

Chief Petty Officer Augustus Eastman Lighthall A-2404



Chief Petty Officer Augustus (Gus) Lighthall.
Photo: Lighthall-Cooper family collection

- **Royal Canadian Naval Reserve**
- **Born: Picton ON, 4 May 1905**
- **Enlisted: Montreal Division RCNVR, 6 July 1940**
- **Civilian Occupation: Second Mate, SS *Waterton*, McKellar Steamships Limited**
- **Death: Killed when HMCS *Alberni* was torpedoed and sank on 21 August 1944**
- **Mentioned in Despatches**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 7; Picton War Memorial; HMCS *Alberni* Museum in Port Alberni; Lighthall Lake in North-west Ontario is named in his honour**

Augustus Eastman Lighthall, known as Gus, was born 4 May 1905 at Bloomfield in Prince Edward County, ON. He was the second youngest of seven children born to Margaret and Augustus Lighthall. His oldest brother, Don, who served with the Canadian Expeditionary Force, was killed in action at Vimy Ridge on 3 May 1917 during the First World War.

Gus' father was a partner of "Gilbert and Lighthall", cabinet and coffin makers in Picton. When Augustus was quite young, his father abandoned the family and his mother moved in with her parents, Angus and Mary Green, at Glenora, ON. Gus attended school at Lake on the Mountain. The "mountain" in this case was a hill about 60 metres above Glenora; with Gus walking the "mountain" 2.5 kilometres each way to attend school.

After eight years of public schooling and at age 14, Gus left school. He eventually became a seaman on the Great Lakes freighters. He spent 12 years working on lakers and he was working with McKellar Steamships Limited as the Second Mate of the SS *Waterton*, when he enrolled in the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve (RCNR).

Gus enlisted at the Montreal Division of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve on 6 July 1940. He was almost 35 years old at the time and he was officially described as 5' 10 ¼" tall, grey hair, blue eyes, and had a fair complexion. No doubt due to his experience on the lakers, he was rated Able Seaman on enlistment and the next day he was rated Leading Seaman. Leading Seaman Lighthall spent the rest of July 1940 at HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax, NS for training. On

29 July 1940, he was drafted to HMCS *Protector*, also known as Point Edward Navy Base in Sydney, NS. HMCS *Protector* was the staging point for 'slow convoys' out of Sydney, NS. There, ships were repaired, provisioned, and formed into convoys prior to crossing the Atlantic. Gus remained in *Protector* for 19 months. He was rated Petty Officer (temporary) on 17 January 1942 and on 3 May 1942 he was reassigned to HMCS *Stadacona*.

On 2 June 1942, Petty Officer Lighthall joined HMCS *Alberni* on the east coast and he was rated Acting/Chief Petty Officer. HMCS *Alberni* was a Flower-class corvette completed at Yarrows Ltd. in Esquimalt, BC and was commissioned on 4 February 1941. Corvettes were small armed escort vessels for the purpose of protecting and defending freighters and convoys from attack. HMCS *Alberni* was 205 feet long (62 metres), could travel at 15 knots (30 kilometres an hour), and was armed with various guns and 'Hedgehog': the depth charge throwing weapon for attacking submarines.



HMCS *Alberni* circa 1943-44. Photo: National Defence. - Image Negative Number O-6140

As A/CPO, Gus "carried out the duties of T.C." until 31 October 1942. The term "Torpedo Coxswain" was the precursor to the modern term, "Coxswain". On a corvette, this was the senior non-commissioned officer on the vessel. As the T.C., A/CPO Lighthall was responsible for the discipline of the sailors. He attained this position no doubt in part due to his age and maritime experience on the Great Lakes.

A/CPO Lighthall and HMCS *Alberni* sailed for England in October 1942 and were part of Operation TORCH, the allied invasion of North Africa. During this operation, *Alberni* escorted convoys between the United Kingdom and Gibraltar. On 27 October 1942, HMCS *Alberni* rescued 12 crew from the American tanker *Gurney E. Newlin* that had been torpedoed. The next day, she rescued 81 survivors from the British whaling ship *Sourabaya* that had been torpedoed and sunk.



Chief Lighthall, Torpedo Coxswain, and subordinates.
Photo: Lighthall-Cooper family collection

HMCS *Alberni* returned to Canadian waters in March 1943 and was assigned escort duties between Quebec City and Labrador. On 6 July 1943, A/CPO Lighthall was awarded his first good conduct badge. HMCS *Alberni* went in for refit in Liverpool, NS in November

1943. Gus took leave back home to Ontario during the refit. On 2 December 1943, he married Mary Isabel Wilkinson of Chatsworth, ON. There were no children from this all-too-brief marriage.

Following the refit, HMCS *Alberni* sailed to Bermuda in February 1944 for 'work-ups' in which this intensive period of trials and exercises prepared the newly fitted ship and its crew for active duty. HMCS *Alberni* then proceeded to the UK for Operation NEPTUNE, the naval aspect of the D-Day landings. In February, Gus was confirmed as a Chief Petty Officer.

On 26 July 1944, the crew of *Alberni* shot down a German Junkers 88 aircraft that attacked the ship at close to sea-level. The wreckage splashed down within 100 metres of the ship.

