

Able Seaman William (Bill) Tudor Mountain, MiD, V31164, RCNVR



Photo credit: Nancy Palmer and Krystal Boros

- Born in Calgary 23 April 1924
- Enlisted in HMCS Tecumseh in Calgary, Alberta 18 March 1942
- Killed in action when minesweeper HMCS Guysborough torpedoed off Ushant, France 18 March 1945
- Mentioned in Dispatches
- MOUNTAIN BAY, N.W.T. (map sheet 75J/4) 62 degrees 09' 01" N 107 degrees 37' 03" W, on Eileen Lake was named in his honour on 24 June 1963.

William Tudor Mountain, also known as Bill, was one of five children of William Calvin Mountain and Alice Coleshill of 1119-9 St SE, Calgary, Alberta. He attended Colonel Walker School up to grade nine. He enjoyed sports especially baseball and football. William was working as a delivery boy for the printing company Phoenix Press before enlistment.

On 18 March 1942, William enlisted in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve at HMCS *Tecumseh* in Calgary. Enlistment documents describe William as 5'8" in stature 135 lbs with blue eyes, a fair complexion and a member of the Church of England. Ordinary Seaman Mountain did basic training in HMCS *Tecumseh*. On 14 July 1942, he shipped out to the accommodation ship HMCS *Givenchy* while training in HMCS *Naden* in Esquimalt, BC. Ten months later, on 13 May 1943 he was promoted to Able Seaman and a week later posted to the Vancouver-built Bangor class minesweeper HMCS *Guysborough*. The ship sailed from Esquimalt for Halifax in March 1943 where she took up escort duties in the North Atlantic.

After a refit in Baltimore, HMCS *Guysborough* sailed for Plymouth England by way of the Azores arriving in March 1944. That month 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. In December 1944, AB Mountain returned to Canada with HMCS *Guysborough* for a refit in Lunenburg, NS. William was looking forward to his return to England as he was to be married there on arrival.

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 Able Seaman Mountain. His body was never recovered, he was 20 years old.

Able Seaman Mountain was recognized for his selfless action during those 19 hours awaiting rescue with a Mention in Despatches. The citation reads, "*For outstanding courage, resolution and devotion to duty when their ship was sunk - HMCS Guysborough*" Able Seaman Mountain was also awarded 1939-45 Star, Atlantic Star & Clasp, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp and the War Medal. His mother, Alice Mountain, was awarded the Memorial Cross

After the War, the former Lieutenant RCNR Benjamin R. Russell, Commanding Officer of HMCS *Guysborough* paid a visit to the Mountain family in Calgary. He explained that the men were in the water for over 19 hours and most died of exposure while clinging to the rafts or rotating to a place on the four Carley Float life rafts. William was lost while trying to pull another seaman up out of the water and onto the raft.

William's brother Raymond Malcolm Mountain also joined the Navy and served in Korea in HMCS *Cayuga*, HMCS *Ontario* and the submarine HMCS *Grilse*. His nephew Bill Rice was inspired by his two uncles to join the Navy and trained at HMCS *Cornwallis*, then served in HMCS *Skeena*, HMCS *Ottawa*, HMCS *Qu'Appelle*, and HMCS *MacKenzie* from 1963 to 1966.

Able Seaman William Tudor Mountain is remembered on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 13. In addition, MOUNTAIN BAY, N.W.T. (map sheet 75J/4) 62 degrees 09' 01"N 107 degrees 37' 03" W, on Eileen Lake was named in his honour on 24 June 1963.

Prepared by:

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Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission file for AB William Tudor Mountain
- London Gazette 14 August 1945
- Library and Archives Canada Service file for AB William Tudor Mountain
- Photo: Cousins Nancy Palmer, Salinas, California and Krystal Boros, Vancouver BC
- Nephew Bill Rice, Calgary AB
- Calgary Herald March 10, 1944
- Calgary Herald March 1945
- Gazeteer of the Northwest Territories, p 139, July 2017