

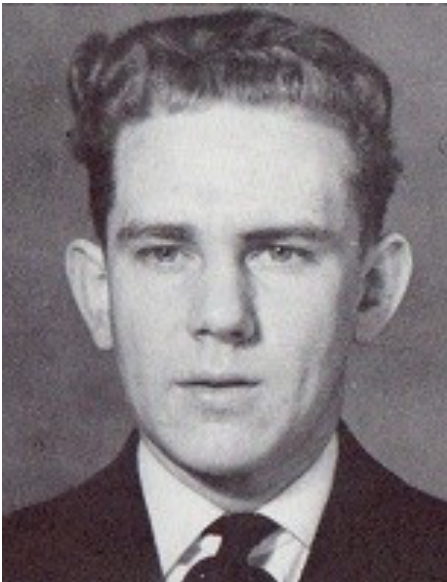
GRAINGER, Roy James (#V/17877)

Roy James Grainger was born in Kingston and, at some time, moved to Sarnia where he was employed at Loblaw's. He was the father of a young daughter when in 1941, he enlisted with the Royal Canadian Volunteer Reserve. By February 1943, he was a Supply Petty Officer aboard the *HMCS Athabaskan*. In late April 1944, *HMCS Athabaskan* on a mission to clear the English Channel in preparation for the Normandy landings was sunk off the coast of Brittany. Roy, 24, perished at sea, his body never recovered.

Roy Grainger was born in Kingston, Ontario on December 4, 1916, the youngest son of James Francis and Edith Mary (nee Ford) Grainger, of 24 Walton Street, Port Hope, Ontario. James and Edith were married in January 1906 in Toronto and their union produced three sons--Francis Raymond (born November 7, 1907); James Norman (born February 9, 1911, but died August 15, 1911 a result of chronic indigestion); and Roy—and four daughters: Dorothy (born 1909, later Mrs. Melville McCall); Eileen Edith (born June 7, 1912, later Mrs. John Donald Hogg); Marie (born 1918, later Mrs. L. Wilson); and adopted daughter Rose Marie (born around 1941, later Mrs. R. Austin). In 1921, the Grainger family residing in Kingston included parents James (37) and Edith (34), and their children Francis (13), Dorothy (12), Eileen (9), Roy (4) and Marie (3). James Grainger supported his family working as a machinist at a foundry.

Roy completed two years of high school at Peterborough High School. At some point, he moved to Sarnia. When he enlisted at age twenty-four with the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve on November 27, 1941 in London, Ontario, he was residing at 145 Davis Street and was employed as a meat manager at Loblaw's Groceteria. Roy stood five feet seven and one-quarter inches tall, had blue eyes and auburn hair, and was single at the time. He served on several ships, including the *Prevost* (December 27, 1941 - January 4, 1942); *York* (January 5 - March 2, 1942); *Stadacona* (March 3 - December 11, 1942); and *Niobe* (December 12, 1942 - February 3, 1943). On February 4, 1943, Roy Grainger became a member of the *HMCS Athabaskan*, attaining the rank of Supply Petty Officer.

Beginning on the opening day of the Second World War, the **Battle of the Atlantic** would be the longest continuous campaign of the war, and one in which Canada played a central role. The Royal Canadian Navy, along with the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and Canada's Merchant Navy, played a vital role in defending the country's eastern coast and escorting convoys of ships carrying men and essential machinery, arms, fuel and basic resources between North America and Europe.



Supply Petty Officer Roy Grainger



Tribal Class Destroyer *HMCS Athabaskan G07*

The *HMCS Athabaskan (G07)* was a destroyer of the Tribal class, built in 1940-41 and commissioned by the Royal Canadian Navy in February of 1943. She was plagued by mishaps during her very short service life. She had to be repaired due to weather-induced stress and was involved in two minor collisions that required repairs. The *Athabaskan* drew some good luck in its early days. On August 27, 1943, she was heavily damaged by a German Henschel glider bomb during an anti-submarine chase in the Bay of Biscay. During that incident, a "Chase

me Charlie,” as the gliders were known, had struck and passed through it, luckily without exploding. The *HMS Egret* was sunk in the same incident.

