

PAITHOWSKI, Michael Joseph (#V/17380)

NOTE: Michael Paithowski spelled his surname with a “w” in it. The rest of the family spelled the surname with a “u”, as Paithouski.

Less than three years after enlisting, Michael Joseph Paithowski married the love of his life. Seven months later, he was serving on one of the sturdy little “work horses” of the Royal Canadian Navy. Three months after the birth of his son, Michael Paithouski lost his life off the east coast of Canada to what British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said was “... the only thing that ever really frightened me during the war...”

Michael Joseph Paithowski was born in Hamilton, Ontario on December 7, 1916, the son of Michael Paithouski Sr. (nicknamed “Tato”) and Rosa Paithouski. Rosa Paithouski (nee Doskevitch) was born in Lvov, Poland. Rosa had a previous marriage to Paul Lukasevich, and Rosa and Paul had two children together: Peter Lukasevich (born 1901) and Mike Lukez (born 1907, changed his name from Lukasevich), who later became half-brothers to Michael Paithowski. Rosa emigrated from Poland to Canada, leaving behind her husband and two children. Peter Lukasevich and Mike Lukez later immigrated to Canada, arriving in their twenties in Sarnia, and they later moved to Windsor.

Michael Paithouski Sr. (“Tato”) was born in Vilshanka (near Kiev), Ukraine. When Tato emigrated from Trieste in northeastern Italy to North America in 1909, his first stop was Ellis Island, New York. Tato’s last name was actually Piatkowski, but the immigration officer recorded it as Paithouski, which it was to remain afterwards. His name is recorded on the American Immigrant Wall of Honor at Ellis Island in New York Harbor. Tato Paithouski then made his way from New York to Montreal and later to Hamilton. It was in Canada that Tato married Rosa. Tato and Rosa had three children: Mary (born 1915 in Montreal); Michael Joseph (born December 7, 1916 in Hamilton); and Nicholas Joseph (born October 26, 1917 in Hamilton). Eventually the Paithouski family moved to Sarnia, residing at 589 South Vidal Street. Tato supported his family working as a boiler foreman at Imperial Oil’s Refinery.

The Paithouski siblings and their spouses were very busy people. Michaels’ sister, Mary, married Earl Joseph Wynne just before Earl went off to war in September 1939 (he would become a Sergeant in the army). Michael’s younger brother **Nicholas (Nick) Joseph Paithouski**, was a star football player for Queen’s University, from where he graduated in 1940 as a civil engineer. In his first season as a football player at Queen’s in 1936, Nick played on the junior team because he was viewed as too small for the senior squad. That season, he was voted as the junior team’s Most Valuable Player. He would play as a regular on the senior offensive and defensive line for the following three years for the Queen’s Golden Gaels. Nick won the Johnny Evans Trophy as MVP as a lineman in the 1939 season. Graduated in engineering in 1940, Nick was the only one of five children from a Ukrainian-Polish immigrant family to receive a university education.

Nick also was an outstanding player for the Sarnia Imperials and the Regina Roughriders. As it turns out, his football experience would figure greatly during the war. Nick played centre and linebacker for the 1940 Sarnia Imperials where he was an all-star and won the 1940 Imperial Oil Trophy as the Ontario Rugby Football Union (ORFU) league MVP. In 1941, Nick played one year for the CFL Regina (later Saskatchewan) Roughriders. In April 1942, Nick enlisted with the Royal Canadian Engineers, later becoming a lieutenant. He arrived overseas around August 1943. During his time overseas, one of Nick’s highlights was playing in two famous football games in London, England.

The idea for the first football game originated when Major Dennis Whitaker, a former quarterback for the Hamilton Tigers of the CFL and a Dieppe survivor, and an American Special Services lieutenant met in a pub, and began talking football. The result of the chance meeting was the **Tea Bowl**. The game was to be a hybrid, with the first half played under American rules, and the second under Canadian. The Canadian Army team, named the “Mustangs”, had a number of Sarnians (Nick Paithouski at center, Charles Henry Living—including in this Project, and Ken Withers) and several CFL players. The Tea Bowl was played on February 13, 1944 before over 30,000 fans in White City Stadium in London and was even broadcast on British radio. With the threat of German bombers, RAF Spitfires were deployed to cover the skies around the stadium during the game. The Canadian Army “Mustangs” defeated the U.S. Army Central Base Station “Pirates” team by a score of 16 to 6.

