

## LET THE BOY SCOUT DO IT

This is the story of two of Perth's earliest Boy Scouts: Alexander Campbell and John Kanelakos. Heroes as boys and men.

'Scouting' came to Perth in March 1916 when a troop of 15 boys between the ages of 14 and 18 was organized at Knox Presbyterian Church. The Knox minister, Reverend William M. Grant (1860-1940)<sup>1</sup>, took on the role of Scoutmaster, aided by church organist Robert Brown Harle (1887-1947) as Assistant Scoutmaster.

The Scouting movement, founded in England in 1908 by Lieutenant General Robert S. S. (later Lord) Baden-Powell (1857-1941), a veteran of the South Africa (Boer) War, reached Canada in the same year with the formation of troops at Merrickville and St. Catharines, Ontario, and Port Morien, Nova Scotia. In Lanark County troops were founded at Almonte and Carleton Place in 1910 and at Lanark Village in 1913.<sup>2</sup>

Although Perth trailed its neighbors by half a decade in establishing a Boy Scout troop, the *Perth Courier* had been advocating the new organization's Victorian principles since 1910.

*The Boy Scout movement furnishes growing boys with healthy amusement. It teaches city lads to tell the truth and play manly games instead of hanging around the street corners and smoking cigarettes. It has been happily described as a national system of athletics and hygiene. It makes definitely against physical and moral deterioration, against the development of an unemployable class, against the growth of slums. It encourages the out-of-door life and restores to town-bred boys the use of their eyes, ears, and muscles. It tends to render them resourceful, manly, dextrous, and last, but not least, polite.*<sup>3</sup>

When the 1st Perth Troop at Knox Church was established, the *Courier* explained some basics to the uninitiated.

*On first entering the Scouts, certain preliminaries have to be gone through in order to prepare the lad for his first badge. Swimming tests and other efficiency tests are gone through. If he passes, he is enrolled. Later life-saving tests are gone through and when a boy completes his course, he knows many valuable points which will help him in future times. At the head of each patrol is a patrol leader, and under him is a Corporal. Six others make up a patrol.*<sup>4</sup>

The emphasis placed on swimming, as described by the *Courier*, would pay dividends before its new Scout Troop was even a decade old.

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. William M. Grant lived in Canada and at Perth only briefly, he was born at Speymouth, Morayshire, Scotland, and died at Elgin, Morayshire, Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> Smiths Falls formed its first troop in 1916, the same year as Perth, but it disbanded within a few weeks when no men could be found to act as Scoutmaster.

<sup>3</sup> *Perth Courier*, September 9, 1910.

<sup>4</sup> *Perth Courier*, April 7, 1916.

# HE WAS A MAN

## Alexander Railton Campbell (1910-1943)

On a frosty afternoon in late December 1921<sup>5</sup>, as 11-year-old Alex Campbell crossed the Gore Street Bridge, bound for his home near Knox Presbyterian Church<sup>6</sup>, he was paying little attention to the excited shouts coming from the Tay Basin. Ten days of freezing temperatures and only light snowfall had turned the Tay Basin into a giant ice rink, alive with a large, loud, shinny game and skating party. When the shouting suddenly changed tone, however, it brought him to the bridge rail.

Peering over, almost directly below him, where the current of the Tay River flowed into the Basin, he spotted a small figure clinging to a lip of broken ice at the edge of a wide lead of open water. The figure struggled in the dark water in desperate silence, but the hockey players and skaters, clustered in a gawking panicked crowd, screamed and shouted for help.

As a “*Boy Scout Corporal*”<sup>7</sup> Alex Campbell had trained for emergencies just like this one and did not hesitate. Slipping down the canal bank on his rear, he slid on his belly across the ice toward what he could now clearly see was a young girl. According to witnesses, “*other boys standing about did not make even an attempt to help, but said to let the Boy Scout do it*”<sup>8</sup>.

Campbell was almost within reach of grabbing the girl’s coat collar when the ice cracked beneath him, gave way, and dumped him into the river. He had not paused to remove his woolen overcoat and when plunged into the freezing water its weight pulled him down and the current threatened to drag him beneath the ice. Swimming with all his strength he managed to reach the ice edge and, hand over hand, pulled himself to the girl’s side. Grabbing her coat, he held her head above water and towed her across the open lead to a stronger ice shelf near shore. There, one of the spectators finally reached out with a hockey stick and helped hoist the girl out of water. Despite the weight of his waterlogged coat, Campbell managed to lift himself up onto the ice and, exhausted, drag the nearly frozen girl to safety on the riverbank.

In December 1921, when she strayed too close to the open water and broke through the ice, Julia Bernice Beadle was just 6½-years-of-age. Born at Westport, Ontario, in 1914, she was the eighth of nine children<sup>9</sup> born to mill worker Joseph Henry Beadle (1864-1922) and Margaret Elizabeth Martin (1876-1944), then living on Sherbrooke Street in Perth.<sup>10</sup> Thanks to Alex Campbell, hardly five years her senior, Julia would grow up to marry twice<sup>11</sup>, raise two daughters of her own, and live to the age of 76 years.

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<sup>5</sup> Probably on Saturday December 17th.

<sup>6</sup> St. Paul’s United Church after 1925.

<sup>7</sup> Perth *Courier*, December 23, 1921.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Her sibilings were Mary Estella (1894-1951), Joseph Miram (1897-1936), William Ambrose (1901-1959), Gervaise B. (1904-1944), Thomas Sylvester (1907-1964), Patrick Alphonse (1909-1988), Anastasia ‘Annis’ (1912-c1990), Marcella (1916-1997).

<sup>10</sup> Six months after her ducking in the Tay Basin, Julia’s father died on June 24,1922.

<sup>11</sup> Julia married William John McCann (1891-1972) and Albert Hart (1938-2005).

On January 12, 1922, Perth Scoutmaster Richard Henry Holmes (1890-1977)<sup>12</sup> filed a petition with the Boy Scouts Associations Headquarters recommending that Alex Campbell be formally recognized for his brave and selfless actions in saving the life of Julia Beadle. Investigators took sworn statements from two of the eyewitnesses, 13-year-old Harold Imeson (1909-1931) and nine-year-old Wilfred Doyle (1913-2000), that confirmed press reports of the rescue as published in the *Perth Expositor*, the *Perth Courier*, the *Quebec Chronicle* and circulated by the *Canadian Press* wire. The investigators concluded that Campbell should be awarded the Boy Scouts 'Silver Cross' for gallantry.

