

Tony Sosnkowski
Polish Refugee
Batory
July 13, 1940



I arrived in Halifax on the 13th of July, 1940, as a ten-year old war refugee, from England, having twice previously escaped: from SE Poland in September 1939, as the German and Soviet attacking armies were closing in; and from France in June 1940 as the German armored columns neared Bordeaux. We sailed from Gourock in Scotland, under a very powerful convoy escort, which included none other than the Battleship HMS Rodney. Much later I found out that the reason for all that naval protection was not us refugees but British Gold Bullion being shipped for safekeeping, for the duration, in the vaults of the deep basement under the Sun Life Building in Montreal - then the largest and tallest office building in the Commonwealth.

Traveling with me, and processed on that day through Pier 21, in a few hours, for train departure to Montreal were: my mother, Jadwiga; older brother, John, who later served in the Polish Air Force in England; and younger brothers Joseph and Peter. I have been deeply grateful all my life, for the warmth and kindness of our reception, and the care, education, and even affection which we received when our mother had to sail to England, in 1941, to stand by my father's side in wartime duties, when he became the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces in England and Middle East/Italy.

My parents, after the war, settled in Arundel, NW of Montreal. I served 31 years in the Canadian Army including 18 months at the front during the Korean War. Before my final retirement, in 1995, I worked for 13 years with volunteer agencies in Ontario and P.E.I. My brothers also led productive lives and enjoyed successful careers as Canadian citizens, but Pier 21 is where Canada began, for all of us.

Now comes the punch line of this narrative. Just above the ending of the Pier 21 story, in 3 April Chronicle-Herald, was a Flashback column - "That Was The Week" - March 29-April 4, 1968. Under the headline "An Old Friend Returns to Halifax" it described "the return of the Polish liner MS Batory, with a new look." That was the ship on which I arrived in Halifax, on 13 July, 1940!