Stung by the loss, the Americans called for a rematch. Their new team, the U.S. 29th Army team, named the “Blues”, was reinforced with a contingent from the University of Iowa Cornhuskers and a former NFL all-star. The rematch, played on March 19, 1944, again in White City Stadium, this time before a crowd of 50,000, was

dubbed the Coffee Bowl. The U.S. “Blues” defeated the Canadian Army “Mustangs” team by a score of 18 to 0. The outcomes of the games were really irrelevant; what counted was the camaraderie, the friendly competitiveness, and a sense of shared purpose. Less than three months later, the Allied forces, including some of the games’ participants, joined together in something much larger – the D-Day landings in France.

As a platoon leader with the Royal Canadian Engineers, Nick Paithouski was responsible for supplying the equipment and building of bridges, 51 of them in 45 days in France, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands between March 24 and May 5, 1945. In late 1945, Lieutenant Nicholas Paithouski was awarded the decoration “Mention in Despatches”. The award reads, “The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the award of Mentions in Despatches, in recognition of gallant and distinguished services.” After the war, the United States military authorities recognized his distinguished service and bravery, awarding Nick the USA Bronze Star for his efforts, an honour bestowed on a very small number of non-American servicemen, for supplying bridging parts and equipment to Allied Forces in North West Europe. After the war, Nick Paithouski married ‘Effie’ Barbara Paul in 1946 in Hamilton. Nick went on to play two seasons with the Hamilton Tigercats (Wildcats at the time), in 1947 and 1948, while working at Stelco. He then returned to Sarnia to start a family with ‘Effie’ Barbara Paul. They were successful, as ‘Effie’ gave birth to Janet Elizabeth (1951, later Janet Baker) and Joseph Paithouski (1953).

‘Effie’ Barbara Paul was the daughter of Lt. Charles Marr and Frances (nee Williams) Paul. ‘Effie’ was born in London, England in November of 1917 during a Zeppelin air raid. Her parents Charles and Frances decided that mother and child should travel to Sarnia, Ontario and await the father’s discharge from the army. In September 1918, baby ‘Effie’ Barbara and her mother Frances Paul left Southampton, England bound for New York aboard the *RMS Olympic* (one of *Titanic*’s sister ships), under the constant threat of U-boat attack. The British Government had paid for their tickets, a special deal for English wives and children of colonial soldiers to reduce the number of people to be fed. Both Frances’ and Effie’s names are recorded on the American Immigrant Wall of Honor at Ellis Island in New York Harbor. When mother and daughter Paul arrived in Sarnia, Frances received a telegram informing her that her close sister “Lou” had died back in England. Frances’ husband Lt. Charles Marr Paul was still fighting in Europe (more on Lt. Charles Paul below).

Nick and ‘Effie’, along with their children Janet and Joseph Paithouski, moved to Ottawa in 1960. Nick supported his family working there as a civil engineer for the Federal Department of Transport. ‘Effie’ Barbara Paul earned a Bachelor of Arts degree and became a teacher with the Carleton Board of Education. ‘Effie’ Barbara Paul Paithouski passed away in July of 1976.

Nick Paithouski returned to Sarnia in 1984 to receive a local award - he was inducted into the Sarnia-Lambton Sports Hall of Fame for football in 1984. Trip Trepanier, the Hall of Fame Director, former teammate and long-time friend of Nick Paithouski, described him as “one of the best centres in Canada, not just one, but for a couple of years... He never bragged about anything; he just took everything as it came.” On September 15, 1985, Nick Paithouski passed away at the age of eighty-seven. Both Nicholas Joseph Paithouski and Effie Barbara Paithouski are buried in Lakeview Cemetery in Sarnia.

In the autumn of 1987, Nick Paithouski was posthumously accepted into the Queen’s University Football Hall of Fame. The Paithouski Prize, honouring his memory, is awarded annually at Queen’s University to the graduating engineering student who has demonstrated the most consistent improvement in academic performance. Twenty-five years after his death, on May 15th, 2010, Lieutenant Nick Paithouski was inducted into the Canadian Veterans Hall of Valour in Carleton Place near Ottawa.