On the evening of Friday, May 5th, the Perth Boy Scout Troop staged an event at the Balderson Theatre on Gore Street honoring Alex Campbell. Following a program of "choruses, recitations, songs, physical exercises, blind-fold boxing, contests, and the three act play 'A Boy Scout's Good Turn'" Campbell was decorated with the Silver Cross.

The award was to have been presented by local Member of Parliament and Minister of Railways and Canals John Alexander Stewart (1867-1922), but he had fallen ill<sup>13</sup> so the ceremony was conducted by County Court Judge James Henderson Scott (1858-1935). The Judge "paid a high compliment to the Boy Scouts" in general, and "to Scout Alex Campbell, who at the risk of his own life, had saved young Miss Beadle from drowning in the river ... a commendable act". He then read a letter to Campbell from Dr. James William Robertson (1857-1930)<sup>14</sup>, Chief Commissioner of the Boy Scouts of Canada, "who personally congratulated the Perth Scout for his brave deed".<sup>15</sup>



*Alex Campbell, second from right, with his siblings, LtoR, Richard, Lavinia, Ivey and Emilie.*

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<sup>12</sup> Born in England in 1890, 'Sgt. Holmes' or 'Skipper Holmes', arrived in Perth in 1913. In 1916 he enlisted with 130th Battalion and served in the 3rd Canadian Infantry Battalion during WW1 where he was wounded and won the Military Medal. Returning to Perth in 1919 he took over leadership of 1st Perth Scout Troop and helped found a Cub Pack, a Sea Scout Troop, and a Rover Scout Group. He was appointed District Scout Master for Lanark County in 1925. On his CEF enlistment papers Holmes gave his occupation as a 'Farm Laborer', but after study through a government financed veterans' program at the Perth Business College, he moved to Smooth Rock Falls in 1929 and worked in the office of the Abitibi Pulp and Paper Company for the next 25 years - except for the years of WW2 when he re-enlisted as an infantry Sergeant, rising to the rank of Captain. At Smooth Rock Falls he launched the town's first Cub and Scout troops. Retiring to Perth in 1955 he continued his involvement in Scouting into the 1960s. Holmes was active in Scouting for over 50 years and received the Boy Scouts' Medal of Merit (1938) for long & valuable service, the Long Service Medal (1946) and the Silver Acorn (1973) for meritorious conduct & service. He married Grace Annie Drew (1885-1974) in England in 1917 and was the father of two sons and a daughter. He died in 1977 and was buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Perth.

<sup>13</sup> John A. Stewart died five months later on October 7, 1922.

<sup>14</sup> Robertson was formerly Professor of Dairying at Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph, and the Dominion Dairy & Cold Storage Commissioner 1890-1904, and was the man behind production of Perth's famous 'Mammoth Cheese' in 1892. He had just been named Canada's Chief Commissioner of the Boy Scouts in early 1922.

<sup>15</sup> *Perth Courier*, May 12, 1922.



**Scoutmaster Richard Holmes 1890-1977**  
c1960

(Photo courtesy of Scouts Canada)

In concluding his remarks Judge Scott told the people of Perth that they owed a great debt to Scoutmaster Richard Holmes who *“devoted an immense amount of time gratuitously to the Boy Scouts movement”* and urged that *“every effort should be made to uphold Sgt. Holmes in the splendid work [with] which he is connected, a work which teaches discipline, obedience, good habits, and good citizenship”*<sup>16</sup>.

Silver Cross medal winner Alexander ‘Alex’ Railton Campbell was a ‘barrack brat’, born March 8, 1910 at Wellington Barracks, Halifax, Nova Scotia. His father, Sergeant Henry ‘Harry’ Davies Campbell (1879-1917), a native of Pendleton, Lancashire, England, was a professional soldier then serving with the Royal Canadian Regiment<sup>17</sup>. At the outbreak of World War One (WW1) in 1914, Harry Campbell was promoted to commissioned rank and, serving as a Captain and Quarter Master with the 24th Battalion Canadian Infantry, was killed in action at Passchendaele in July 1917.

When Captain Harry Campbell died in France, his wife, Sarah Jane Railton-Campbell (1879-1951), and his five children<sup>18</sup>, were living in army quarters at Quebec City. In 1919, at war’s end, the family moved to Perth, Ontario, to live with Sarah’s spinster sister, Catherine Railton (1878-1949)<sup>19</sup>, at 28 Gore Street West.

Alex Campbell was nine years of age when he arrived at Perth. He attended Perth Public school and, mindful of the lack of a father in his life, his mother encouraged him to enroll in Richard Holmes’ Boy Scout Troop. Alex’s name never appeared on the public school honor roll<sup>20</sup>, and at Perth Collegiate Institute, while he earned good grades in English Literature, he otherwise seems to have been a ‘C’ student. He was, however, a much admired athlete. Alex played most intermural sports, competed on the inter-school badminton team and was a star of the rugby squad that swept the county championship every year during his time at PCI (1925-1929). In this connection an artistic talent also revealed itself as he entertained the student body with cartoons lampooning each game posted to the school bulletin board.

By 1925, at age 15, Campbell become Assistant Scout Master at the Perth Troop. At PCI he was active in the cadet program, a platoon leader in 1928 and 1929, and even before graduation enlisted with the 42nd Lanark & Renfrew Militia Regiment where he was ranked Sergeant by 1928 at the age of 18 years.

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<sup>16</sup> Perth Courier, May 12, 1922.

<sup>17</sup> Captain Henry Campbell had formerly served with 2nd Battalion, 4th Kings Own Rifles, and had seen action in the South African (Boer) War.

<sup>18</sup> Emilie Mary (1906-1973), unmarried; Ivy Margaret (1908-1971), married John McLean Chamard (1911-1986); Alexander Railton (1910-1943), unmarried; Lavinia Grace Catherine (1912-1986), married Howard Gibb (1909-1983); and Richard Birchall Philip (1915-1979), married Ethlyn Anne Morrison (1915-2013).

