

Flowers at cenotaph honour victims of military attacks



By Brock Weir

The group gathered at Aurora's Cenotaph on Saturday morning to pay tribute to Corporal Nathan Cirillo and Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent may have been small in size, but the pride they had for the fallen soldiers was anything but.

The nation was rocked last Wednesday as news broke that Cpl. Cirillo was gunned down while standing guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, before his killer was ultimately shot dead at the end of the Hall of Honour in Parliament's Centre Block by Sergeant-at-Arms Kevin Vickers.

By the afternoon, flags were lowered across Aurora, including Town Hall, public buildings, the Cenotaph, and on the boulevards along Wellington Street. Underscoring the serious nature of the shootings, York Regional Police also provided extra presence around the Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe Armoury throughout Wednesday as a precaution. Poignantly, both the National and Provincial flags were lowered at the Aurora Cenotaph, which honours the war dead of Aurora, King Township, and what was once the Township of Whitchurch.

As Canada mourned, Aurora's Wendy Paul stood alongside the Highway of Heroes on Friday to pay her respects to Cpl. Cirillo as he made his final journey back to his hometown in Hamilton. She came to the Cenotaph on Saturday with her mother, Brenda, to continue the tribute at the Altar of Sacrifice.

"I grew up in Air Cadets with a lot of our family in the military, so it was really important to be here today and to be on the Highway of Heroes yesterday," Ms. Paul told *The Auroran*. "I have a lot of friends who still serve and we have family that still serve overseas."

The deaths last week had added poignancy, she said, as they were two of the very few soldiers killed on home soil while serving their country.

"That hit home more for me," she said. "We pulled over to the side of the highway with firefighters and it was very moving, but very quick. It was just a sea of lights that went by at dusk and it was absolutely silent. People were sombre and had their hands on their hearts. It was the first time I had ever done it, and I would do it again. It was beautiful and really moving to be there, and it makes you realise that you should do it for everyone on the Highway of Heroes."

Also following the procession closely was Lori Hood of Stouffville, who came to Aurora as a mark of respect. Her brother stood on one of the highway's overpasses near Ajax, recalling it was just a sea of people with barely enough room to stand. In the aftermath of the shooting, however, she said she was moved by the veterans who sprang into action to protect not only local war memorials, but

also taking the time to stand outside local mosques in rotas.

?They are here for all Canadians, regardless of religion or anything else,? said Ms. Hood. ?We have no answers as to why, so why start blaming when you have no idea what the root cause is.?

A similar view was expressed by Councillor Evelyn Buck, who joined the three women in a moment of silence.

?It seemed like if I didn't come out today I would not be respecting the young men whose lives were lost this week,? said Councillor Buck. ?I am struggling with the meaning of what has happened and still trying to make some sort of sense out of it.?