

D-Day Veteran, Aurora resident, Joe Durkin dies at 99



Joe Durkin always questioned whether it was worth it ? the ?it? being international conflict.

But, when he shared his unique story with people who couldn't begin to imagine his experience, he needn't have wondered after all.

Durkin, who bore witness to history to one of the most pivotal moments of the Second World War as a soldier who landed at Gold Beach on D-Day, June 6, 1944, once again joined the ranks of his fellow officers in the pantheon of history, passing away on September 24, just four days after his 99th birthday.

Last year, in the lead-up to Remembrance Day, Joe and his wife of 73 years who survives him, British ?Land Girl? Alma Durkin, invited The Auroran to their home at the Meadows of Aurora to share a story that only they could tell.

It was a powerful insight into the realities of war and the realities of coming back from the front when so many others didn't.

Sitting down with us, Alma smoothed Joe's hair while daughter Jennifer pinned on his beret and medals, photo-ready.

?Earlier he said, ?All those boys who never came back. I wonder if it was worth it,? said Jennifer of what transpired that morning. ?I said, ?Yes, Dad, it was worth it because you and all the other people basically saved Europe and the rest of the globe from Hitler running the world. Don't doubt that the sacrifice was worth it ? and luckily you made it through, but those who didn't, their sacrifice was worth it because we reap the benefits every day.?

Conversations of legacy would have been unfathomable to the men like Joe who, he said, simply felt like they were doing their duty.

?It wasn't a matter of ?wanting' to be,? said Joe of becoming involved in the war effort. ?I was in the Welsh Guards and once you became 18 they got you and that's where I came in. I asked to get into the Navy ? I just fancied the sea, really, and I went to a naval training camp and then onto the ships.?

Alma added his father thought he was ?daft? to join the Navy ?because there's no back door on a ship,? but Joe persisted.

?First it was training in Britain and then I was shipped to many different places, including the Far East,? says Joe. ?I was scared to death. You're always meeting the enemy somewhere.?

Part of his duties in his role as Stoker was to keep the ships firing as he and his crew sailed minesweepers into different European ports in the dark of night.

By the time of what became known as D-Day, he was in a landing craft.

He and his fellow servicemen were not privy to what was planned until the morning of, he recalled, and as the hours ticked down, so too did the anticipation of learning what would be required of them ? and Joe's tasks included operating an anti-aircraft gun to protect the landing troops.

As such, he wasn't among the first to make the landing, but he kept those who came before him as safe as possible until his turn came ? and, just days after landing, he found himself next to Winston Churchill who made the journey across the Channel himself to see the success of the mission.

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