Nick Paithouski’s induction into the Hall of Valour was doubly moving for the Paithouski family. ‘Effie’ Barbara Paul’s father, Lieutenant **Charles Marr Paul**, was also inducted into the Hall of Valour on the same day. Charles Marr Paul was born in Sarnia and was in the first contingent of Canadians to leave for battle in the First World War, leaving Val Cartier with the CEF on October 3, 1914. Charles joined the 8th Battalion of the 90th Winnipeg Rifles, nicknamed the Little Black Devils and was later credited with saving many lives. Lieutenant Charles Paul received the Military Medal for courage and gallantry under fire while holding the line during the first German attack with poison gas at Ypres in April 1915. He also earned a Meritorious Service Medal for saving more lives during the Battle of the Somme in 1916. His unit was also at Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele in 1917 and the following year he was made officer in the field. It was during the war that Lt. Charles Paul met and married Frances Williams in England. After returning to Sarnia with his British bride, Charles and Frances Paul raised eight children: Francis (would serve in the Royal Canadian Navy); Robert, Elva, Lillian, Edna Jean, Edith (married Roy Telfer--served with Canadian Army); Betty Elizabeth (married Jack Stevens who served in the Canadian Army and

was wounded at Dieppe); and Effie Barbara who would become Nick Paithouski's future wife. More information on Charles Paul, including portions of two letters that he wrote to his mother from the Front in April of 1915 are included in this Project.



Lt. Nick Paithouski - World War II



Lt. Charles Marr Paul - World War I

Michael Joseph Paithowski was born December 7, 1916 in Hamilton. NOTE: Many of the documents in Michael's Military Service File, including his Death Certificate, record his birthdate as December 7, 1917. In fact, he was born in 1916.

Michael Paithowski was a member of St. Joseph's Catholic Parish in Sarnia, and prior to enlisting worked for approximately six months as a labourer at Kellogg Construction Limited in Sarnia. He was twenty-four years old when he enlisted in the Canadian Navy, Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR), on January 23, 1941 in London, Ontario. He stood five feet seven and one-quarter inches tall, had blue eyes and fair hair, was single, and lived with his parents on Vidal Street at the time. He recorded his occupation as fireman, C.S.L. After the war he planned to gain employment as a stationary engineer. Michael initially received training in London, then in April 1941, continued training at the naval base Stadacona (Halifax), and then Hochelaga (Quebec). On September 17, 1941, he became a member of the crew of the *HMCS Drumheller*, a Flower-Class corvette. He served on the *Drumheller* until December 16, 1943. The ship had a number of assignments, including part of the Sydney Force, Newfoundland Command, the Newfie-Derry run, and Mid-Ocean Escort Force escorting convoys across the Atlantic.

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.

On November 30, 1943, Michael Paithowski married Miss Eloise Victoria Johnston (born 1920), the only daughter of John Eugene Johnston and Florence Johnston of 332 Confederation Street at St. George's Chapel in Sarnia. At the wedding ceremony, Mrs. Hazel Smith served as the matron of honour and George Kumchy served as the best man. Following the ceremony, the immediate families were entertained at the Colonial Hotel for a reception before the newlyweds left on a short wedding trip. On their return, the couple lived at 332 Confederation Street and later 215 Confederation Street, Sarnia. Michael and Eloise Paithowski had one child together, a son, John Michael, born August 22, 1944.

Michael's wife, Eloise Victoria Johnston, had two brothers, both of whom also served in the war. One brother, Eugene, served in the infantry, his life forever altered by his wartime experiences. Her other brother Jay Syver Johnston, became a Flying Officer-Wireless Operator/Air Gunner with the Royal Canadian Air Force. Jay Johnston (Michael's brother-in-law) lost his life during the war when the Liberator aircraft he was in crashed into Black Mountain in Quebec in October of 1943. The crash took twenty-four airmen's lives, the largest single-crash loss of life in the history of the RCAF. The plane was listed as missing, and its remains were not found until after the war. Jay Johnston's story is included in this Project. Michael and Eloise Paithowski married just one month after Eloise had lost her brother Jay.

