

Remembrance Day DVD project leaves legacy spanning generations



By Brock Weir

Separated by nearly 100 years, they share a desire to serve their country. What drives ? and drove ? them might be different, but the spirit remains the same.

They are part of the backbone of Aurora and now they are brought together through a new DVD, now at Aurora's elementary schools, created as a legacy project by Aurora's Sesquicentennial Committee.

?They were supplying iron ore to Germany and Churchill wanted to stop it,? recalls 102-year-old naval veteran Allen Griffiths on the film. ?We were up there [in Scandinavia] laying mines to prevent the cargos going by ship to Germany and it was a very, very dangerous task we had. We were outgunned, outshot by airplanes, got hammered terrible, lost a lot of men. The rate of death in submarines is 98 per cent. Only two of us survived on average on the trips, and I am about the only one alive today that can go back that far.?

Not far behind, however, is 92-year-old Carl Beddel, who served in the Battle of the Atlantic.

?We were happy to get back, but a lot of our buddies didn't,? he said. ?That was the sad part. The happy part was we were home, safe, and since we experienced several years of the war we were different than our buddies.?

But Elizabeth Cannon and her buddies are all rowing in the same direction as members of the Queen's York Rangers Army Cadet Corps. On the DVD, Cannon says in her first year she wanted to leave the program because it was tiring, perhaps boring, and just one more thing to do at the end of a long week at school. But then, something changed.

?I realised all I was getting out of it, the different skills and the people I was meeting,? she said. ?To those who join cadets, wait it out. That first year of anything, not just cadets, that first year of high school when you think. ?this is gonna suck.' I am in my third year of high school and I am so happy. I am loving it. I don't want high school to end and I don't want cadets to end. The people I see here every night for the next two years I might not see again and I want to get as much time with them as I can.?

The Remembrance Day DVD had its premiere at Aurora Town Hall last Tuesday night, the eve of Remembrance Day itself, before an audience of Council and public alike. Introduced by former councillor Alison Collins-Mrakas, Chair of the Town's Sesquicentennial Committee, which was tasked in planning Aurora's milestone 150th Birthday Celebrations, she said the presentation picked up on a thread left after the 2013 party.

?We designed a year-long celebration for Aurora's 150th birthday and there were four different events spread out across the whole year,? said Ms. Collins-Mrakas. ?The theme of the Sesquicentennial year was the celebration of past, present and future. The Committee's final legacy project was the creation of a DVD that could be used to educate students not about war but of the sacrifices that have been made and a renewed look to the future.

?This video took a look at the significance of Remembrance Day, as told through the eyes of the individuals that sacrificed their freedoms, to ensure we could hold onto ours.?

In addition to veterans and cadets, the DVD brings together the stories of currently serving Armed Forces personnel, local educators who have used Remembrance Day as a learning tool in the classrooms, and the moving accounts of Silver Cross Mothers who lost their sons in the theatre of war, including Aurora resident Donna Beek, whose son, Corey Joseph Hayes, was killed in Afghanistan.

The video left Council at a loss for words.

?It is very hard to say anything after a remembrance like that,? said Councillor Wendy Gaertner. ?Thank you very much to the Committee for ensuring we have this. In Aurora, we have many young people and families that are part of the Queen's York Rangers program and I would just like to thank them.?

Added Councillor Michael Thompson: ?That was simply remarkable.?