After D-Day, HMCS *Alberni* was assigned anti-submarine duties in the English Channel. On 21 August 1944, HMCS *Alberni* was on anti-submarine duties along the south coast of England in the English Channel. Just before noon on that day, shortly after hands had been piped to dinner, HMCS *Alberni* was torpedoed by U-480, a German submarine equipped with a rubberized coating that made detection by sonar or ASDIC (acoustic submarine detection is similar to sonar) much more difficult. HMCS *Alberni* sank in minutes. Chief Petty Officer Augustus Lighthall and 58 of his fellow crew members were reported as missing in action and presumed killed. Chief Petty Officer Augustus Lighthall was 39 years old.

For his service, Chief Petty Officer Lighthall was awarded: the 1939-45 Star, the Atlantic Star and Clasp, the Africa Star and Clasp, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. He was also awarded with Mentioned in Dispatches (MiD). This award, where the name

of the recipient appears in an official report written by a superior officer, notes the gallant or meritorious actions of an individual in the face of the enemy. The posthumous MiD citation for CPO Lighthall reads,



"For courage and resourcefulness while picking up survivors under adverse weather conditions in the North Atlantic in October 1942, and again in the Mediterranean in February 1943. This rating, who lost his life at the time of the destruction of HMCS Alberni (21 Aug 1944), always showed a consistent devotion to duty and coolness in action. This was evident at the time of the destruction of a JU-88 in July, 1944. His conduct in action was always a credit to the service and an inspiration to the men serving under him."

Chief Petty Officer Augustus Eastman Lighthall is remembered on Panel 7 of the Halifax Memorial; the Picton War Memorial; HMCS *Alberni* Museum and Memorial in Comox, BC; and the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 366 at the Centre Block Houses of Parliament, Ottawa. The Province of Ontario honoured his sacrifice and recognized his gallantry by naming Lighthall Lake after him in Northwestern Ontario, west of Lake Nipigon at coordinates 49.674721N 89.5486W.

Gus, along with his brother Don who was killed in action at Vimy Ridge in the First World War, are also memorialized on their mother's gravestone in Glenwood Cemetery, Prince Edward County, ON.

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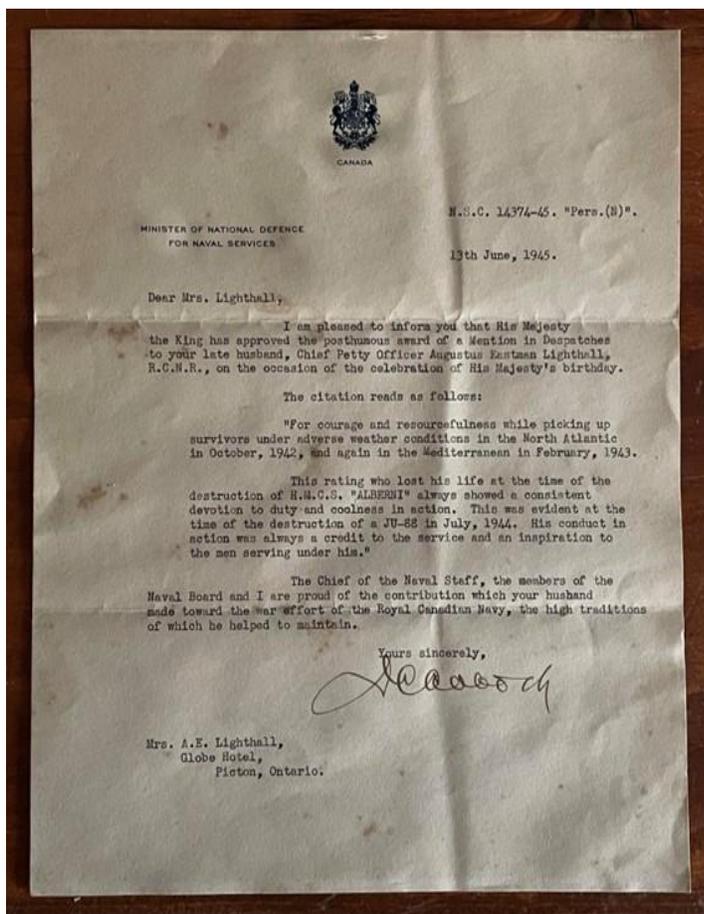


Sources:

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- Library and Archives Canada Service file for CPO Augustus E. Lighthall
- ancestry.ca and Military Records, family trees and other links. Retrieved 3 Apr 22
- Wikipedia, HMCS Alberni. Retrieved 3 Apr 22
- ReadyayeReady, HMCS Alberni. Retrieved 3 Apr 22
- Findagrave. Retrieved 3 Apr 22
- Prince Edward County museums and archives
- Mrs. Margo Lighthall Cooper, niece, of Picton

Other Pictures:

CITIZEN SAILORS VIRTUAL CENOTAPH - CÉNOTAPHE VIRTUEL DES MARINS CITOYENS



Letter from Minister of national Defence to Mrs Lighthall providing details of the Mention in Despatches. Photo: Lighthall-Cooper family collection



Certificate presented to to CPO Lighthall's next of kin by the citizens of the Alberni District. Photo: Lighthall-Cooper family collection