in the Mining Section and he that he was “confident that he had a good working knowledge of all British moored mines and most of the ground mines laid by aircraft.” He went on to state that he also had experience with many types of enemy mines. This knowledge combined with his experience on the BC coast prior to the war in his opinion justified sending him back to Canada. He also alluded to the fact that his wife was recovering from an accident, and he wished to be nearer home. Commander Brock was noncommittal in his response and promised only to forward his request to Naval Staff HQ in Ottawa. He wished Ellis the best of luck with his request but offered no hope that a change might be made.

On the 12th of January 1942 Lt. Henry Ellis was severely injured in an accident aboard a minesweeper. Commander Brock’s letter to the Naval Secretary in Ottawa contained the following passage in which he described the accident.

“The cause of the injury resulting in Lieut. Ellis’s death was the parting of the certain hoisting gear during experimental

mining operations in Spithead; a leading block came adrift under an unexpected strain and was hurled through the air by the bow of the fall. The steel sheave of the block flew out and struck Lieut. Ellis on the back of the head, crushing the skull so seriously that he was almost, if not completely, unconscious from the moment until he died. I have been assured by the Surgeon Rear Admiral and by the Surgeon Capt. in charge that although an operation was immediately performed and everything else done that could be done, the case was almost hopeless from the start, and also that if Lieut. Ellis had not died from the injury, he would undoubtedly have been a mental and physical cripple for the rest of his life.”

Commander Brock wrote a letter of condolence to Henry Ellis’ wife on the 19th of January 1942 where he explained the circumstances of the accident and expressed his sincere regret. He informed her that he had attended to the funeral for her husband which was held with full naval honours and attended by an uncle and an aunt from Scarborough. Commander Brock later forwarded photographs of the event to the uncle in Scarborough. The correspondence from Commander Brock and other references indicated that Henry Ellis was held in considerable esteem by his shipmates many of whom wrote to Mrs. Ellis.

Lt Ellis was 31 years of age at the time of his death and stated his religion as Church of England. He had served a total of 237 days of which 210 days were overseas service. Mrs. Jean May Ellis received \$165.35 as a War Gratuity Payment, and she was the sole beneficiary of her husband's Will. He was buried in Clayhill Naval Cemetery also known as the Haslar Memorial Cemetery. His grave location was marked as Line 9, Grave 24, Plot E. His name was entered in the Canadian Virtual War Memorial and can also be found on page 71 of the Second World War Book of Remembrance.

For his service he was posthumously awarded the Defence Medal, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp and the War Medal. His wife and his mother both received the Canadian Memorial Cross.

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Sources:

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