During English Channel operations in early 1944, RCN Tribal class destroyers *Haida*, *Huron*, *Iroquois*, and *Athabaskan* were involved in a series of battles along the French coast. In February 1944, the destroyers were engaged in *Operation Tunnel*--anti-shipping sweeps which the Canadian sailors described as “fooling around the French coast.” After about twenty operations, in the early morning hours of April 26, the Tribals *Huron*, *Haida*, and *Athabaskan* intercepted three German torpedo boats near St. Malo. A running gun battle ensued. The Tribals illuminated the sea with starshells while the Germans laid a smokescreen and fired their torpedoes. As the Tribals closed the distance, they launched a salvo of shells, hammering the enemy vessel *T-29*. The other enemy vessels barely survived their full-tilt flight from destruction. The victory was a boost to morale, and *T-29* was the RCN’s first enemy surface vessel sunk.

Three nights later, in the early hours of April 29, 1944, the *HMCS Athabaskan* and her sister ship the *HMCS Haida*, were ordered to intercept a German force steaming towards Morlaix River, off the coast of Brittany in the English Channel. Just before 4:00 a.m., the *Athabaskan* made radar contact with two German Elbing destroyers, *T-24* and *T-27*, and an E-boat. Closing range to 4300 yards, the *Athabaskan* fired a volley of 4-inch star shells. Upon being illuminated in the darkness, the enemy created a smokescreen, fired their own starshells and their big guns. A fierce clash ensued, with the enemy firing shells and torpedoes while the two Tribals blasted away with their guns. As both Canadian ships opened fire, they turned their bows directly towards the German destroyers, to present as little silhouette as possible and to avoid torpedoes fired at them. Unfortunately, an enemy torpedo from German boat *T-24* hit the *Athabaskan* at 4:17 a.m., causing catastrophic damage, with flames soaring ten meters high and ammunition exploding below deck.

The *Haida* laid a smokescreen to cover the wounded *Athabaskan* and continued to pursue the enemy. Within ten minutes of the first torpedo strike, *Athabaskan*’s magazine exploded, shooting 200-metre-high flames that were witnessed from over 40 kilometres away. Fires were raging fiercely above and below decks. Slowly, *Athabaskan* upended and slid under the surface, as steam and escaping air hissed her death knell. Survivors were scattered, some in boats, others clinging to floats and still others supported only by their life jackets in the freezing water, many of them barely alive. As the ship went down, darkness shrouded the last resting place of the destroyer, with only the red blinking lights on the life jackets providing some indication of the sailors’ location in the water. Dozens of crew members died in the burning oil that polluted the surface water or succumbed to the freezing cold.

Haida had continued the chase and was able to punish *T-27* with accurate gunfire until she was run aground by her crew, with the other T-boat fleeing. *Haida* then returned to assist *Athabaskan*, even though the destroyer was vulnerable, as U-boats were likely converging on any possible rescue ships. When *Haida* arrived, it came across life jacket lights bobbing and blinking in the dark, many of the men barely conscious, located within five miles of the German-held French coast. The *Haida* dropped all of her life rafts and floats, scramble-nets were lowered over the side and her own men went down them to drag up dazed and exhausted survivors. Her motor cutter (power launch) also went over the side, manned by a party of three volunteers. With the tide pulling at the destroyer and dawn raising the probabilities for an imminent air attack, the *Haida* had limited time to rescue survivors.

After being stopped for ten minutes, word was passed along that the ship would have to go ahead in five minutes. The warning was repeated at one-minute intervals to the rescue parties labouring along the side and on the quarter-deck. Sixty seconds after the last warning, the order “slow ahead” was given. After fifteen minutes, and after rescuing as many as she could, the *Haida* was forced to make a run for it. The *Athabaskan* captain, Lieutenant Commander John Stubbs, in the water with the other survivors, declined rescue by *Haida* to swim back for more crew members.

