

## BROCK'S BANTER: Change in the Brisk Air

**By Brock Weir**

As the grandchild and great-grandchild of a raft of servicemen and women, Remembrance Day always has a special place in my heart.

It is a day I have always tried, regardless of where I am, to observe, whether it was at school assemblies when I was younger, taking the bus into the heart of the city to the National War Memorial when I was studying in Ottawa, or simply taking a stroll down Yonge Street to our own Cenotaph to take in the invariably moving services among scores of people united with that very same objective: to Remember.

This job allows one to take in such experiences from many different perspectives, oftentimes two different perspectives in the same year.

When Remembrance Day falls on any day other than the weekend, there are usually two services to observe, often on the nearest Sunday and Remembrance Day proper. When there's a Sunday service, I'm usually on duty covering the event off to the north side of the Cenotaph, with more or less a low-flying bird's eye view of the proceedings.

The weekday ceremonies, on the other hand, provide an opportunity to be amongst the hundreds of Aurorans who gather to pay tribute, affording the chance to seek very personal answers, and answers never anything less than unique, to the common question: why do you Remember?

Over the years, their answers have run the gamut from a woman remembering her father, killed in action when she was a toddler, leaving her just a few fleeting memories, a handful of reminiscences passed down from her widowed mother ? along with an incalculable amount of pride.

There have been parents still flying on air from the recent arrival of their son or daughter back from the front, and other couples weighed down with worry over what might come next for their children who were, at the time, still serving in Afghanistan or on training missions around the world.

Others, bowed by age, were there to remember the men they served alongside of in very real theatres of war, more leaving a poppy in memory of a spouse or sibling who had made the ultimate sacrifice.

Each story stood alone, each moving, each providing a life lesson from which we can all benefit.

This year, however, there was only one service ? on Remembrance Day proper this past Saturday. As such, I was at my usual weekend post up by the Cenotaph.

It is a scene which never fails to impress.

Given the cold snap, I was wondered what the crowds would be like. On sunny days which veer to the warmer ends of the thermometer, the place is teeming. Otherwise, the crowds are slightly thinner but impressive nonetheless. I predicted the latter before arriving on the scene, but the new LAV was the wildcard.

The LAV, or Light Armoured Vehicle, had recently been placed atop its long-waiting concrete pad just a few days previously to serve as a tribute ? albeit a controversial tribute ? to those who served in the recent conflict in Afghanistan and, as such, there was set to be a bit more pomp and circumstances to the proceedings, promising a flypast from the RCAF to mark the tribute's unveiling. While it was, for many attendees, a moving sight, I was pleased to hear from those I spoke to that it was not necessarily an added draw; our crowds ? and what a mightily impressive crowd it was! ? were ready to be there regardless, whether or not the vehicle was finally ready for its close-up.

Before the LAV's plaque, explaining its meaning, was unveiled by two veterans of Afghanistan, I was moved by the slow but deliberate procession of honoured guests up the path leading to the Cenotaph to take pride of place on the dais.

As I anticipated, it was a smaller procession than usual ? just a handful of men and women who had served King ? or Queen ? and country when they were needed most, at a time that is part of the historical record for many in the crowd, or distant personal memories for others.

Weather, of course, was a factor. It was a relief to see some faces who previously occupied those seats ? such as Frank Young ? receiving the tributes they so richly deserve after the ceremony from the warmth of the traditional post-service luncheon hosted by the Ladies Auxiliary at the Royal Canadian Legion. Yet, it was a poignant reminder of how we need to cherish this generation while we still have the chance.

Two of our veterans from Afghanistan received a moment in the spotlight when they had the opportunity to unveil the plaque on a vehicle so closely related to their service in memory and tribute to people so near to their hearts, but that was just a moment.

Whether they are still serving as active personnel or blending in with the crowd ? and I know for a fact that this was indeed the case for a few ? it would be nice if these heroes were able and willing to take a greater role in the ceremonies as the veterans they are. For so many of us, the word ?veteran? brings up images of a senior, a parent or a grandparent. But the face of the veteran is a changing one and should be embraced. Perhaps this gives more recent veterans pause before they embrace the fact they are indeed a veteran, but people would so dearly wish to salute them along with their predecessors.

The following morning was spent, as my Remembrance Sunday so often is, watching the broadcast from London where so many of my forebears served either during wartime or before departing for the thick of the theatre.

It too is an invariably moving service made extra poignant by the presence of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, the only still serving Head of State and Consort who proudly served in the Second World War, the Duke himself seeing active combat in the Royal Navy and being mentioned in dispatches.

This year's ceremony had an extra layer of poignancy as, for the first time, Her Majesty and His Royal Highness, did not take an active role in the ceremony, instead observing the proceedings from a nearby balcony with the rest of their family as their son, the Prince of Wales, laid a wreath on their behalf, followed by the rest of their children and Princes William and Harry.

It was a concession to age, and the recent retirement of the Duke of Edinburgh, but a sign that time is indeed marching on.

As the Royal Couple prepares to quietly mark their 70th wedding anniversary this Monday, November 20, it is high time to give thanks once again to this remarkable couple, veterans both, who still so admirably and faithfully serve the United Kingdom, Canada and the rest of the Commonwealth each and every day.

They are an example we can all be proud of and I, for one, will be raising a glass in their honour ? both in thanks and for many years of health and happiness to come.