After serving aboard the *HMCS Drumheller* until mid-December 1943, Michael Paithowski was then stationed at the base Stadacona in Halifax for a time, and on June 13, 1944, he was transferred to the *HMCS Shawinigan*, with the rank of Petty Officer Stoker.

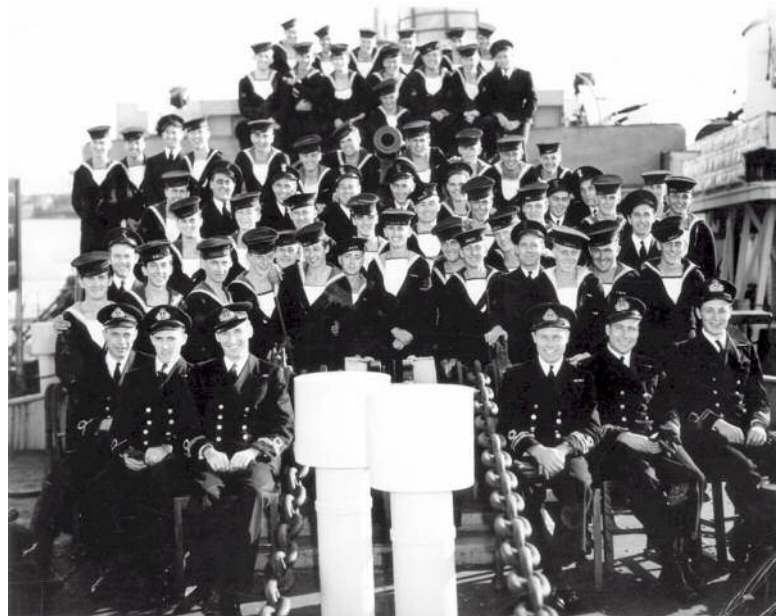
Before he joined the *Shawinigan*, Michael returned to Sarnia on a few weeks leave, to visit his parents, his new wife and his many friends. It would be the only time he would see his young son Johnny. When he returned to duty, Michael sent his new wife Eloise and their young son three letters while aboard the *Shawinigan*. Less than one year after getting married, Michael Paithowski lost his life.

The *HMCS Shawinigan (K136)* was a Flower-class corvette, originally designed to accommodate a standard crew of less than fifty. Commissioned on September 19, 1941 at Quebec City, it was one of the sturdy little “work horses” of the RCN and was to become the 9th corvette and 19th Canadian warship lost in the war. She was in the navy’s convoy escort and patrol fleet. Her sea miles totaled more than 150 000, and she had been one of the busiest vessels of her class, escorting convoy runs in the Atlantic Ocean and off the east coast of Canada. Few ships of her class spent more time at sea during the period when German U-boats were most active in the North Atlantic. During the two years prior to her sinking, she did not lose a ship under her charge. Men who served aboard her had been acclaimed for fighting efficiency, for rescue work and attacks on enemy U-boats. She escorted hundreds of thousands of vital war supplies and shipping to Allied ports.

On November 24, 1944, the *HMCS Shawinigan* and a United States Coast Guard Cutter *Sassafrass* escorted the ferry *Burgeo* from Sydney, Nova Scotia to Port aux Basques, Newfoundland. Ferries on this route were always escorted after the tragic loss of the passenger ferry *SS Caribou* two years earlier. In mid-October of 1942, the *Caribou* had been torpedoed on the same route and 136 lives were lost, including ten children. In November 1944, the three ships made an uneventful crossing to Port aux Basques, at which time the *Shawinigan* detached to continue doing an independent anti-submarine patrol in the area. The *Shawinigan* was scheduled to rendezvous with the *Burgeo* the following morning for the return to Cape Breton. But the *Shawinigan* never made it.



Petty Officer-Stoker Michael Joseph Paithowski



Crew of the *Shawinigan* 1944

On that fateful November 24 moonlit night, the *Shawinigan* maintained radio silence while performing anti-submarine patrol in the Cabot Strait between Newfoundland and Cape Breton Island. Nearby, German U-boat *U-1228* was trying to repair a faulty snorkel without success and had decided to return to Germany for repairs. It was now 9:30 p.m. As soon as *U-1228* started her return route into the Atlantic, she sighted the *Shawinigan*. In its first recorded attack on enemy shipping, *U-1228* fired a single T-5 Gnat torpedo that struck the corvette in the stern.

