

## Ordinary Signalman Patrick Leo Ross V-11329



Ordinary Signalman Patrick L. Ross. Photo:  
<https://hmsjervisbay.com>

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Quebec City QC, 24 July 1920**
- **Enlisted: HMCS Unicorn, 3 May 1939**
- **Civilian Occupation: Student**
- **Death: Died when HMS Jervis Bay sank due to enemy action on 5 November 1940**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 7; and Ross Lake (59° 59' N 103°54'W) in Northern Saskatchewan**

Patrick was the first of three children born to Mary Elizabeth (Elizabeth) Ross and Harrison Ross on 24 July 1920 in Quebec City. Parents Elizabeth and Harrison were married in Winnipeg in September 1919, settled in Saskatoon shortly after, and Harrison found work as a carpenter. Elizabeth, originally from Quebec City, chose to return there for Patrick's birth. When Patrick was about one month old, they returned to Saskatoon. Brother Cecil Harrison was born in 1924 and sister Mary Elizabeth in 1928. In 1936, Patrick's father was hired by the Saskatoon Sanitorium, and he enjoyed steady employment until his retirement. In 1932 the family moved to a neighbourhood on the southern outskirts of the city. The neighbourhood was relatively prosperous in spite of the Great Depression with at least one member of the majority of households having steady employment. The Ross children were enrolled in St. Joseph's Separate School. Upon completion of Grade 8, Patrick moved on to the Technical Collegiate Institute graduating in 1938.

Patrick became a Signalman in the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals (Militia) and served from 27 October 1935 until 1 September 1937. On 3 May 1939, he enrolled in the Saskatoon Division of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve as an Ordinary Seaman. He was attested by Lieutenant Commander Harold Balfour who in 1944 would be promoted to the rank of Captain and appointed as the Commander of the Port of St. John's, Newfoundland.

Following enrollment, Patrick undertook summer training in HMCS *Naden*. In February 1940, he returned to HMCS *Naden*, remustered to Ordinary Signalman and was then drafted to HMCS *Stadacona* in May for further training. On 1 October 1940, he was drafted to HMS *Jervis Bay*.

HMS *Jervis Bay*, originally built in 1921-22 as a passenger ship for the Aberdeen & Commonwealth Line to carry emigrants to Australia from Britain, was taken up from trade by the Admiralty in August 1939 and designated an armed merchant cruiser. Seven 6-inch guns and two 3-inch guns, all manufactured in the 1890's, were distributed around her upper deck. There were no automated ammunition handling systems and only a rudimentary fire control system associated with the guns. In addition, *Jervis Bay*, like all armed merchant cruisers, was

vulnerable, being high-sided, unarmoured, and inadequately divided into watertight compartments. She was repainted grey and allocated a crew of 255 men (mainly reservists). Her role was that of an ocean escort for Atlantic convoys. In the First World War and the early stages of the Second World War, the Germans employed armed merchant ships as surface raiders. Against such ships the *Jervis Bay* had a good chance of success, but she was no match for armoured, purpose-built warships.

Commanded by Captain Fogarty Fegen, she was ordered to Saint John, New Brunswick in late July 1940 to undergo a six-week refit. On completion, *Jervis Bay* left Saint John in September for Halifax to commence convoy escort duties. From there as the only escort, she took charge of Convoy HX84, consisting of thirty-seven merchant ships, and departed Halifax on 28 October for Glasgow. Before departing, she received a draft of 22 Canadians, including OS Patrick Ross, (1 RCN, 7 RCNR, 14 RCNVR) and 7 Newfoundlanders to complete her complement.

In the late afternoon of 5 November HX84 was about 750 miles southwest of Iceland when they encountered the German heavy cruiser *Admiral Scheer*. *Admiral Scheer* was armed with six 11-inch guns in two triple-gun turrets, and eight 6-inch guns all coordinated by state-of-the-art fire control systems. At 1645, Captain Fegen ordered the convoy to disperse into the gathering darkness then closed *Admiral Scheer* firing *Jervis Bay's* guns in a valiant effort to delay her target. The ensuing action lasted twenty-four minutes. *Admiral Scheer's* eleven-inch guns repeatedly hit *Jervis Bay* with devastating results while her guns never came within range. Captain Fegen stayed on what remained of his bridge to the end in spite of grievous wounds. Once free of the *Jervis Bay*, *Admiral Scheer* set about to pursue the scattered merchant ships but was only able to sink four and damage one. 190 members of *Jervis Bay's* ships company, including Patrick Ross and 16 other Canadians and Newfoundlanders perished. Patrick was 20 years old.

For his service, Ordinary Signalman Patrick Ross was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the War Medal, and the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp. His mother, Elizabeth Ross, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

Ordinary Signalman Patrick Ross has no known grave and is commemorated on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 7. Additionally, Ross Lake (Lat 59°59' N Long 103° 54' W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory.

In July 1943 an anonymous letter was written to the Chief of the Naval Staff by a neighbour of the Ross family urging him to do the humane thing and write Elizabeth confirming that Patrick had been killed. For sixteen months Elizabeth had been torn between grief and the hope that somehow Patrick was alive. In modern terms the writer asked that Elizabeth be given the gift of closure. The letter demonstrated the closeness of the neighbourhood and the sometimes insensitivity of the Naval Board.

#### Prepared By:

John Dalzell, Capt(N) (retired), Commanding Officer HMCS UNICORN 1983-88 & Citizen Sailor Virtual Cenotaph Research Team



#### Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission record for Ordinary Signalman Patrick Ross

- Library and Archives Canada Service Record for Ordinary Signalman Patrick Ross
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial – Profile page for Ordinary Signalman Patrick Ross
- Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial -Profile page for Ordinary Signalman Patrick Ross
- HMS Jervis Bay, *80th Anniversary Nov.5 1940-2020*. Retrieved November 3, 2021 from <https://hmsjervisbay.com/index.php>
- Warfare History Network (2020), *The Heroic Death of HMS Jervis Bay*, Retrieved November 3, 2021 from <http://warfarehistorynetwork.com/2019/01/13/the-heroic-death-of-the-hms-jervis-bay/>