Following is a portion of an account of the events from William Sclater’s 1947 book *Haida*:

Just then there came a cry, “Athabaskan’s been hit,” which made every head on *Haida*’s bridge turn around. They could see her plainly... From somewhere aft of the bridge, a great column of flame was shooting up, outlining her foresection in bold relief. Even as they looked her B gun fired. From the enemy ships there came a frenzied burst of gunfire as they sighted the burning destroyer and turned all their guns on her in an endeavor to give her a knockout blow... In *Athabaskan*, after the crash and explosion aft there was no panic. That the propellers had ceased to function was evident and the ship was being carried forward only by her own impetus... There was fever activity now on the crippled ship’s decks....

(Early damage reports included heavy damage aft, Y gun collapsed, after pump was gone, after steering position was out of action and ship was settling by the stern). The young Captain nodded. "All hands stand by their Abandon Ship stations," he said. "I'll let Haida know." Obedient to the order the crew started to file off the bridge... The Captain remained on the bridge, watching them go.... down there on the maindeck the men still worked desperately to bring the pump into action *(to deal with the rising flames behind them)*. It was almost ready. The Chief Engineer turned to put the feedline overboard and the Gunner T was fixing up the fairleads to the starter when a sudden rumble in the fire presaged disaster.

A great roar of flame went blasting skywards and the after part of the ship became a holocaust. The deck on which they stood tilted crazily and then collapsed as internal explosions blew it out... Great blobs of burning oil were falling everywhere, over the forward section of the maindeck and the bridge. Men standing by the boats...covered their heads with their arms and dashed blindly forward, trying to find shelter under the boats, away from the burning oil. Many plunged headlong into the sea... The ship lurched violently and most of those who were left went tumbling over the side... "Abandon Ship!" came a shout...

The *Athabaskan* was going. She had righted and now the bow was rising. Up, up it came until it was nearly perpendicular and the ship was clear of the surface almost back to the first funnel. She seemed to poise there a moment and then slipped swiftly backwards, down into the engulfing waters. The brightness disappeared and darkness came down over the sea...

(After pursuing and punishing T-27, Haida turned back to where the Athabaskan had been). B gun fired and a starshell burst over the spot where the *Athabaskan* had been. Under it the black clusters of survivors could be seen. There were three or four groups and numbers of small, separated figures... As *Haida* closed, the flashing lights of the survivors' lifejackets could be seen more than three miles away. Heading for the largest clusters, the Captain let the ship glide to a stop among them... It was an eerie scene in the dim, predawn gloom. Lifejacket lights were flashing and survivors were shouting and blowing their whistles in the adjacent waters as the rafts and boats were dropped and lowered away... The sea was heavy with fuel oil and those who reached the ship's side were covered with it from head to foot. Few had the strength left to climb up the scramble nets or the ladders, and *Haida's* people went over the side and helped them in... Soon rescuers and rescued alike were filthy with the thick, slippery oil. Spreading on the decks it made men flounder and fall...

The minutes were going fast. The allotted quarter of an hour passed, by a long margin, when the call went out for the men to man their stations to get the ship under way again. From the bridge came telephone warnings at five, four, three, two and one minutes to go now, and then the ship started slowly ahead... Daylight was imminent and attack from land and air could be looked for at any moment here. It was time to go.

Forty-four oil-soaked *Athabaskan* crew members were picked up out of the water by her sister ship *HMCS Haida*. Eight *Athabaskan* crew members were able to climb into a lowered *Haida* motor cutter, and slowly made their way to safety. Three German torpedo boats picked up 83 survivors in the water, and sent to prisoner-of-war camps. A total of 129 of the crew were lost in the sinking of the *Athabaskan* that April 29 night, among them, the *Athabaskan* Commander John Stubbs and Petty Officer Supply Roy Grainger of Sarnia.

On May 2, 1944, Edith Grainger in Port Hope received the following letter from the Secretary, Naval Board;

Dear Mrs. Grainger:

It is with deepest regret that I must confirm the telegram of the 1st of May, 1944, from the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, informing you that your son, Roy James Grainger, Leading Supply Assistant, Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve, Official Number V-17877, is missing from H.M.C.S. "ATHABASKAN".

According to the report received from overseas, your son's loss occurred when H.M.C.S. "Athabaskan" was torpedoed and sunk by enemy action on the 29th of April, 1944, in the English Channel. Further particulars of this Naval disaster are being published in the newspapers.