Four minutes after the attack, the *Shawinigan*, with its entire crew, disappeared in a plume of frigid Atlantic water and a shower of sparks. The ship had no time to transmit any messages and authorities later speculated that the *Shawinigan's* depth charges exploded as she sank, adding to the destruction. The next morning,

the *Burgeo* left Port aux Basques on schedule in the fog but could not find the *Shawinigan*. They maintained radio silence and did not inform command of *Shawinigan*'s failure to appear.



Flower Class Corvette *HMCS Shawinigan K136*

Unescorted, the *Burgeo* made for Sydney and arrived on November 25 at 6 pm. Suspecting something had happened to *Shawinigan*, naval officers in Sydney ordered an air and sea search for the missing corvette, but bad weather put a stop to much of that. A day or so later, searching ships came upon fragments of wreckage, an empty Carley float and six bodies, which were all that remained to indicate what had happened to the *Shawinigan*.

A third of *Shawinigan*'s crew were twenty years old or younger and no crewmember survived the tragic sinking. Seven officers and 84 crew members, including Michael Paithowski, were lost. It is impossible to record exactly what happened to *Shawinigan* during her final moments. Some sailors were probably killed instantly by the horrific explosion; others inevitably died in the icy water as the ship sank. Those fortunate enough to get into their life vests and survive the explosion would later die in the freezing North Atlantic.

The *Shawinigan* was one of only three RCN ships lost with all hands. Twenty-three-year-old Petty Leading Coder William Anderson, another Sarnian, was also on board and perished in the sinking. His name is also inscribed on the Sarnia cenotaph and his story is included in this Project.

In late November 1944, Michael Sr. and Rosa Paithouski in Sarnia received a telegram from the Department of National Defence informing them that their son, PETTY OFFICER MICHAEL PAITHOUSKI HAS BEEN REPORTED MISSING AT SEA. The message contained no other information and intimated that a letter would follow. The message was received exactly one year to the day that Michael had married Eloise Victoria Johnston.

On November 29, 1944, Eloise Victoria Paithowski at 332 Confederation Street, received the following letter from the Secretary, Naval Board:

Dear Mrs. Paithowski:

It is with deepest regret that I must confirm the telegram of the 29th November 1944, from the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, informing you that your husband, Michael Paithowski, Stoker Petty Officer, Official Number V-17380, Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve, is missing at sea.

The only information that can be given at this time is that your husband is missing at sea when the ship in which he was serving was lost. Please be assured, however, that as soon as further particulars can be released, you will be informed.

It is regretted that slight hope is held for your husband's survival. When it is considered, beyond all reasonable doubt, that no further hope exists and should no information be received to the contrary, an official presumption of death will be made by the Canadian Naval Authorities.

It is requested that, for security reasons, you regard the name of the ship in which your husband was serving, as confidential until such time as an official announcement is made. Please accept the sincere sympathy of the Department in your anxiety.

On December 7, 1944, Eloise received the following letter from the Secretary, Naval Board:

Dear Mrs. Paithowski:

Further to my letter of the 29th of November, 1944, details of the disaster in which your husband has been reported missing are now being released.

H.M.C.S. "SHAWINIGAN", a Royal Canadian Navy corvette, was lost while on operational duty at sea. Seven officers, including her Captain, Lieutenant W.J. Jones, R.C.N.R., and seventy-eight ratings are missing. The bodies of five other ratings have been recovered and identified. There are no known survivors.

It is requested that you will regard this information as confidential until an official announcement is made. May I again express sincere sympathy with you in your anxiety.

On December 7, 1944, in a dispatch from Ottawa, the Hon. Angus L. Macdonald, Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, announced the loss of the *H.M.C.S. Shawinigan* while on operational duty in the North Atlantic. He gave no details but said the ship's complement had been lost and five bodies have been recovered and identified. It was announced locally that two Sarnia seamen, Michael Paithowski and William Anderson, were members of the crew of the *Shawinigan* and were reported missing.