<sup>19</sup> Catherine Railton had come to Canada in 1911 and worked at Bishop Strachan School in Toronto.

<sup>20</sup> The name of his sister Ivy appeared regularly as a top student.



**Alex Campbell c1928**  
(Photo courtesy of Scouts Canada)

In 1930 he spent a few months in Toronto but returned to Perth and established his own small business. The *Ottawa Evening Citizen* would later describe him as a “commercial artist”<sup>21</sup>, but his trade was designing and painting signs that, over time, he expanded to decorative painting and even re-painting cars and trucks<sup>22</sup>. Over the next decade Alex Campbell played leadership roles with the St. Andrews Presbyterian Church Youth Group, the PCI Ex-Pupils Association and the 100 Club, and continued to follow his athletic pursuits, playing for the Perth Town Rugby Team, and serving on the executive of the Olympic Club where he was noted for his wrestling prowess and gymnastic demonstrations.

By 1939 Alex Campbell was ranked a Captain in the Lanark & Renfrew Regiment. That May, he took his command, Perth’s Company-D, to Ottawa for the visit of King George VI and Queen Mary, and then travelled as part of the Royal escort from Ottawa to Kingston. A few months later he was promoted Regimental Major, but when war broke out that September, he was so anxious to join the fight that, in April 1940, he accepted a reduction in rank to Lieutenant, to enlist with the Hastings & Prince Edward Light Infantry Regiment (Hasty Ps) of the Canadian Active Service Force (CASF)<sup>23</sup>.

Lieutenant Alex Campbell went overseas in the summer of 1940. In the fall of 1941 he completed the Company Commander’s Course in England and by June 1942 had been restored the rank of Captain and Company Commander. He first saw action in North Africa at the end of 1942 when he was loaned to the British Army’s 2nd Battalion, Coldstream Guards, part of 1st Guards Brigade, 78th Infantry Division.

Ordered back to the United Kingdom at the end of March 1943, he took command of A-Company of the Hasty Ps in time for the invasion of Sicily (Operation Husky) that July. One of his Platoon Commanders was Lieutenant Farley Mowat<sup>24</sup> who, in his war memoir, *And No Birds Sang* (1979), recalled Captain Alex Campbell as an “elephantine lump of man, red-faced, heavy-browed, and fierce eyed, with an incongruous little Hitlerian moustache. He was possessed of a ferocious determination to kill as many Germans as he could, as they had killed his father ... The only good German, he liked to say, was a dead one – seven days dead under a hot sun. Apart from this fixation, he was a kindly man and ... a bit of a poet too.” The *Ottawa Evening Citizen* wrote that,



<sup>21</sup> *Ottawa Evening Citizen*, February 2, 1944.

<sup>22</sup> On his WW2 enlistment documents he gave his occupation as “sign painter and contractor”.

<sup>23</sup> His brother, Richard Birchall Phillip Campbell, served as a Royal Canadian Navy instructor at Halifax.

<sup>24</sup> Farley Mowat OC (1921-2014), writer and environmentalist, author of 41 books that sold 17 million copies.

*He was wounded slightly<sup>25</sup> in Sicily but refused to go to hospital and continued in the fighting with his men. Campbell was credited with deeds of exceptional daring and gallantry and was credited with killing 23 Germans with a Bren gun whom he trapped in a convoy<sup>26</sup>*

Campbell's single-handed Bren gun attack occurred when his company ambushed a German convoy near Valguarnera, Sicily, on July 18, 1943. It was described as follows by platoon commander Lieutenant Farley Mowat.

*Then a furious bellow made me turn to see Alex Campbell launching himself down the slope. He was holding a Bren tucked under his one good arm and firing quick bursts as he ran. Although a spare mag was clenched between his teeth, he was still able to roar like a maddened minotaur ... I momentarily expected to see his mighty bulk come crashing to the ground ... [but] Alex concentrated his berserk fury on a single truck, and when he had finished firing into it from a range of a dozen yards, his consuming hatred of the enemy must surely have been sated. Within that truck 20 or more Germans writhed and died.<sup>27</sup>*



**Major Alexander Campbell  
1910-1943**

Shortly after the landings on Sicily, German positions on high ground at Assoro stalled the Allied advance and seemed impossible to circumvent or overcome.

*The summit, the site of an ancient Norman castle whose ruins remained, rose 100 feet above the town. The Germans never believed the Allies would dare stage an attack against such an easily defended position. But the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment sent one company and a special 'assault company' under Major<sup>28</sup> Alexander Campbell to scale the steepest of the castle hill's cliffs while the rest of the battalion approached from the northeast.*

*In the early hours of the 21st [July 21, 1943], the battalion quietly scaled the cliffs and captured the feature, much to the surprise of the German defenders. Throughout the day, the battalion used its elevated position to call in artillery strikes and conduct attacks into the town. On the 22nd, the 48th Highlanders of Canada, scaling cliffs to the west, helped the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment expel the Germans from Assoro.<sup>29</sup>*

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<sup>25</sup> Shot through the muscle of his right arm in the first few minutes of the landing on Sicily.

<sup>26</sup> Ottawa *Evening Citizen* 02 Feb 1944, by Gregory Clark (With the Canadians in Italy).

<sup>27</sup> *And No Birds Sang*, by Farley Mowat (2012).

<sup>28</sup> He was actually still a Captain at the time.

<sup>29</sup> *Sharpening The Sabre: Canadian Infantry Combat Training During the Second World War*, by R. Daniel Pellerin (Thesis 2016).

Campbell was 'Mentioned in Despatches' and promoted Acting Major in August 1943, just as Sicily fell. The drive behind his ferocity as a fighting soldier, and perhaps as a Boy Scout hero, may be revealed in a letter written to his mother on August 3rd, wherein he told her "*My biggest worry is that I may not be as good a soldier as I should be to live up to Daddy*"<sup>30</sup>.

The Hasty Ps moved on to invade Italy in September, but in early November Alex Campbell fell ill with hepatitis and spent nearly two months in hospital back in North Africa. He did not rejoin his regiment until December 23, 1943, when he found it engaged in a bloody month-long brawl with the elite German 1st Parachute Division in the Moro River Valley, outside the small town of Ortona.

