

BROWN, Paul Albert (#N3119)

Paul Albert Brown was eager to serve, enlisting as a seventeen-year-old before war was declared. He would lose his life in what would turn out to be the longest and deadliest battles of the war and to what British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said was "... the only thing that ever really frightened me during the war..."

Paul was born in Domville, Ontario, near Prescott, on July 8, 1920. He was the son of Albert Glen (of Domville, Ontario) and Ada Helena (nee Anderson) Brown. Albert and Ada Brown were married in Ontario on November 15, 1916. Paul had one brother, Charles Russell (who would serve with the RCAF), and two sisters: Jean Anderson and Eleanor Louise. When Paul was eight years old, he would lose his father Albert who passed away on March 12, 1928 at the age of forty-one. Mother Ada Brown and family would move to Sarnia sometime after Albert's death and live at 225 Maria Street. Paul would reside in Sarnia for approximately eleven years, and he attended Johnston Memorial Public School and Sarnia Collegiate. During his school days, he used to spend his spare time on farms. He was also active in Central United Church Century Young Men's Sunday school for many years. He would work on a farm only one summer before leaving high school in November 1937 to volunteer to serve in the navy.

One of the reference letters obtained by Paul Brown for his application to enter the Navy was from Ross W. Gray, Member of Parliament for Lambton West. In his January 1938 letter to the Naval Secretary, Department of National Defence in Ottawa, Ross Gray wrote in a letter with House of Commons letterhead:

Dear Sir:

This is to certify that I have known Paul A. Brown for the past twelve years. He is anxious to join the Naval Service. His application will show his educational ability and I desire only to say that in my opinion he would make an excellent applicant as he is a good, clean young man of excellent habits and character.

Paul Brown would complete his formal "Application for Entry in the Royal Canadian Navy" on January 8, 1938. Because Paul was under the age of 18 when he enlisted, a Consent Paper was required with a parent's signature, which his widowed mother Ada provided, dated January 25, 1938 in Sarnia. Ada, a Sarnia school teacher, would pass away two and a half years later on August 14, 1940 in Sarnia General Hospital at the age of forty-six. Approximately four months after her death, Paul Brown would lose his life while serving in the Navy.

On April 7, 1938, at the age of seventeen years and nine months, Paul Brown would officially become a member of the Royal Canadian Navy. He stood six feet tall, had blue eyes and brown hair, and was single. He lived with his widowed mother Ada on Maria Street in Sarnia at the time. He was first stationed at *HMCS Stadacona* training barracks in Halifax, with the rank of Boy Seaman. He was guard of honour for our King George VI and Queen Elizabeth during their cross-Canada visit and happened to be on the same ship as Their Majesties. In October 1938, Ordinary Seaman Paul Brown received his elementary training on *HMCS Venture*, a training ship that was similar to the *Bluenose*. On February 11, 1939, he was posted on the *HMCS Skeena* where he advanced to the rank of Able Seaman. Seven months later, on September 10, 1939, Canada would declare war on Germany. Paul Brown would be posted to *HMCS Stadacona* in Halifax on October 21, 1939. On November 26, 1939, Able Seaman Paul Brown became a member of the *HMCS Saguenay*, serving as a pom-pom gunner. In letters received by his relatives, Paul had said that he had been "all over the world."

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.

The *HMCS Saguenay (D 79)* was an A-Class Destroyer commissioned for service in the Royal Canadian Navy in 1931. The *Saguenay* was the first warship ever to be custom built for the Royal Canadian Navy. In the early morning hours of December 1, 1940, the *HMCS Saguenay* was part of a group escorting a convoy about 300 nautical miles west of Ireland. Travelling at twelve knots and in a zigzagging pattern, she noticed a flare shot up from the dark sea that had been fired by a U-boat moving in to attack the rear of the convoy. The *Saguenay* increased her speed and made for the position of the flare. At approximately 3:50 am, the submarine was sighted half a mile distant. Almost simultaneously, a torpedo struck the *Saguenay*. The torpedo had been fired by the Italian submarine *Argo*. The *Saguenay* bow was blown off, and flames broke out and raced through the ship. The *Argo* surfaced again, circling to get in a second shot. Able Seaman Clifford McNaught demonstrated the kind of courage indicative of the remaining crew. Clifford was suffering from painful burns to his face, and his hands were horribly

mangled. He nevertheless dashed forward to assist the short-handed gun crew by passing shells to them. The *Saguenay* crew were able to fend off the *Argo*. The British destroyer *Highlander* arrived within an hour or so to find the *Saguenay* limping slowly forward. Ninety men were transferred to the *Highlander* to reduce casualties in case of another torpedo attack. Throughout the night and most of the next day, a skeleton crew remained on board the *Saguenay* continuing to fight the fires.