In mid-February 1945, the Paithowski family in Sarnia received a telegram from Ottawa informing them that their son, PETTY OFFICER MICHAEL PAITHOUSKI WHO WAS REPORTED MISSING AT SEA LAST NOVEMBER IS OFFICIALLY PRESUMED LOST. Also in February 1945, Eloise received the following letter from the Secretary, Naval Board:

Dear Mrs. Paithowski:

Further to my letter of the 7th of December, 1944, I regret to inform you that in view of the length of time which has elapsed since your husband, Michael Paithowski, Stoker Petty Officer, Official Number V-17380, Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve, was reported missing from H.M.C.S. "SHAWINIGAN", 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 24th of November, 1944.

Please allow me to 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, the high traditions of which your husband has helped to maintain.

Michael Paithowski's death was later officially recorded as, *Missing, presumed dead, when the ship in which he was serving, H.M.C.S. 'Shawinigan' was lost while on operational duty at sea.*

In late August 1945, Eloise, then at 215 Confederation Street, received a War Service Gratuity of \$817.95 for the loss of her husband. Also in late August 1945, she received the following letter from the Secretary, Naval Board:

Dear Mrs. Paithowski:

Further to my letter of the 15th of February, 1945, the Department is now able to release additional information regarding the loss of your husband's ship and I am accordingly passing on the following particulars which will, no doubt, be of interest to you.

H.M.C.S. "SHAWINIGAN" sailed from Sydney, N.S., on the 24th of November, 1944, to escort a merchant ship to Port Aux Basques, Newfoundland, and arrived off Port Aux Basques that night. In accordance with orders she was then to carry out a patrol in the area for the duration of the night, after which she was to meet the same merchant ship the next morning and return with her to Sydney.

The merchant ship arrived in Sydney unescorted on the night of the 25th of November and after it was ascertained that "Shawinigan" had not appeared at the designated rendezvous to provide escort as instructed, searches were instituted and "Shawinigan" was discovered to be missing.

It was the opinion of the Department at the time that the ship had been torpedoed by an enemy submarine during the night of the 24th/25th of November, 1944, as submarines were known to be operating in that area; and this has since been confirmed from German evidence. Although no survivors were found, a few bodies were recovered by later searches, due to tidal movements, some distance from the area in which "Shawinigan" was known to be operating. As a result, the position of the sinking can not be exactly ascertained, although from German evidence and the Department's computation, it is estimated to be in the vicinity of the three mile limit off Channel Head, near Port Aux Basques, Newfoundland.

It was not until after the war ended and *U-1228* surrendered, that the details of what had happened to the *Shawinigan* that night were uncovered. When the U-boat commander was interrogated in May 1945, he stated the ship sank quickly, followed by two underwater explosions. He saw no survivors in the water.

Michael Paithowski, 27, has no known grave. He is memorialized on the Halifax Memorial, Nova Scotia, Canada, Panel 12. On the Sarnia cenotaph, his name is inscribed as M. Paithowski. The page displaying Michael's

name in the Book of Remembrance in the Memorial Chamber of the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill, Ottawa is open each year every September 1st.

Michael left behind his new wife Eloise and their three-month old son Johnny Paithouski. For Eloise, she did not have clear closure of her brother's death or her husband's death until after the war ended. Eloise would go on to be employed at Bell Canada as a switchboard operator, working midnight shifts and leaving their son Johnny to be cared for by Michael's sister Mary and her husband Earl Wynne. Years later, Eloise remarried, to Tom Rue, a Norwegian Merchant Marine, stationed in Canada.

Fifty-three years after the sinking, on June 14, 1997, at Trois Rivieres, Quebec, the Prime Minister of Canada Jean Chretien and his wife took part in a Royal Canadian Navy ceremony to officially commission the new *HMCS Shawinigan (704)*. A memorial monument dedicated to the 91 lost was also unveiled. In attendance were Johnny Paithouski and his wife Paulette. They were there with other families who had lost loved ones on board the *HMCS Shawinigan* on that fateful night in November of 1944. Johnny had married Paulette, her second marriage, and she had a son from her first marriage, Shawn. A number of years later, with his step-son's full approval, Johnny in the first legal case of its kind in Ontario, adopted Shawn who then became Shawn Paithouski.

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