In his war memoir Farley Mowat recalled that, on the afternoon of December 23rd, he was sent to the rear to guide replacements through the rain, sleet, and mud to reinforce his, by then, badly undermanned regiment. He had travelled only a short distance however, when he met Campbell, now a full Major, returning from hospital, and leading 140 green recruits just arrived from Canada. As they marched back into the valley together, Campbell commented that he had been "*verisfying*".

*He pulled an envelope out of his battledress jacket and handed it to me. "Read this when you get time and tell me what you think". I tucked it away unread and fell in beside him as the column marched on ...*

Later that night, after Campbell had joined his company in the line and Mowat had returned to the Battalion Headquarters (BHQ) and Aid Post, in the cellar of a shattered farmhouse, where he was now serving as Battalion Intelligence Officer, he recalled the envelope.

*I fished it out of my tunic. It was scrawled in pencil on a soiled sheet of Salvation Army canteen paper and his angular script was difficult to read in the shaky light of a kerosene lantern that jumped and flared whenever a shell exploded near at hand*".<sup>31</sup>

*When 'neath the rumble of the guns,  
I lead my men against the Huns,  
'Tis then I feel so all alone & weak & scared,  
And oft I wonder how I dared,  
Accept the task of leading men.*

*I wonder, worry, fret, and then I pray,  
Oh God! Who promised oft  
To humble men a listening ear,  
Now in my spirit's troubled state,  
Draw near, dear God, draw near, draw near.*

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted from *The Stories Behind Forever Changed* (Canadian War Museum exhibit 2021), by Britt Braaten and Tim Cook.

<sup>31</sup> *And No Birds Sang*, by Farley Mowat (2012). Other sources say that the poem was enclosed in a letter home to his mother at Perth, and the poem was published in the *Perth Courier* on January 13, 1944 with his obituary, just 18 days after he was killed. Either or both versions of the story may be true. Campbell may have given copies of his poem to any number of people.

*Make me more willing to obey,  
Help me to merit my command,  
And if this be my fatal day,  
Reach out, Oh God, Thy Guiding Hand,  
And lead me down that deep, dark vale*

*These men of mine must never know  
How much afraid I really am,  
Help me to lead them in the fight  
So they will say, "He was a man".*

In the small hours of Christmas Day morning, as Mowat struggled in the lantern light to read the poem Campbell had titled *Prayer Before Battle*, a few hundred yards away “a patrol was ordered out on the fringe of Ortona” to destroy a force of paratroopers that had infiltrated the line during the night. “Major Campbell insisted on taking it himself by reason of the perilous nature of the job”.<sup>32</sup>

About 7:30 a.m. the walking wounded began to straggle into the headquarters’ aid post. Among them, a sergeant suffering from a shrapnel wound to his leg. Mowat recalled how the sergeant,

*... shakily accepted a cigarette, then told me what he had seen. Alex had sent what was left of Seven Platoon to launch the initial attack, and Seven had almost immediately been caught by enfilading fire from three machine guns, with the loss of several killed and wounded.*

*The logical course would then have been for Alex to send one of the other platoons to outflank these guns, but he did not choose to do this. Instead, he did the unexpected and inexplicable.*

*Seizing a Tommy gun he levered his great bulk to its full height, gave an inarticulate bellow and charged straight at the enemy. He could have gone no more than three or four paces before he was riddled by scores of bullets. Crashing into the mud like a falling colossus, he lay there, his body jerking spasmodically until the dead flesh at last lay still. During that timeless interval, both his own men and the Germans were so stunned by his action that not a further shot was fired by either side.<sup>33</sup>*

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<sup>32</sup> Ottawa *Evening Citizen*, February 2, 1944, by Gregory Clark (With the Canadians in Italy).

<sup>33</sup> *And No Birds Sang*, Farley Mowat (1979). It should perhaps be noted that some of Mowat’s writing has been described as ‘subjective non-fiction’ and he admitted that he “never let the facts get in the way of the truth”. However, while he may have taken some literary license in his descriptions of Alex Campbell, there can be little doubt he told “the truth”.



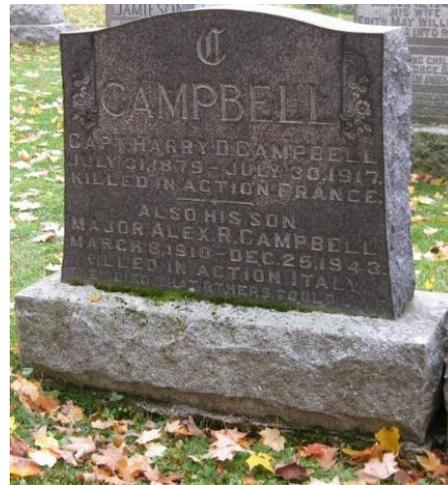
Great War Memorial Hospital



Perth & District Collegiate Institute



Moro River War Cemetery



Elmwood Cemetery

Alexander Railton Campbell, the Boy Scout who pulled Julia Beadle from the icy waters of the Tay Basin, and the Army Major who dared “*accept the task of leading men*”, lies buried in the Moro River Canadian War Cemetery. He is also memorialized on the cenotaph gate plaque at the Perth Great War Memorial Hospital, in the Canadian Virtual War Memorial and on a stone he shares with his father in Elmwood Cemetery, Perth.<sup>34</sup>

Alex Campbell’s poem, *Prayer Before Battle*, became as iconic of Canada’s WW2 experience as John McCrae’s poem *In Flanders’ Fields* did of WW1. *Prayer Before Battle* has been published, and read or recited at memorial services, many thousands of times over the years since Campbell wrote it in the winter of 1943.

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<sup>34</sup> Alex Campbell’s mother, Sarah Jane Railton-Campbell (1906-1973), and his sister Emilie Mary Campbell (1906-1973) are also both buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Perth. Alex Campbell never married.

## PROMPT ACTION & PRESENCE OF MIND

### John Agusta 'Jack' Kanelakos (1913-1996)

Wednesday April 11, 1928 dawned bright and clear. As the spring sun rose over the trees and rooftops, it quickly warmed the banks of the Tay Canal although the last chunks of winter ice still flowed through the Basin on their way down to the Rideau.