While Leading Supply Assistant Grainger is reported as "missing", there is a possibility of his survival. It is understood that a number of the crew have been taken prisoners of war by the enemy. The Red Cross have been informed and are attempting to obtain from the German Government a list of those taken. Please be assured that as soon as any further information respecting your son has been received you will be informed.

Please allow me to express the sincere sympathy of the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, the Chief of the Naval Staff and the Officers and men of the Royal Canadian Navy, the high traditions of which your son has helped to maintain.

Five months later, in October 1944, Edith received another letter from the Secretary, Naval Board. Following is that letter;

Dear Mrs. Grainger:

I must regretfully inform you that since your son was reported missing no further information has been received of his survival or that he is a prisoner of war. I wish to assure you, however, that the Department makes every endeavor to discover the fate of missing men and draws upon all likely sources of information about them.

In the case of men who are believed to be prisoners of war continuous efforts are made to speed up the machinery whereby their names and camp addresses can reach this country. The official means is by lists of names prepared by the enemy government. These lists take some time to compile, especially if there is a long journey from the place of capture to a prisoner of war camp. Consequently "capture cards", filled in by the prisoners themselves soon after capture and sent home to their relatives, are often the first news received in this country that a man is a prisoner of war.

Very slight hope is now held, however, that your son is a prisoner of war as the total number of names of men who are known to be prisoners from H.M.C.S. "ATHABASKAN" coincides with the number which the Germans claim to have captured from this ship. Even if no news is received that a missing man is a prisoner of war, endeavours to trace him do not cease. Enquiries are pursued, not only among those who were serving with him, but also through diplomatic channels and the International Red Cross Committee in Geneva. The moment reliable news is obtained from any of these sources it is sent to the Department and is immediately passed on to the next of kin.

Should no information be received to the contrary your son will be presumed dead by the Canadian Naval Authorities at a later date. May I extend my sincere sympathy in this time of anxiety.

Three months later, in mid-January 1945, Edith received a final letter from the Secretary, Naval Board. Following is that letter;

Dear Mrs. Grainger,

Further to my letter of the 10th of October, 1944 I regret to inform you that in view of the length of time which has elapsed since your son, Roy James Grainger, Supply Petty Officer, Official Number V-17877, Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve, was reported missing from H.M.C.S. "ATHABASKAN", and as no news has since been received to the contrary, the Canadian Naval Authorities have now presumed his death to have occurred on the 29th of April, 1944.

May I again express sincere sympathy with you in your bereavement on behalf of the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, the Chief of the Naval Staff, and the Officers and men of the Royal Canadian Navy.

Roy Grainger would later be officially recorded as, *Missing, presumed dead, when H.M.C.S. 'ATHABASKAN' was torpedoed and sunk by enemy action in the English Channel.* Roy left behind his mother and father, his brother and sisters, and his four-year-old daughter, Rose Marie Diana Grainger. Before he went to war, Roy had what was then termed "an illegitimate daughter" with a married woman. Roy financially supported his daughter Rose, and had the normal fatherly anxieties over her well-being—he cherished and loved her. Rose was adopted by his parents James and Edith Grainger in Kingston in late October 1943, while Roy was aboard the *Athabaskan*. In July 1945, James and Edith received a War Service Gratuity of \$403.98 for the loss of their son. Years later, on June 2, 1962, Rose Marie Grainger married RCAF Flying Officer R.R. Austin at RMC in Port Hope, Ontario. They later made their home in California. Twenty-seven-year-old Roy Grainger has no known grave. His name is inscribed on the Halifax Memorial, Nova Scotia, Canada, Panel 12.

Years later, there was speculation that the *Athabaskan* may have, in fact, been lost to a friendly fire incident after being torpedoed by a British motor torpedo boat, or that she had suffered some sort of catastrophic internal explosion in number one boiler room. Due to the poor condition of the wreck, and the poor record keeping and incomplete logs of other ships in the area at the time, neither of these theories has yet to be confirmed.

From: *The Sarnia War Remembrance Project*, by Tom Slater