

An afternoon with our remaining veterans



By Chris McGowan

The eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month is Remembrance Day.

It is a time to reflect, remember, and show respect to those who have fought for our country, to those that served, and to those that have given their lives so that we can have the freedom we take for granted every day.

We are all aware of this day, but most of us have not had the experience of serving for our country in war time.

Hollandview Trail Retirement Home in Aurora has over thirty Second World War veterans and we were honoured to be able to talk to eight of those veterans this week. Upon entering the room, we noticed the laughter and camaraderie amongst them. They did not know each other in wartime and had only met in their new home, but they are bonded by the experience of serving our country firsthand. They were there. They fought for us.

John B. Wilkes, 91, served from 1942 ? 1945. Wilkes was a part of the 23rd Field Regiment that introduced the Sexton, a self-propelled artillery gun mount that had much greater technical complexity. As part of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, the regiment arrived in France and participated in the Battle of Normandy as it was reaching its climax. Wilkes was there.

Stan Bray, 89, served from 1942 ? 1945 in the RCAF as a radio operator ? radar. His job in the Air Force was to be on the lookout for enemy submarines. Bray was stationed on the west coast of Canada, patrolling for Japanese submarines.

?I then went overseas on transport on a DC3 to fly supplies in to our boys.?

Jack Cameron, 91, served from 1941 ? 1946 with the Royal Navy.

?They used to say join the Navy and see the world and that is what it was like,? he says.

He joined in North Wales, and was in two Russian convoys. He then went to the Mediterranean.

?We supported the troops in Palermo, Italy, and then we were torpedoed off of Algiers, and then the Americans were sent in,? says Cameron, who also participated in Normandy.

Jack Ross, 84, served from 1944 ? 1945. He is the baby of the group.

?I was a boy soldier, and did not last very long, came back in 1948 in the North West Air Command for the Canadian Air Force stationed in White Horse, Yukon. We were there when the Korean War broke out.?

Ross's team was involved with maintaining and servicing Aircraft in Scotland as well, where they provided support for the rest of Europe.

Jack Saul, 92, served from 1942 ? 1945. Saul was with the RCAF as a flying instructor.

Graham Kennedy, 90, served from 1941 ? 1945.

?I was trained on spitfires for air gunnery, but was transferred to typhoons,? Kennedy said. ?I was shot down in aircraft fire over Holland in 1945, and had a compression fracture lumbar one.?

Kennedy was wearing medals which displayed his service in battle.

Carl Bedal, 89, served from 1943 ? 1945 in the Royal Canadian Navy out of Halifax, Nova Scotia. He had convoy duty on a Corvette. His service duties took him to the North Atlantic.

Peter Nordheimer, 92, served from 1942 ? 1945 as part of the Royal Canadian Artillery.

?I was sent overseas about six months before the invasion,? he says. ?I was a Gunner, but I was kind of an expert in communications. I took Morse code, communicating to France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany.?

During our time spent with these men that served our country, they laughed, had a beer and listened as they shared their stories. It was evident they all did their part. They are in a retirement home now, some with their wives, some alone, but they are proud men.

They are aware that they are a few of the lucky ones that made it back, and they quickly reminded us that so many did not.