Shortly before 11:00 a.m., seven-year-old Ivy Vaughan<sup>35</sup> set out from her Beckwith Street home to run an errand for her mother. Sent to collect groceries at a shop on Gore Street, Ivy took a small wagon from her yard and, passing her neighbor, invited their daughter, four-year-old Laura Mae Fleming<sup>36</sup>, for a ride-along. As Ivy made her way along the Tay Canal tow path, about half-way between Beckwith and Drummond Streets, with little Laura giggling and urging her on, she began to run. Suddenly a front wheel dropped into an eroding rivulet of melting ice, jerking the wagon handle from her hand. The wagon and Laura went summersaulting over the bank into the fast flowing icy waters of the Tay in full spring flood. The frigid water took Laura's breath away, but Ivy began screaming hysterically.

In 1928 Easter Sunday fell on April 8th, so that week students were enjoying their spring school holiday. Among them was 15-year-old John Kanelakos, a pupil of room VII-B at the Perth Public School. Riding his bicycle along Beckwith Street, he was approaching the Beckwith Street bridge when he heard the panicked screams of Ivy Vaughan. Racing to the scene, Kanelakos threw his bicycle aside and

*... jumped into the icy waters and pulled [Laura] out to the shore<sup>37</sup>, rescuing her from the deep and cold waters of the Tay without a thought of self or the risk he undertook in plunging into the canal<sup>38</sup>.*

Laura Fleming's saviour, John Agusta Kanelakos, was born at Perth in 1913, the eldest son of Peter Kanelakos (1885-1959), a native of Liffeney<sup>39</sup>, Greece, and Christina Thornton (1886-1920) who had been born at Carleton Place.

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<sup>35</sup> Ivy Vaughan (1920-1985) was the daughter of Robert Harvey Vaughan (1892-1978) and Mary Jane Beatty (1890-1939). Robert Harvey Vaughan had been a waiter on the SS *Carpathian* when it rescued survivors from the sinking of the SS *Titanic* in April 1912. He was born in England and emigrated to Canada in August 1912. See <https://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/carpathia-crew/robert-vaughan.html>. Ivy had 13 full and half-siblings - Russel Harvey (1912-1959), Robert (1917-1925), Pauline 'Polly' (1922-2012), Sharon Rose (1947-2001), Alberta, Dorothy, Allan, Joyce, Nora (d.2001), Wilma, Cedric, Hubert and Ruby.

<sup>36</sup> Laura Mae Fleming was the daughter of Laurence H. Fleming (1893-1936) and Daisy Robinson-Fleming (1896-1961). Her siblings were Gordon, Harold, Arthur, and Dorothy.

<sup>37</sup> *Perth Courier*, April 13, 1928.

<sup>38</sup> *Perth Courier*, November 2, 1928.

<sup>39</sup> No location named Liffeney, Greece, identified, perhaps Lefkandi on the island of Euboea.

Peter Kanelakos had emigrated to Canada in about 1905 with his brothers John and James. In 1908, Peter and John, confectioners and candymakers by trade, arrived in Perth and opened the Palm Gardens Ice Cream Parlor at 73 Foster Street. They produced and sold homemade candy, confectionary items, and ice cream, as well as selling specialties like fruit and oysters. On the floor above the Palm Gardens, the brothers also operated a tobacco shop and pool hall.<sup>40</sup>



Peter Kanelakos married Christina Thornton (1886-1920) at Ottawa in 1912 and they had four children: John (1913-1996), James (1915-2000)<sup>41</sup>, Frocena/Florence (1917-1980)<sup>42</sup> and Doris/Dormena (1918-2015)<sup>43</sup>. Christina Thornton-Kanelakos died at age 34 in 1920 and the Palm Carden Ice Cream Parlor was sold in 1925<sup>44</sup>. The Kanelakos brothers, Peter and John, moved to Smiths Falls where they opened the 'Candy Kitchen' soda fountain and candy store in the Kerfoot Building at the corner of Beckwith and Russell Streets. However, Peter Kanelakos' sons, aged 10 and 12, remained in Perth, living with their grandparents, John Thornton (1862-1949) and Rebecca Dietrich-Thornton (1858-1944)<sup>45</sup>, while the daughters, aged seven and eight, went to live with relatives at Cony Island, New York.

John Kanelakos grew up at Perth, an energetic and athletic youth. In winter he played shinny on the river and in summer played baseball and swam in the mill pond above the Haggart Island dam. All year round, from the age of about 12 years, he was an active Boy Scout and in 1928, when he rescued Laura Fleming, was a Patrol Leader with 1st Perth Troop.

In recognition of his actions on April 11th that year, Scoutmaster Richard Holmes recommended Kanelakos to Boy Scouts' Headquarters for appropriate recognition and the Perth *Courier* sent a copy of its reporting on the rescue to the Royal Canadian Humane Association urging that Kanelakos be recognized for his heroism. The Provincial Board of Honor and the Dominion Medals and Awards Board reviewed the incident and added their endorsement.

On October 28, 1928, all 1,100 seats at the Balderson Theatre at Perth, were occupied when young John Kanelakos was honored by his fellow Boy Scouts from Perth and Smiths Falls<sup>46</sup>, his community and visiting luminaries.

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<sup>40</sup> Another brother, Stavros, and two sisters, Pinelopi /Penelope and Marigo stayed in Greece. A few years later, a cousin, Joseph, opened the Titanic Pool Hall & Tobacco Shop, outfitted with five pocket billiard tables, at 37 Gore Street East.

<sup>41</sup> Married (1938) Lillian Geraldine McFadden (1920-2014).

<sup>42</sup> Married (1938) Cornelius Allen Cole (b.1912) and Ernest J. Withers (1921-1971).

<sup>43</sup> Married Andrew Haggis (1910-1992), son of George and Emilia Hanzakos. The Hanzakos family changed their surname to Haggis.

<sup>44</sup> The Titanic Pool Hall was sold in 1921.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Kanelakos was later remarried to Mary Viola Healey (1900-c1963), daughter of Owen Vincent Healey (1872-1938) and Mary Johanna McDermott (1873-1954).

