

Legion members come together to mark D-Day anniversary



By Jeff Doner

In 1944, the world was gripped by a deadly war, but on June 6 of that year, the D-Day invasion of Normandy turned the tides for the Allied forces pushing into Europe and was the beginning of the end of the conflict.

Last Saturday, the Aurora branch of the Royal Canadian Legion commemorated the 70th anniversary of the invasion with a remembrance ceremony in conjunction with their 40th year in their Industrial Parkway home.

The event featured a small parade and had many veterans, Legion members, cadets and a full complement of musicians on hand from the White Heather Pipes and Drums.

Long-time Aurora resident Albert Arcand, 95, served in the military through four conflicts and a total of 23 years, and took part by laying a wreath in memory of all those who have served over the years, alongside Silver Cross Mother Donna Beek, who lost her son in Afghanistan.

"It sure brings back a lot of memories," said Mr. Arcand. "I saw some of the actual D-Day ceremony on TV the other day and that was very impressive. It was nice to see they were able to do that. But, back here, I've been part of the Legion for about six or seven years and I was honoured to be invited to present the wreath for the troops and peacekeepers."

Originally from Saskatchewan, the retired Major enlisted in the Armed Forces when he was young and willing to help out.

"When I joined the army I served with the signal corps for about three years and when I was all ready to go overseas with the signal corps, they transferred me to the air force," he said. "So, once I got to the air force, I started training all over again. But, after about a year of training, I got my wings and was commissioned as an officer of the Air Force."

However, he didn't end up making it overseas at that time, as he said there were so many reserves already waiting. Being transferred to the Air Force also set him back with having to start training all over again.

"I personally don't regret you didn't go overseas in World War Two," added his son, Claude. "Being a navigator and a bomber wasn't something many people did for long."

Nevertheless, that was really just the beginning of the elder Arcand's military career.

When the war was over, he returned home to go to school at the University of Saskatchewan to study engineering.

Then, over the years, he was stationed all over Canada and served overseas in the Korean Conflict and in Vietnam and Laos.

After that, he returned home, eventually retired as Major in 1966, moved to Toronto and went on to work in a number of different fields until retiring from his job in commercial development at the age of 70.

Over the years he has become a member at the Legion in Aurora and said he was honoured to be a part of their 40th anniversary. Arcand now spends plenty of time with his son, Claude, and grandson Pierre, who have seen firsthand the support the Legion has given to their family and community over the years.

?I remember the Legion going up when it was built in 1974 and I've come here for various events and as my father was getting older started to become more involved because he had more time, so we joined it and I found it to be a wonderful organization for supporting veterans,? said Claude, who is now a history and music teacher at Ecole Secondaire Catholique Renaissance.

?They're also trying to sensitize people to the importance of memory and giving thanks to all those who have served in the past. I think the Legion is an integral part of that. The place is loaded with history ? living history and of course all the images on the wall.?