River Class Destroyer *HMCS Saguenay D79*

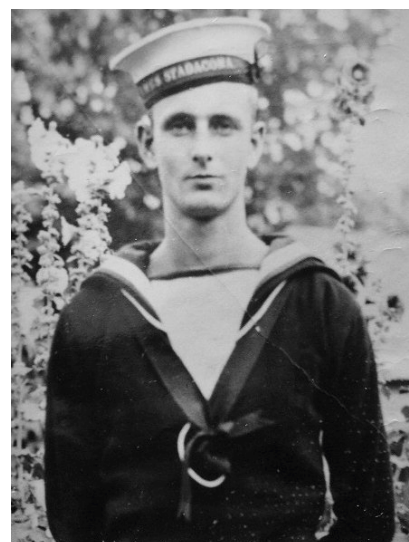
By noon of the next day, the *Saguenay*, “the ship that would not sink” had managed to limp to the British port Barrow-in-Furness on one engine. The ship would be out of service for six months. A total of 21 of the *HMCS Saguenay* crew lost their lives in the U-boat attack, and another 18 were wounded. Two of the lost crew members were from Sarnia. Paul Brown was reported missing and presumed killed in action in the damaging of the destroyer *Saguenay*. Paul Brown was later officially recorded as, *Death due to enemy action, at sea*. Also on board the ship was Able Seaman Hector Le Gare of Sarnia, who was also killed in the attack. His name is also inscribed on the Sarnia cenotaph and his story is included in this Project. Paul Brown and Hector Le Gare were the second and third casualties from Sarnia to lose their lives in the Second World War.

At the time of Paul’s death, his siblings were: Charles Russell Brown (with the RCAF, stationed at Moncton, N.B.); Jean Anderson (nee. Brown) Knight (a school teacher in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario); and Eleanor Louise Brown (later Eleanor Hutchinson, of 230 North Vidal St., Sarnia, and later Toronto, Ontario). Approximately one week prior to the attack, Paul’s sister, Miss Jean (Brown) Knight in Sault Ste. Marie, had received a letter from him, but it was so rigorously censored that she could not derive much information from it. Paul’s brother, Charles Russell Brown, had been corresponding with Paul, and the two brothers had hopes of spending Christmas together in Halifax. One week after the attack, Paul’s sister, Miss Eleanor Brown in Sarnia, would receive a telegram from the Minister of National Defence for Naval Affairs, informing her that Paul was missing. At an assembly at Sarnia Collegiate, principal F.C. Asbury announced the loss of the two former students, Hector Le Gare and Paul Brown, which was followed by a period of silence in respect to the memory of the two Canadian sailors.

Paul Brown’s brother, Corporal Charles Russell Brown of the R.C.A.F, who was posted in Moncton New Brunswick at the time, received the following letter from the Naval Secretary in mid-December 1940:

Dear Sir:

It is with very deep regret that I confirm the telegram of the 9th December from the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services that your brother, Paul A. Brown, Able Seaman, R.C.N., O.N. 3119, is reported to be missing from H.M.C.S. “SAGUENAY”, believed killed in action following damage to this vessel by a torpedo on the 1st December, 1940.



Able Seaman Paul Albert Brown

Please allow me, therefore, to express sincere sympathy with you in your sad loss on behalf of the Chief of the Naval Staff and the Officers and men of the Royal Canadian Navy, the high traditions of which your brother has helped to maintain.

Paul Brown was the first member of the Central Century Club to pay the Supreme Sacrifice. In mid-December 1940, he was honoured at a service at Central United Church. The pastor of the church, Rev. E.W. Jewitt paid tribute by saying, "These young men who are giving their lives are giving them to preserve the freedom and liberty of us all." In August 1945, Paul's siblings: Charles Russell, Jean and Eleanor would receive and share the War Service Gratuity of \$256.77 for the loss of their brother. Twenty-year-old Paul Brown has no known grave. His name is inscribed on the Halifax Memorial, Nova Scotia, Panel 4.

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