<sup>46</sup> In 1911 Smiths Falls Boy Scout Harold A. Whitcomb (1896-1951) also won the Boy Scout Silver Cross for Gallantry, as well as the Royal Humane Association's Bronze Medal for Bravery, for his rescue of Mary Hunter from drowning when she fell from a boat near Portland on the Rideau River. After graduating secondary school at Smiths Falls, Whitcomb enrolled at McGill University but interrupted his studies to serve in the Canadian/Royal Navy during WW1. He later resumed his studies, graduated with a medical degree, returned to Smiths Falls to practice medicine and served for a time as Lanark County Coroner.

Perth Mayor T. Arthur Rogers (1895-1957)<sup>47</sup> presented Kanelakos with a Royal Canadian Humane Association 'Honorary Diploma', "*following which the Boy Scouts, who surrounded John on the stage, gave three lusty cheers and a tiger*"<sup>48</sup>. Mayor Rogers told the assembly that,

*... following a very close investigation of the circumstances surrounding the act of saving the life of little Laura Fleming on April 11th last, John Kanelakos is justly entitled to the award for his prompt action and presence of mind in saving the little girl's life, rescuing her from the deep and cold waters of the Tay without a thought of self or the risk he undertook in plunging into the canal. Words fail me to express my admiration for the act of John Kanelakos, an act due to the training and discipline he received as a member of the Boy Scouts.*<sup>49</sup>

The Mayor went on to recognize the work of Scoutmaster Richard Holmes and expressed hope that the award would be an inspiration to Kanelakos,

*... to give of his best to his fellow man in the future, and that it would be a similar inspiration to the Boy Scouts ... every citizen of the Perth is proud of what John Kanelakos has done.*<sup>50</sup>

Finally, in the highlight of the evening, Kanelakos received the Boys Scouts Associations Silver Cross for gallantry, presented by Boy Scouts of Canada Assistant Commissioner John A. Stiles (1876-1958)<sup>51</sup>. Stiles also saluted Scoutmaster Holmes as "*a self-sacrificing man for your children*" and told Kanelakos that as,

*... you were prepared when the time came and at other similar times in future you will also be prepared. This Silver Cross will be one of the most precious things in your life. There isn't money to buy it.*

As he completed grade school and studied at the Perth Collegiate Institute, John Kanelakos became a passionate and accomplished photographer. His grandparent's home at Perth would remain his address of record until 1940 but, although he was born and raised where the Tay Canal Basin was the largest body of water within many miles, he was drawn to the sea. By the time he turned 20 he had begun a lifetime of maritime wandering, camera in hand.



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<sup>47</sup> Mayor 1927-1929.

<sup>48</sup> Perth Courier, November 2, 1928.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> John A. Stiles, B.A., Sc., M.E., T.C., OBE, later Boy Scouts Chief Commissioner, an engineering professor from the University of New Brunswick moved to Ottawa in 1919 and became the first Chief Executive Officer of the Boy Scouts' Association, a position that he held until his retirement in 1946.

According to one newspaper account, *“in 1932 [Kanelakos] sailed off Vancouver Island, later going on a Caribbean cruise ...”*<sup>52</sup> By 1934 he was at Halifax, Nova Scotia, working as a freelance photographer and at odd-jobs, including some time as a civilian employee at the Eastern Passage Air Station<sup>53</sup>.

Then, in 1936, he signed on as cook, among a crew of seven on the former trawler *St. Cuthbert*<sup>54</sup>. After an overhaul and installation of a new engine, refitting her to freight Mexican oil, the *St. Cuthbert* had been sold to a transport firm in British Honduras. Only two days after departing Halifax, bound for Belize, the *St. Cuthbert* was engulfed by a storm generating what a Halifax newspaper described as *“mountainous waves ... that caused damage and almost loss of life on many large vessels putting into Halifax ...”*<sup>55</sup>. Sixty two miles off Chebucto Head the *St. Cuthbert*’s engine failed and Captain J. Barr Champion told the press that for the next 48 hours *“all hands fought against terrific odds while his ship was pounded by the seas”*. Finally taken in tow by the salvage tug *Foundation Franklin* the *St. Cuthbert* and her crew were taken back to Halifax and John Kanelakos escaped the first of many close calls he would face at sea.

With the *St. Cuthbert* repaired and finally delivered to Belize, Kanelakos returned to Nova Scotia and in 1937-1939 worked as a photographer for the Halifax *Chronicle*. In mid July 1939, however, he joined the crew of the yacht *Estey*, a Tancook Schooner<sup>56</sup>. On a honeymoon cruise, with planned stops in the West Indies and a circumnavigation of the South America, the 16-ton, 150 foot *Estey*’s pumps and motor had failed, and she was in Halifax for repairs when Kanelakos signed on. The schooner sailed again on July 15th but at 2:10 a.m. on August 8th, in dense fog and high winds, she struck the rocks off Overton Beach, near Forchu Lighthouse, Yarmouth Bar, Nova Scotia.

*The raging breakers swept the helpless craft onto a ledge about two miles from Yarmouth Light. She began to break up almost immediately from the pounding seas.*

*John Kanelakos, former Halifax freelance photographer, appears as the hero of the rescue. In a tiny dory, the navigator of the craft made three trips to shore through the breakers to bring [Honeymooners] Mr. and Mrs. [William C.] Mooney and [crewman] Fred Horne to safety. Leaping into the tiny skiff Kanelakos rowed Mrs. Mooney to shore, following with Mr. Mooney and Horne. By that time the Estey had broken completely in two ... the vessel was broken into matchwood.*<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> John A. Kanelakos scrapbook, courtesy of Don Kanelakos. The newspaper from which the clipping was taken is unidentified and undated.

<sup>53</sup> Later CFB Shearwater.

<sup>54</sup> Launched 1916, 311 gross tons, 137 feet long, 23.5 foot beam, 12.3 foot draft, requisitioned as a minesweeper during WW1.

<sup>55</sup> John A. Kanelakos scrapbook, courtesy of Don Kanelakos. The newspaper from which the clipping was taken is unidentified.

<sup>56</sup> A Tancook Schooner, with its counter stern and characteristic round or 'spoon' bow was a distinctive type of small sailing work boat built primarily on Big Tancook Island, Nova Scotia, and the immediate surrounding area. The Tancook Schooner is credited with influencing North American yacht designers and pleasure craft users during the early to mid twentieth century.

<sup>57</sup> John A. Kanelakos scrapbook, courtesy of Don Kanelakos. The newspaper from which the clipping was taken is unidentified.

Although the headline in a Yarmouth newspaper of August 10, 1939 read “*Schooner is Total Loss: None Injured*”, this does not appear to have been completely accurate. John Kanelakos seems to have been hurt. A later newspaper story stated that “...*at the outbreak of the war* [September 3, 1939, a month after the loss of the *Estey*] *he was laid up following a wreck of a yacht off the coast of Nova Scotia, but in 1940 was well enough to sign on a tanker at Montreal*”<sup>58</sup>.



*Imperial Oil Transport Company Tanker 'Vancolite'*

Kanelakos volunteered for military service but, apparently due to the injury sustained when the *Estey* sank, he failed to pass the Canadian Active Service Force (C.A.S.F) medical. Undaunted he signed on as a merchant seaman with the Imperial Oil Shipping Company Ltd. to serve on their vessel M.V. *Vancolite*, one of a number of oil tankers in the British service, owned jointly by in the Imperial Oil and the Canadian government. The *Vancolite* and her sister ships transported bunker oil, diesel, aviation fuel and gasoline from points of production to the United Kingdom or allied bases elsewhere. Serving aboard fuel tankers like the *Vancolite* was extremely dangerous duty. These ships were the favored targets of Axis submarines and aircraft. A direct hit by bomb or torpedo invariably meant the immediate and complete loss of the ship, crew, and cargo when the vessel vaporized in a ball of fire.

When John Kanelakos first went to sea as a merchant seaman in 1940, while his ship might enjoy some protection in a convoy, it had no means of self-defense. However, the British Admiralty Trade Division undertook to arm around 5,500 merchant vessels. By the end of 1940, 3,400 vessels had been armed, mainly with anti-aircraft weapons and heavy machine guns, and gunnery schools established. A few months after joining the *Vancolite*, Kanelakos enrolled to train as a gunner.

The gunners' school at Halifax provided five weeks' basic naval training, followed by two-and-a-half weeks of gunnery training and two-and-a-half weeks of advanced seamanship instruction. The final part of the course provided a month of specialized training covering the variety of weapons fitted to merchant vessels. Most gunners were Royal Navy personnel, but many, like John Kanelakos, were merchant seamen.

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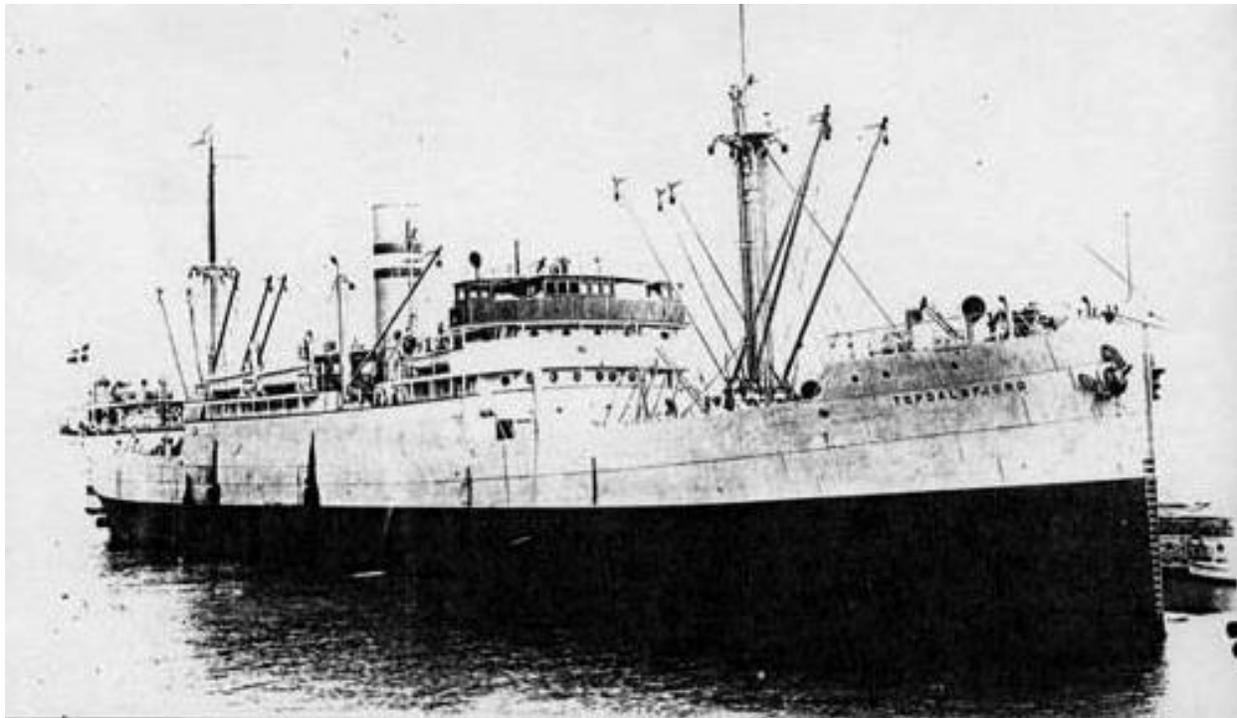
<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

In late 1940, Kanelakos graduated as a 'Gun Layer' and enlisted with the Royal Navy's Defensively Equipped Merchant Service (D.E.M.S.) for a period of five-years or the duration of hostilities and returned to the *Vancolite* and the danger of North Atlantic convoys.<sup>59</sup> In November that year he was in the convoy defended by HMS *Jervis Bay* when she was sunk southwest of Reykjavik, Iceland, by the German heavy cruiser *Admiral Scheer*.



*D.E.M.S. Gunlayer*

In 1941 Kanelakos was seconded by the British Admiralty to the Norwegian merchant marine service, Nortraship. When Nazi Germany invaded Norway in April 1940, they captured only about 15% of the Norwegian merchant fleet. The remainder, more than 1,000 ships totaling over 4,000,000 gross registered tons (GRT), was at sea or in foreign ports when Norway fell. The Norwegian Government in exile organized 'Nortraship', headquartered in London, requisitioned the 'free' fleet, and placed it at the disposal of Britain and her allies. The Royal Navy's D.E.M.S. program armed the ships and provided trained gunners to man them.



*Nortraship D/S Topalsfjord*

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<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile his younger brother, James Kanelakos (1915-2000), had enlisted with the RCAF and served as an air gunner with Bomber Command, flying more than 40 missions before being shot down over Hanover in September 1943. He was badly wounded but manage to parachute from his crippled aircraft and spent nearly two years as a prisoner of war until he escaped in early 1945. James Kanelakos was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM) and promoted to Flying Officer. After the war he returned to Perth and went into the fuel business.



**Boatswain John Augusta Kanelakos**

Over the next two years John Kanelakos served as 'Gunnery & Armament Officer' on several Norwegian ships but spent most of that time on the D/S *Topdalsfjord*<sup>60</sup>. The *Topdalsfjord* sailed more than 200,000 miles during the war, carrying 116,500 tons of cargo. She was mostly in service in the Atlantic, but also made voyages to Africa and the Mediterranean. In early 1941 Kanelakos sailed aboard *Topdalsfjord* to Alexandria carrying supplies to the allied armies in North Africa as Rommel launched his offensive on the Egyptian border. In May 1942 his ship was in the supply convoy to Mozambique supporting the British campaign that seized the Vichy-French-controlled island of Madagascar. Then, in November that year, *Topdalsfjord* carried supplies for Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of French North Africa at Oran, Algeria.

Late in the war, after Kanelakos had been posted back to British/Canadian flagged vessels on North Atlantic convoy duty,

*... the Norwegian government set out to present King Haakon's medal<sup>61</sup> to Jack Kanelakos, Canadian merchant navy gun layer from Perth, but it was not until January 3 he could be found in port long enough to make the presentation.*



**Krigsmedaljen**

*Kanelakos, a tanned six-footer with a snappy black beard that would do credit to an old navy seadog, is on a Canadian merchant ship now and his stays in port are short and infrequent.*

*"They had several letters out chasing me" he grinned, "but I usually left for another port before they could find me". But find him they did and on January 3rd the medal was presented by Harald Juell<sup>62</sup>, Norwegian consul at Halifax.*

*"I didn't know just what one incident they might be giving me this medal for" Kanelakos reflected, "since we were in several little mix-ups, one not far off Halifax and the Nova Scotia coast. Whatever it was, I certainly got a lot of fun from it all and loads of good experience. I'd like to be sailing with the Norwegians now, but I got transferred."<sup>63</sup>*

<sup>60</sup> Built by Canadian Vickers Ltd., Montreal and launched in May 1921 for NAL, 6,310 tons, 365 feet long, 49.7 foot beam, 26.5 foot draft.

<sup>61</sup> King Haakon VII's 'Krigsmedaljen' (*The War Medal*), awarded to Norwegian or foreign military personnel and civilians actively and honorably participated in the war for Norway.

<sup>62</sup> Harald Juell (1894-1980) was a Norwegian diplomat, ambassador, and military officer. He served as consul at Halifax 1941-1946.

<sup>63</sup> *Perth Courier*, January 18, 1944.

Not all dangers come from the enemy. In October 1943 John Kanelakos was Chief Gunner on the cable-laying ship *Lord Kelvin* when it collided with the Royal Canadian Navy minesweeper HMCS *Chedabucto* in the St. Lawrence River near Rimouski, Quebec. His ship tore a 25 X 12 foot (7.6 X 3.7 m) hole in the side of *Chedabucto*. All but one member of the *Chedabucto* crew escaped before their ship rolled over and sank.



*CS Lord Kelvin*

After the war, Kanelakos returned to the employ of the Imperial Oil Shipping Company Ltd. He sailed on company tankers for the next three decades, logging service on *Imperial Quebec*, *Imperial Acadia*, *Imperial Halifax*, *Imperial Toronto*, *Esso Knoxville*, and others, while visiting ports all over world from Europe, to Curaçao and Venezuela, to Suez, to Chile and Resolute on Cornwallis Island in Canada's arctic.



In January 1962 Imperial Oil Limited formally commended John Kanelakos *"regarding an accident involving two crew members which occurred on December 31, 1961"* aboard the *Imperial Quebec*.

*Your actions in this emergency which contributed materially to the recovery of two men with only minor injury. We wish to highly commend you on your presence of mind and bravery in this instance. If it had not been for the prompt action of the watch on deck, we have no doubt that this incident would have had a tragic ending.*

In January 1970 Kanelakos participated in the *Imperial Acadia's* rescue of three crew members from the MFV *Marion Crouse*, a Canadian fishing vessel that sprang a leak in the engine room in heavy weather and sank off Port Hawkesbury, Nova Scotia.

Less dramatically, in June 1972, 35 miles off St. John's, Newfoundland, Kanelakos' *Imperial Acadia* also rescued two men from the dory Q.E.-3. The men had left St. John's on June 4th, trying to row across the Atlantic, but within days one of them had fallen ill and was suffering from exposure.

Halifax was John Kanelakos' home port from the early 1930s, and it was there that he had three successive partners, Olive, Zona and Hattie, but no children. He was a member of the Royal Canadian Legion, Royal Canadian Naval Association, Canadian Merchant Navy Association, and Nova Scotia Wildlife Federation.

John Augusta Kanelakos died at Halifax on November 20, 1996, but his ashes were brought back to Ontario and buried in Hillcrest Cemetery at Smiths Falls.<sup>64</sup>

Laura Mae Fleming, the little girl John Kanelakos pulled from the icy waters of the Tay Basin in 1928, outlived him by 12 years. She grew up to marry Clifford Edward Dalton (1920-1980) and was the mother of one daughter. Laura Mae died, aged 85 years, at Lanark Lodge, Perth, in November 2008, and was buried beside her husband Elmwood Cemetery.

- *Ron W. Shaw (2022) - With assistance from Helen Benda, Don Kanelakos and Ron Lyon.*

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<sup>64</sup> The same cemetery where his brother and fellow WWII veteran James Kanelakos (RCAF) was buried.